

# Freshmen legislators ferret out budget pork

By Tim Richard

LANSING — Reps. Jerry Vorva of Plymouth and Dan Gustafson of Haslett are in a band of freshman Republicans giving senior lawmakers a bad time over hidden items in state spending.

Their targets: aid to the Pontiac Silverdome stadium, soccer parks for the governor and Legislature, pay hikes and possible casino gambling.

For example, an \$800,000 subsidy for the Silverdome is lumped in a single line item with \$450,000 apiece in aid to horse race track cities such as Livonia, Northville and Hazel Park. Senior politicians did that to prevent Gov. John Engler from vetoing the Silverdome money.

Vorva, whose district includes Northville, and Gustafson, whose district includes western Livingston County, joined several other freshmen in a protest statement

in the permanent House Journal as lawmakers finished work on budget bills prior to the Oct. 1 start of a new fiscal year.

The Silverdome and track money, along with \$2.5 million to supervise Indian run casino gambling, were contained in the \$59 million Department of Agriculture budget bill, which the House barely approved, 58 to 40.

Voting yes were Republicans Willis Bullard of Milford and Susan Munsell of Howell. The battle got rougher as the House turned to the \$2 billion "general government" budget, covering the governor, Legislature, appellate courts, attorney general and several smaller departments.

"The House Fiscal Agency scandal underscores the need for more openness and good government in Lansing," said Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, a fiscal conservative and free market devotee.

Kaza was particularly unhappy about the oldtimers' tactics. In July he won 87 to 1 approval of an amendment to spell out the line items in Engler's staff budget and in legislative budgets.

Things fell apart in appropriations conference committees, however, where senators insisted on lump sum spending. Senators even objected to the House listing its line items because public pressure would force them to do the same, Kaza said.

That bill "omitted important provisions for accountability and openness in legislative budgets," added Vorva, Gustafson and others in a joint statement.

Other lawmakers complained that the bill contained a \$4 million increase for Detroit courts, \$2.3 million for southeastern Michigan auto emissions tests, \$4 million for Lottery advertising, \$1 million more for Civil Service and pay hikes for judges.

The executive office's \$4.3 million budget contains 85 jobs. The Legislature's \$84 million budget shows salaries for members and staff but not how many staff members are employed.

That bill squeaked through 59 to 38, with 56 needed for passage. The bills also were passed by the Senate and sent to Engler for his signature. Many believe the governor may veto the combined

Silverdome and racetrack line item.

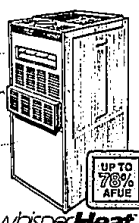
Refer to Senate Bills 622 (Agriculture) and 527 (general government) when writing to your legislator.

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A band called Blackthorn will perform at 8 p.m. Friday, Nov. 12, at the Auburn Hills campus of Oakland Community College in Building F, room 119.

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