

Governor promises 'net tax cut'

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Gov. John Engler is determined that Michiganans will get a net tax cut, even after new taxes are imposed to pay for schools.

But Engler said he has seen nothing to "open the door" to raising the state personal income tax to pay for the \$6 billion property tax cut he signed into law Thursday.

"Asked if he had set a figure for a net tax cut, he said, "There will be a net tax cut, but no numbers have been set."

Meanwhile, the Michigan Federation of Teachers, representing Detroit and a few suburbs, filed suit in Wayne Circuit Court to halt the property tax cut because the state has found no replacement revenue.

State treasurer Doug Roberts, an Engler appointee, said the governor might seek again to have voters raise the 4 percent sales tax as a major replacement source. Polls have shown the sales-tax is the least unpopular of all taxes in Michigan.

Engler went to Greenfield Village in Dearborn Thursday, to the 1861 Scotch Settlement School that Henry Ford attended, where he signed Senate Bill 1 to cheers from a mainly Republican audience. It repeals \$6 billion in operating property taxes for public

schools and intermediate (county) districts. The state still supplies \$3.5 billion in school aid.

Plans floated

Here's how the 1994 school finance picture is taking shape:

- Republicans talked of a net cut in taxes of \$500 million to \$2 billion.
- Engler touted "schools of choice" within the public school system but wouldn't endorse consolidating small districts. He said he would rather free local districts from dealing with finances and let them concentrate on teaching.
- Last year the Legislature put up money for "choice" plans within counties, said Robert Schiller, superintendent of public instruction. "But they were planning grants. The program did not get under way," he said.
- This year there is no money for planning "choice" programs. Nevertheless, Schiller said the State Board of Education is committed to encouraging districts to provide such programs.

Many lawmakers are talking about restoring school districts' ability to levy "enrichment" taxes. There was little agreement, however, on whether those would be a restoration of part of the property tax or a local income tax.

■ Engler and GOP lawmakers showed little interest in consolidating small, fiscally weak school districts. Michigan has 562 districts, many with only a few dozen pupils.

■ Despite stiff resistance from teachers unions, Republicans will seek "cost containment" laws to cut school costs.

"This falls I want to see significant reforms passed by the Legislature and on my desk," Engler said.

The audience cheered his refer-

ences to wedding "medlocrity" and "bureaucracy" out of education. Citing the \$9 billion cost of Michigan public schools, Engler said, "We are already paying for a world class education. Now it's time to deliver one" — to more applause.

Engler repeated his call for "schools of choice" within the public school system but wouldn't endorse consolidating small districts. He said he would rather free local districts from dealing with finances and let them concentrate on teaching.

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Some cost cuts

Many legislators at the ceremony saw no need to replace all the lost \$6 billion.

"There will be a net tax cut," said Rep. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, chair of the House Taxation Committee. "We'll eliminate

some tax expenditures (tax breaks). We'll cut state spending. And we'll do cost containment.

"The governor seems to want to put a sales tax proposal on the ballot," added Bullard, whose panel would handle such a proposed constitutional amendment. The Legislature's job is eased by the fact that the property tax cut law also eliminates an \$860 million item from the budget — income tax rebates for homeowners who have paid property taxes beyond 3.5 percent of income.

"I don't see \$6 billion in replacement taxes," said Rep. Jerry Vorva, R-Plymouth. "It will be significantly less. A \$2 billion savings would be wonderful. It's possible, though I'm not overly optimistic."

"There will not be a (restoration of the) property tax for schools," said Rep. Penny Criesman, R-Rochester. "There will be restructuring of the budget."

"There will be a combination of taxes and reduction of costs," predicted Rep. Tom Middleton, R-Ortonville. "I see a half-billion to one-billion-dollar cost reduction."

Middleton would like to see other local units of government allowed to collect more property taxes so that the state could get rid of its revenue-sharing program with cities, townships and counties.

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MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Kids stuff

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brands, just the styles."

"I like basketball shirts," Ross piped in.

Carol Edwards of Sterling Heights was browsing at Hudson's in the Oakland Mall with sons Steve, 9, and David, 5.

"I watch the ads and when jeans are on sale I usually go to Mervyn's or Kohl's and buy the boys about five pair each," she said. "BUM shirts are very popular at our school so they'll get a few of those. Shoe shopping is a separate trip."

Nancy Williams of Bloomfield Hills avoids any hassles and budget bending by shopping without her elementary school-age children.

"I know what size they wear so I buy a few different outfits in my price range," she explained. "When I bring them home, they try them on and they decide which ones we keep and which ones I return to the store. It works

out great, but I don't know if they'll let me continue this when they get older."

Jean Wujczyk of Rochester Hills, shopping at the Oakland Mall with her children, Lisa, 11, and Danny, 9, noticed that kids wear summer clothes long into the fall these days, extending this seasonal wardrobe.

"When I went back to school, hot or not, we wore plaid jumpers, leather shoes and knee-socks," she said. "These days kids go back in shorts and sneakers until it gets cooler." Danny pointed out that he prefers that his mom spend his clothing dollars on skiwear and equipment because he belongs to a ski club.

Julie Heiters of Clawson said she ventures out shopping with daughters Hillary, 12, and Kelly, 9, with a set amount of money put aside for back-to-school clothes. When the cash runs out, it's back home to save up more.

"They got book bags, shoes and

jeans last week," Heiters said. "We'll go out later in the year when it gets colder for sweats."

Browsing past the colored jeans, hooded flannel shirts and bold-striped rugby shirts out for fall, 16-year-old Stacey Hughes of Sterling Heights headed for the bell bottoms hanging on a rack at Penney's.

"I just love the styles from the 60s and 70s," she said. "They are sooo cool. I'm shopping for some bell bottoms. They're really cool." Traditionalists will appreciate the "resurgence of classic basics" at stores like Talbots for Kids in the Somerset Collection.

"Parents who want good, no trend standards, clothing without novelty prints will want to stop in Talbots for Kids," said Amy Osborne Dusey, the store manager.

The average elementary school outfit, if purchased on sale, will cost mom and dad about \$165. The breakdown: A winter jacket \$75, shoes \$35, jeans \$20, shirt or

turtleneck \$10, underclothes \$10, and a book bag \$15. Double this cost for each additional offspring.

"That's why we make a list and go from there," insisted Suzanne Wills, a Troy mother of two. "It's too darn expensive to venture out without one. Try on all the clothes from last year, subtract the ones that are worn or don't fit. Add the ones that can be handed down. Then make a list of what is needed and go from there."

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St. John

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The new fall collection includes

pieces in traditional black and white with chocolate brown, the "new" shade for 1993. Suits and dresses include the famous brights for St. John Daywear, St. John Separates and St. John Evening Wear. St. John jewelry is

electroplated in 22-karat gold to three times the thickness of the industry standard. Shoes include suede loafers, zip-back ankle boots, platform pumps and evening slippers.

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