

House committees finish work

By REP. RAYMOND BAKER (R-Farmington)

The last couple of weeks have been legislatively profitable. Most of the committee work has been completed on the major bills slated for consideration this spring, and I understand that the budget bills are about ready to be submitted to the house floor. A number of important bills were approved by the house last week and sent to the senate.

One of this spring's priority bills, campaign reform, still appears to be stymied. Less than four weeks remain before candidates must file for office and unless action is taken within the next several days, you can pretty well bet that we will go into the 1974 elections without a meaningful campaign reform.

Republicans still intend to hold firm on their insistence that the loopholes must be removed from the present version of the bill before they will vote yes. In its present form the bill would actually weaken campaign law rather than strengthen it.

Meanwhile, the governor signed into law a bill improving unemployment benefits; the house on a nearly unanimous vote approved the "open meeting" bill; and colleagues of mine introduced a bill that would extend the present "code of Ethics" to the legislative branch, including legislators. A number of other significant bills received action in the house, (19 bills were actually passed in one day last week).

ONE OF THE bills signed provided for several amendments and additions to the Michigan Employment Security Act, introduced by the Republican senator from Muskegon, Oscar E. Bouwsma, it does several things its supporters say will bring it into line with current economic conditions and extends coverage of benefits to employees who were not previously eligible for unemployment compensation.

This bill, according to an analysis provided by the Michigan Department of Labor, makes 13 major changes, plus other amendments which fall into the category of clarifying language and updating.

One of the most significant changes is the increase in benefits to unemployed workers, which represents the inflationary trend that has affected all of us. It also increases the maximum weekly rates from \$67 for a person with dependent children to \$105 for a person with four or more dependents.

Further, it extends unemployment benefits to include employees of school districts, community colleges, state-owned educational facilities, and units of local government — unless the local governmental unit has an unemployment compensation system of its own.

Employees of colleges and universities are not covered under this bill. Local school districts, community college districts, and local governmental units may elect to become either contributing

employers or reimbursing employers.

This means the local could contribute to the unemployment compensation fund on a regular basis or reimburse the fund for monies paid out to its employees.

UNDER THE section covering school employees, community college employees and workers in state-owned educational facilities, vacations, recesses, term breaks, and substantial leaves do not constitute unemployment and employees are not eligible for benefits during such period. However, if an employee of one of these institutions is severed from employment more than seven days prior to a vacation period, term break, or summer recess, he is eligible to receive benefits.

The bill also allows pregnant women to receive benefits, whereas under the former act they were not eligible for unemployment compensation.

While the bill extends coverage to employees who were not covered before, it also exempts certain employees from eligibility.

For example, if a family has a business, members of the faculty who work in the business are not eligible to receive benefits; elected and appointed officials of state or local governmental units, school districts, and community colleges are not eligible to receive benefits; anyone working for a school district, community college district or local governmental unit whose salary is made up of 50 percent or more from federal funds is not eligible for benefits until Dec. 31, 1976, after which they would be eligible. Seasonal employees who work 16 weeks or less in a local governmental unit are not eligible unless the employee works longer than 16 weeks or returns to the job within a 30-week period following the end of the 16-week period.

IT ALSO requires that an employee work 12 hours a week in the same school district or community college district in order to qualify for benefits, and it provides for a cutoff of the extended benefit period when the federal share of the unemployment compensation funds are stopped.

Another major change permits the governor to extend the benefit period by executive order to assure additional payments to the unemployed in the state during a period of high unemployment.

The house may be skirting the campaign reform issue, but it is addressing the public's demand for better accountability through other measures.

One of the more notable bills of this session will undoubtedly be the "open meeting" bill passed by the House last week. The measure was endorsed by the Governor and received unanimous Republican support.

It now goes to the senate for consideration. The object of the bill is to put teeth into the concept that it is essential to a democratic society that public business be conducted in an open and public manner and that the citizens be provided with notice of the time, place, and subject matter of meetings of governing bodies so that they might attend and be advised of the performance of public office.

The law is applicable to all governing bodies in the state, including boards of education of both local and intermediate school districts, and governing bodies of institutions of higher education and any other bodies performing an essential governmental function.

THE ESSENTIAL requirements of the bill are that all meetings of all public as well as governing bodies be open to the public; that all persons be permitted to attend; that all deliberations and decisions of the body be made at an open meeting; and that no one be excluded from a public meeting except for breach of the peace.

The bill requires that notice of meetings of governing bodies be posted, and designates where the notice shall be posted and what it shall contain.

The bill does provide for a lim-

ited number of instances in which a governing body may conduct deliberations in executive session. However, at no time can final action or votes take place in executive session.

These exceptions grow out of a practical recognition of the need to allow a forum in which delicate matters concerning individual rights of privacy, or community economic interests can be discussed candidly without compromising the action of the body, or of the individual concerned in the matter.

However, the requirements for meeting in executive session are sufficiently stringent that they cannot be called easily, and the vote calling for one must be taken in public.

THE BILL also establishes

procedures for giving notice of meetings; providing minutes of what occurred at meetings; and invalidating decisions made in violation of the act.

The penalty for an intentional violation of the act is a misdemeanor for which a fine of up to \$1,000 may be imposed. The bill has an effective date of January 1, 1975.

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