

Freeze still up in the air

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Senate Democrats, an often beaten minority, had an hour in the cable television sun Tuesday to berate Gov. John Engler and his Proposal A school finance plan.

Republicans glowered, but let them talk. The occasion was cable TV day in Lansing, when local companies descended on the State Capitol Building, Democratic gubernatorial hopeful Debbie Stabenow and her colleagues gave them a show.

"We have people watching today we don't ordinarily have," said a beaming Stabenow.

The irony was that Democrats lost the battle. They attempted to move for a debate on a property tax freeze bill (SB 146) that is supposed to be a companion to Proposal A on the June 2 ballot.

Engler, most Republicans and some Democrats are supporting A because it cuts school property taxes, replaces the lost revenue with a two-cent increase in the sales tax, raises school spending in poorer districts and places a constitutional cap on property assessments.

The full Senate rejected the Democratic attempt to stage a debate on SB 146 with 13 Democrats for and 19 Republicans against. So for an hour, Democrats asked Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld, the presiding officer, for "permission to make a statement."

"Without objection, it is so ordered," Binsfeld replied politely.

Democrats argued that SB 146 should be taken up prior to the June 2 public vote on Proposal A. SB 146 isn't scheduled for a vote until June 3.

SB 146 would freeze assessments this year and next, said the sponsor, Doug Carl, R-Utica. It differs from Proposal A, which would cap assessments at 5 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

The House passed its version of SB 146 at the same time (March 30) it voted to put Proposal A on the ballot. Senators approved A but not the amended SB 146.

"There's disagreement within the administration," said Democratic floor leader John Cherry of Okla.

"I'm amazed," said gubernatorial candidate Stabenow.

"There's confusion on whether there's a freeze," said Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor.

Repled Republican majority leader Dick Posthumus of Alto: "The only confusion is what some are trying to inject. This

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still is a companion bill. This will pass. We have the votes here. In the very unfortunate event A fails, this is needed for a taxpayers' bill of rights."

'I forgot!'

If Stabenow was campaigning hard on cable TV, colleague David Hongiman, R-West Bloomfield, wasn't.

"I forgot all about it," said Hongiman, who wore faded jeans, track shoes and no tie.

Two casualties

As Democratic senators used the morning to bludgeon Engler, two area lawmakers bills at the top of the calendar got no action at all.

One was a bill by Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville, to allow courts to cut awards in traffic injury cases to passengers who failed to wear seat belts.

The other was the House-passed "potty party" bill by Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills. It requires all municipalities to follow the Michigan construction code, rather than other nationally recognized codes, in regulating public buildings. The Michigan code requires more stalls in the women's restrooms than do other codes.

Bryant a maverick

The Republican State Committee, 104-member governing body of the Grand Old Party between conventions, unanimously endorsed Proposal A last weekend.

That failed to stop state Rep. William Bryant Jr., R-Grosse Pointe, from issuing a series of daily statements knocking Proposal A. Bryant, a former minority leader, represents an area like the western suburbs that will get little property tax relief from the ballot plan.

Bryant calls his bulletins "Bad News of the Day/for Supporters of A." Items:

April 22: "The figures used by the governor for 1993 net property tax cut are inflated by \$94 million." Reason: Even without A, school tax rates will be cut back by the Headlee amendment to the constitution, which requires cutting rates when assessments go up faster than inflation.

April 26: "The governor's figures of claimed property tax relief for 1994 show a cut attributable to passage of House-passed SB 146." Along with Democrats, Bryant notes the Senate has yet to pass SB 146. "No bill, no 'cut' to count," he said.



Man's best friend: Troy police Officer Earl Jenkins and police dog Dandy demonstrate how that department's K-9 unit searches out suspects and evidence.

Crime prevention front and center

A guess-estimated 500 people turned out Thursday evening to get the latest information on safety and crime prevention at what was billed as a "Three Ring Circle of Safety" program.

The brainchild of former policeman-turned-state senator, Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham, it featured the Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills and Troy police departments among others.

The event, which began on a smaller scale last year, drew whole families as well as senior citizens. "There were a ton of families," Bouchard said, "prob-

ably 100 kids."

A police horse demonstration, featuring Birmingham mounted Officer John Heppner, a Troy police dog unit and a karate demonstration were of special interest to youngsters.

Scams and con games, rape prevention and home security were other popular sessions.

Held in Clawson this year, Berkley last year, Bouchard expects to continue to take the show on the road in his senatorial district. That exposes it to more people and gives the host community "a rest."



Plenty for kids: Bicycle safety is made even more interesting to children such as Mac Stewart because two bikes are among a bevy of donated items up for a drawing at the evening's end.



Not for kids only: Krissi Snow of Birmingham is captivated by the K-9 demonstration.

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