

Board hears call for legal challenge to ballot plan

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

County Executive L. Brooks Patterson encountered something unexpected when he endorsed the March 15 ballot proposal to raise the Michigan sales tax — rebuttal.

After Patterson endorsed the increase in the sales tax at the regular meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Thursday, the proposal, and its "blackmail backup plan," were

attacked as a serious violation of the state constitution.

"Robin Hood is not dead," said the attacker, James M. Brennan, referring to the name given to proposals to take money from more affluent school districts for poor districts. "It's alive and well in the fine print" of the March 15 ballot proposal.

Patterson's endorsement of the March 15 proposal surprised no one. The proposal is the financial base of Gov. John Enger's school

finance reform package, and Patterson and the governor have been friends and political allies for some time.

Waiting to raise the sales will send an important message to businesses considering relocating in Oakland County, Patterson insisted: Michigan will not place an unfair tax burden on business.

Brennan's criticism, however, was surprising — in part because of Brennan's background. Until retiring in January, Bren-

nan worked for the board as the director of program evaluation and operations analysis. In that capacity he had worked with commissioners — as well as Patterson and former executive Daniel T. Murphy — on numerous projects.

As commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham, put it, "Jim is a respected colleague. He's no crazy. But he is associated with some anti-tax groups."

Brennan's criticism to the ballot proposal may also be significant as an indication of increasing opposition — to the proposed hike in the sales tax and, if it fails, the backup measure, an increase in the state income tax.

Brennan urged commissioners to file suit challenging. If necessary, both the proposed sales-tax hike and the backup plan to raise the income tax. He referred to it as the "blackmail backup plan."

Commissioners took no action on Brennan's call for a lawsuit. But Jensen and others said they would not be surprised if another agency — possibly an anti-tax organization — did initiate legal action.

In other action, the board:

■ Approved the controversial Oakland County community corrections plan, which would enable nonviolent criminals to serve their sentences — and pay their debts to society — while avoiding prison.

Last year, commissioners rejected a similar plan, in part because of opposition from Prosecutor Richard Thompson, who said the plan would result in violent felons being placed on probation or otherwise released into society.

■ Approved the appointment of Dr. Thomas J. Gordon by Patterson as director of Institutional and Human Services.

Gordon, 49, of Troy was confirmed, 19-5, over the objections of a handful of Republican commissioners. Some said Gordon had not done an exemplary job during his 20-year tenure with the county. Others said Oakland should initiate a nationwide search, if necessary, to get the most qualified administrator.

Commissioner Shelley G. Taub, R-Bloomfield Hills, for example, questioned Gordon's administrative capabilities in light of the fact that Oakland County ran out of flu vaccine last year.

"The county was warned that the coming flu season would be one of the most serious in recent history," Taub said, "yet we didn't order enough vaccine."

In the final vote, however, most board members followed the philosophy of commissioner Thomas A. Law, R-West Bloomfield, who said, "I haven't always agreed with Dr. Gordon, but that doesn't necessarily mean he was wrong. I have trust in Brooks Patterson. And if he wants to appoint Dr. Gordon, I'll support him."

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OCC offers drug talk

The Womencenter at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus presents a free discussion of the causes and effects of drug abuse on women noon to 1 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 22, in Room 308 of B Building.

Participants may bring a bag lunch, or make a purchase from the nearby Ridgewood Cafe, the restaurant owned by the OCC Culinary Arts Program. This session is the second in a series of Brown Bag Discussions sponsored by the Womencenter, a facility that provides educational and supportive resources for area women.

For further information call (810) 471-7602.

The Orchard Ridge campus is located at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, just south of I-696 in Farmington Hills.

OU workshop prepares for new careers

An Oakland University Continuum Center workshop called "Career Building: Preparing for Change" will meet 7-10 p.m. Thursdays, March 3-24, on campus.

Fee is \$129. Participants must register by Feb. 28. For more information, call 370-3033.

Students will learn the tactics involved in career transition, the differences and similarities between change by necessity and change by choice, and techniques to eliminate uncertainty, anxiety and stress associated with job change.

Grandparent volunteers are needed

The Oakland County Foster Grandparent Program, a unit of Catholic Social Services, is seeking people 60 years of age and up to work with youths at Children's Village in Farmdale and developmentally disabled children at Wing Lake School in Bloomfield Hills.

Volunteers must be available to work 20 hours a week. Call Carol Heckman at 333-3716.

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