

A popular Government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps both.
JAMES MADISON

ESCORT SERVICE?

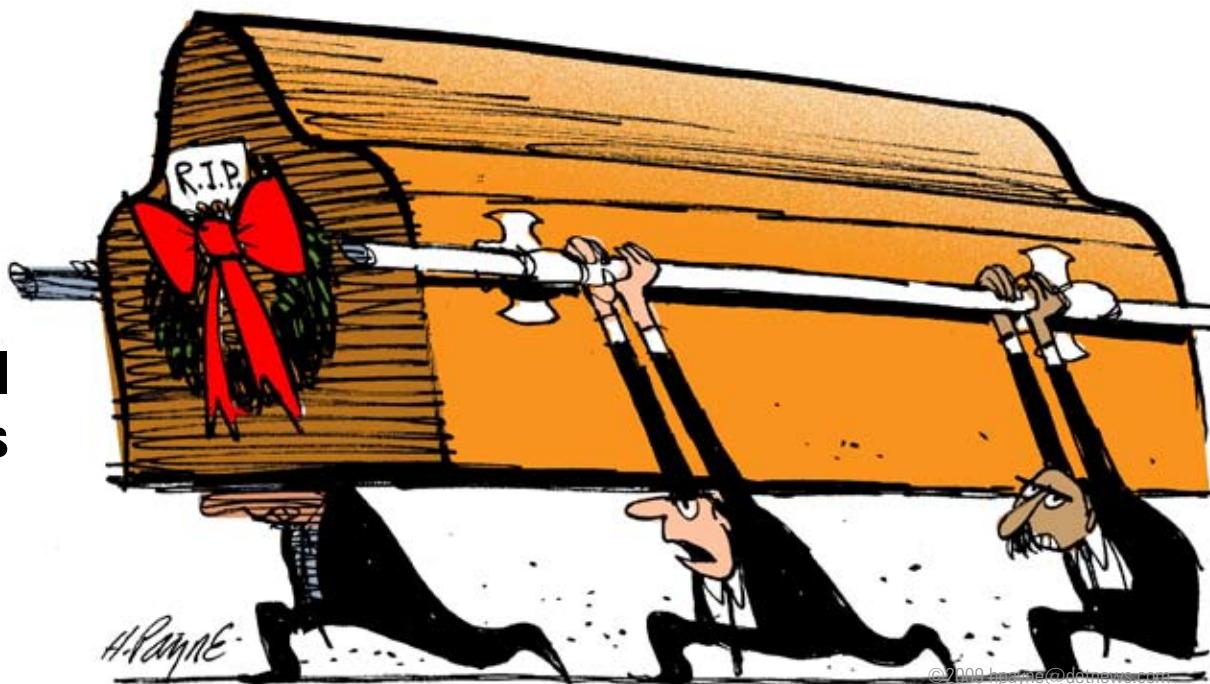
Bill would add state police funeral escort to list of lawmaker benefits

BY KENNETH M. BRAUN

As one of his first actions after taking office at the beginning of 2009, state Rep. Fred Durhal, D-Detroit, introduced House Bill 4229, which would create the “Michigan Legislative Funeral Act.” Upon the death of a lawmaker or

former lawmaker, this proposal would require the state police to provide an escort for the funeral procession if the family of the deceased requests it. The taxpayers would pay for the costs of this escort and also — if the family asks — provide them a state flag.

See “Escort Service,” Page 4

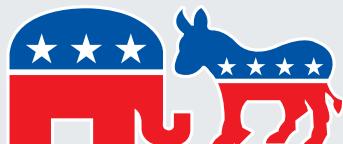


“TAXPAYER-FUNDED POLICE ESCORTS FOR MICHIGAN POLS’ FUNERALS WERE BAD ENOUGH, BUT MANDATORY PALLBEARER DUTY GOES TOO FAR!!”

INSIDE THE ISSUE



The Lowdown 5



State House Endorses Demise of Workplace Secret Ballot

Lawmakers ask Congress to approve card check

BY PAUL KERSEY

On March 4, 2009, the Michigan House of Representatives voted to approve House Resolution 10, a non-binding opinion of the chamber that asks “the United States Congress to enact the Employee Free Choice Act, which would authorize the National Labor Relations Board to certify a union as the bargaining representative when a majority of employees voluntarily sign authorizations designating that union to represent

them; provide for first contract mediation and arbitration; and establish meaningful penalties for violations of a worker’s freedom to choose a union.” One Republican lawmaker joined 66 Democrats in favor of this resolution while 40 lawmakers — all Republicans — voted against it.

By contrast, the state Senate had already passed its own resolution opposed to EFCA in February, noting that secret ballot elections are “at the heart of our Michigan democratic tradition,” and further protesting EFCA’s binding arbitration process that “would remove any incentive for the employer or the union to adopt realistic bargaining positions.” SR 16 passed on a straight party-line basis, with one Democrat and one Republican not voting.

The Employee Free Choice Act would effectively remove secret-ballot elections as a means of establishing a union in a workplace. Instead, a union would be established when it could secure signatures from

See “Secret Ballot,” Page 6

SPECIAL INTERESTS

PROPERTY TAX PROTECTIONS ASSAULTED AGAIN BY HOUSE

Eleven GOP members vote to undermine Proposal A

BY KENNETH M. BRAUN

On March 24, for the second time in four months, the Michigan House voted to allow public school districts to hold elections for so-called “sinking fund” millages so as to increase the amount of money taken for operating expenses (see: “Sneak Attack,” January/February 2009 Michigan Capitol Confidential). Currently, as a result of passage of Proposal A in 1994, school

See “Property Tax,” Page 8

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Kenneth M. Braun, Senior Managing Editor, MICHIGAN CAPITOL CONFIDENTIAL

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Cheap Housing Could Be Michigan Art's Best Friend

BY BRUCE EDWARD WALKER

The hue and cry from members of the arts community over cutbacks of government subsidies is overblown. ArtServe CEO Jennifer H. Goulet recently opined in the Feb. 25 Detroit Free Press that Gov. Jennifer Granholm's recommended 2010 arts appropriation of \$1 million (down from \$8.1 million in 2009, according to Goulet) eliminates "cultural institutions' capacity to provide the rich programming that transforms individuals and communities." I would argue that art and artists are better served if left to their own devices, as recent news stories of burgeoning Detroit arts communities brought about by cheap housing attest.

Defenders of government arts subsidization frequently resort to high-flown, abstract claims of arts' ability to perform an Oprah-style personal and group psyche makeover, concluding without offering concrete evidence that it's up to government largesse — which is to say taxpayers — to preserve art and artists' lifestyles. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The collapse of property values in Detroit is attracting artists from around the world who wish to pursue their respective muses unencumbered by the high cost of living. According to news reports, two such communities have sprung up already, the first near Klinger Street and Davison and the second in Old Redford near Lahser and Grand River.

In fact, there are many historical instances where artists migrated to a given area because it was cheap and subsequently created great art because it was far less difficult to keep the wolf from the door. Cheap living enables artists wishing to focus exclusively on their creative pursuits to do so rather than being sidetracked by unfulfilling tasks at dead-end jobs simply to pay the bills. One artist friend of mine has lived for years in an abandoned storefront near Livernois and Michigan Avenue in Detroit because it allows him to pursue his music, photography and painting without exorbitant overhead.

Arts and artists typically thrive when life's basic necessities come cheap. Think of the bohemians

See "Creating Cool," Page 7

School Union Denounces "Dangerous Trend" Toward Private Food, Busing and Janitors

BY KENNETH M. BRAUN

The Southfield Public Schools last fall began using private contractors to provide food, transportation and janitorial services. It is estimated that this will save the district between \$14.7 million and \$21.5 million over a three-year period — or an annual savings of \$557 to \$814 per pupil. This comes in an environment when falling state revenue projections are forcing the governor to request a reduction of \$59 from the state's per-pupil foundation allowance in her fiscal 2010 budget recommendation.

For several years, the Mackinac Center's Fiscal Policy Initiative has tracked privatization of non-instructional services at public schools. The Center's 2008 survey found that 40 percent of Michigan school districts contract out for at least one of the three big services: busing, custodial and food. Southfield's projected savings for doing all three is not a surprise, as the Mackinac Center's surveys have indicated that privatizing just one support service can lead to annual average savings of more than \$20 per-pupil for food, more than \$135 for janitorial and more than \$220 for transportation.

Privatization's timely injection of fiscal relief is still available and yet unused by a majority of the state's 551 school districts, in large part due to pressure from the Michigan Education Association, the state's largest public school employee union. In December, the MIRS Capitol Capsule newsletter (www.mirsnews.com — subscription required) published a story about Southfield, characterizing its new arrangement as "one of the most comprehensive privatization schemes in the state." An MEA

spokesperson called it part of a "dangerous trend" and noted that the union sends "directors and consultants" and "all the resources we can possibly provide to fight the battle" against districts wishing to privatize.

One MEA tactic is to launch recalls against school board members that vote to hire private contractors. Such an attempt failed in Southfield due to lack of sufficient recall petition signatures. A similar effort against four Reed City board members succeeded during the Nov. 4, 2008, general election, despite the fact that the anticipated annual savings of \$300,000 was used to hire three new teachers. Prior to privately contracting for food and custodial services, the Reed City district's projected expenses were exceeding revenues by \$890,000.

The recall ballot language used by the MEA against the board members avoided listing the privatization vote as the reason. Instead, it cited their approval of the superintendent's contract; a baseless allegation that they had not cut administrative pay; and a subjective accusation that they did not consider input at board meetings. What may have been intended as an effort to deflect attention from the real issue worked on Election Day, but just barely: The average vote in favor of recalling each of the four was just 51 percent.

The hostility regarding privatization savings has also spread to the state Capitol. The MIRS story quotes state Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, as saying he believes that schools are more dangerous when they contract with the private sector. Last legislative session, Jones and state Rep. Jeff Mayes, D-Bay City, co-sponsored a package of

bills that would have placed more restraints on the ability of districts to privatize.

On the other hand, Michael LaFaive, director of the Mackinac Center's Fiscal Policy Initiative, told MIRS that contractors winning competitive bids will often provide more sensitivity to safety and other concerns because they know that their contracts will expire if they do not keep school boards and administrators happy: "Now they've got a person at a private company saying, 'What can I do for you today?'"

The Jones and Mayes bills had co-sponsors from both political parties, but the bills were not considered in the 2007-2008 session of the Michigan Legislature. As of this writing, neither lawmaker has re-introduced these bills for the 2009-2010 session. However, state Rep. Fred Miller, D-Mount Clemens, has introduced House Bill 4219, which MichiganVotes.org says would, "repeal a law that prohibits teachers unions from bargaining to get a school district to agree to not privatize non-instructional support services including bus, custodial, or food services, even if doing so would save the district money." State Rep. Doug Bennett, D-Muskegon, has introduced House Bill 4584, which MichiganVotes.org says would, "prohibit the privatization of any school function if the savings are less than 10 percent compared to the cost of school employees performing the same function."

The contact information for all legislators is on pages 10 and 11. ■

Kenneth M. Braun is the senior managing editor of Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be contacted at braun@mackinac.org. For further information and an opportunity to comment on this issue, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.

ESCORT SERVICE?

from Page One

This bill is co-sponsored by the following state representatives:

Bettie Cook-Scott, D-Detroit
Bert Johnson, D-Detroit
Shanelle Jackson, D-Detroit
Jimmy Womack, D-Detroit
Coleman Young II, D-Detroit
Robert Jones, D-Kalamazoo
Roy Schmidt, D-Grand Rapids
Goeff Hansen, R-Hart
Richard LeBlanc, D-Westland
Bob Constan, D-Dearborn Heights
George Cushingberry, D-Detroit
Dudley Spade, D-Tipton
Rashida Tlaib, D-Detroit
Bob Genetski, R-Saugatuck
Gail Haines, R-Waterford
Kevin Green, R-Wyoming
Tom McMillin, R-Rochester Hills
Marie Donigan, D-Royal Oak.

With an annual base salary of \$79,650 each, Michigan's state legislators are ranked by the National Conference of State Legislatures as the second highest paid in the land.

Along with Durhal, Reps. Womack, Schmidt, Tlaib, Genetski, Haines and McMillin are each new lawmakers beginning their first full term in the Michigan Legislature. This bill was introduced on Feb. 10, six weeks after each was sworn into office.

Shortly after the bill was introduced, Leon Drolet, head of



The head of the Michigan Taxpayers Alliance quipped that maybe lawmakers would next honor themselves with a missing man formation.

the Michigan Taxpayers Alliance, issued a public statement noting that the tributes authorized by the bill more closely approximate those performed for fallen American military veterans: "No word as to whether these politicians will also require military aircraft to perform the missing man formation as an aerial flyover salute at their funerals."

The proposed police escorts and flags for politicians' funerals resemble another honorific that is already provided by the state to both lawmakers and military

veterans while they are still among us. Michigan law allows U.S. veterans of war to select a special state license plate that identifies them as unique citizens who have risked their lives in service to the nation. Michigan legislators are permitted to use license plates that identify them as well: They are designated with the prefixes "SEN" or "REP," followed by the number of the legislator's district. Two sections in state law require the Secretary of State to issue special expiration dates for these plates that coincide with the end of a

lawmaker's term in office. Many lawmakers use these plates. (Note: Drolet, who served as a state representative from 2001 through 2006, did not request a specialty plate that designated him as a lawmaker.)

With an annual base salary of \$79,650 each, Michigan's state legislators are ranked by the National Conference of State Legislatures as the second highest paid in the land. This is far ahead of many states with populations equal to or larger than Michigan, many of which consider the job of state lawmaker to be in

some form or other a part-time position. Florida's population is more than 80 percent larger than Michigan's and that state pays lawmakers an annual base salary of \$30,336. Texas, the nation's second most populous state — 2.4 times the size of Michigan — pays its part-time lawmakers just \$7,200 per year. Georgia, ranked 11th in population right behind Michigan, pays its state lawmakers \$17,342 per year.

On top of their base salary, Michigan lawmakers also receive an annual expense allowance of \$12,000. Additionally, the 12 members elected to leadership positions in each chamber annually receive thousands of dollars more. Those who chair the appropriations committees in the House and Senate receive an extra \$7,000; the leaders of the minority parties in each chamber receive an extra \$22,000; the majority leader in the Senate receives \$26,000 more; and the speaker of the House receives a \$27,000 annual bonus.

House Bill 4229 has been referred to the House Government Operations Committee. The committee is chaired by Rep. Constan, a co-sponsor of the legislation. Rep. McMillin, another co-sponsor, is also a member of this committee.

The contact information for all lawmakers is located on pages 10 and 11. ■

Kenneth M. Braun is the senior managing editor of Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be contacted at braun@mackinac.org. For further information and an opportunity to comment on this issue, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.

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THE LOWDOWN

SENATE SCORING: LIBERAL VS. CONSERVATIVE

Using 34 roll call votes, and technical help from the MichiganVotes.org Web site, the MIRS Capitol Capsule newsletter (www.mirsnews.com – subscription required) ranked the 38 members of the Michigan Senate on the basis of what MIRS characterizes as “most conservative” to “most liberal.” Claiming the top conservative slot for 2008 was Sen. Alan Sanborn, R-Richmond. This marked the fourth time in six years that the Macomb County lawmaker finished first. His overall score for the 34 votes was just 6.06 percent liberal.

The most liberal member, voting that way 97.06 percent of the time on the MIRS scale, was Sen. Irma Clark-Coleman, D-Detroit. Clark-Coleman also finished as the chamber’s top liberal in 2007. She narrowly edged out Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, who was a back-to-back “most liberal” member for 2004 and 2005.

A wide variety of votes were selected, covering subjects as diverse as state spending, environmental regulations, energy policy, gun control, partial birth abortion, charter schools, taxes and more.

No Republican voted more liberal than any Democrat, and vice versa. Sen. Jim Barcia, D-Bay City, ranked as MIRS’ most conservative Democratic senator, voting the liberal line only 61.76 percent of the time. The highest liberal score for a Republican was 32.35 percent, shared by three lawmakers: Sen. Michelle McManus, R-Lake Leelanau; Sen. Roger Kahn, R-Saginaw; and Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester.

ARE SOCIALISTS DECIDING CLOSE STATE HOUSE RACES?

The Greater Detroit Democratic Socialists of America believes it has a proven formula for elevating its candidates to the state Legislature. In the last election, the DSA claims to have targeted its manpower and resources on four suburban “swing” districts in the state House and won them all.

The Web site of the national DSA (www.dsausa.org) asserts that it is the “largest socialist organization in the United States, and the principal U.S. affiliate of the Socialist International.” It traces its organizational roots and “radical” agenda to the socialist movement led by early 20th century presidential candidate Eugene Debs. Its statement of purpose notes that it believes the “international economic order” is “sustained by private profit, alienated labor, race and gender discrimination, environmental destruction, and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo.”

“The Detroit DSA has a simple but effective strategy,”

proclaims their Detroit newsletter, explaining recent political activism. “We endorse progressive candidates in competitive races where the focused efforts of a small group such as ours can tip the balance in favor of the progressive candidate.” That strategy begins with interviews to determine which candidates have views that “run parallel” to the DSA. Then the Detroit-area membership — which the DSA numbers as less than 250 people — votes on which candidates to endorse. Those with endorsements may have volunteer manpower and donations directed their way.

Current state lawmakers that the DSA claims to have propelled to victory include Sen. Hansen Clarke, D-Detroit; Sen. Gilda Jacobs, D-Huntington Woods; Rep. Fred Miller, D-Mount Clemens; Rep. Alma Wheeler-Smith, D-Ypsilanti; and Rep. John Espinoza, D-Croswell. Former state Reps. Steve Bieda, D-Warren, and Aldo Vagnozzi, D-Farmington Hills, were also DSA-endorsed candidates; each left the Legislature due to term limits at the end of 2008.

Stating that they “traditionally” endorse just two candidates for each election cycle, the DSA branched out to four targeted races for the fall of 2008. The approved candidates were: Sarah Roberts, D-St. Clair Shores; Vickie Barnett, D-Farmington Hills; Jon Switalski, D-Warren; and Lisa Brown, D-West Bloomfield. All four were running in open seats. Switalski and Barnett were seeking to replace Bieda and Vagnozzi, while Brown and Roberts were running in seats that were held by outgoing Republicans.

All four DSA candidates won and became members of the Michigan House of Representatives at the beginning of 2009. Brown and Roberts won what the DSA characterized as “razor-thin” victories, each taking less than 52 percent of the votes cast.

On Sept. 6, 2008, the DSA held a fundraiser in Farmington Hills for all four candidates. Outgoing DSA favorite Aldo Vagnozzi was listed as the guest of honor. A total of \$6,500 was reportedly raised and donated to the candidates as a result of this event. Additionally, the DSA reports that “almost every weekend from late summer through the election, DSA volunteers canvassed, prepared literature, or phone banked” in support of one of the chosen four candidates. At least 17 specific members are listed as having participated in at least one “and usually several” of these events.

The DSA reports that during the campaign, Brown’s opponents accused her of being “largely funded by outside radical organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America,” while Barnett’s “opposition commissioned robo calls to undecided voters” accusing the Democrat of being a socialist.

Neither tactic succeeded, either because these charges were not believed by an otherwise socialist-wary electorate or because — in the words of the DSA — perhaps “the McCarthy-era tactic of red-baiting” had been put to rest.

MINORITY REPORT

As the Michigan Legislature approached the April 2 spring break, displays of partisanship were markedly different in each chamber.

In the Senate, where Republicans are in the majority, Democrats demanded a recorded roll call vote aimed at forcing the chamber to begin consideration of Senate Resolution 15, a proposal that would reduce the larger caucus budget provided to the senate’s majority (i.e., Republican) party to the same level as that given to the minority. SR 15 would also require that “all information regarding the Senate’s compensation and expenses shall be made available to the public on the Senate’s Website.”

Both the Republican majority in the Michigan Senate and the Democratic majority in the Michigan House of Representatives receive larger budgets than their respective minority parties. This disparate treatment has been the norm in the Michigan Legislature for several decades. The sponsor of SR 15, state Sen. Gretchen Whitmer, D-East Lansing, estimates that funding both Senate caucuses at the level now paid to the minority would save taxpayers \$3 million per year.

The vote to discharge SR 15 from committee and bring it to the Senate floor for consideration was defeated when all 21 Republicans voted against, and all 16 Democrats voted for, the resolution.

On the other side of the Capitol building, the House of Representatives was working on budget bills.

The Republicans introduced amendments that proposed to reduce spending across the board by five percent. However, according to what the MIRS Capitol Capsule newsletter called a “pre-arrangement” with the Democratic majority, the GOP did not demand recorded votes that would have forced all lawmakers to go on record. As a result, the amendments were defeated by the Democratic majority in a series of unrecorded “voice votes.”

When asked why the Republicans did not push for recorded votes on the budget amendments, a spokesman for GOP House Minority Leader Kevin Elsenheimer, R-Bellaire, said the House GOP would ask for recorded votes “when they knew they could get them,” according to the Gongwer News Service.

In the same article, MIRS reported that House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, praised Elsenheimer and the Republican minority caucus for their bipartisan approach to working with the majority this year. According to MIRS, Dillon said he hoped for more of the same following the spring break. ■

For additional information and an opportunity to comment on these issues, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.



a majority of workers, a process known as card-check.

Last November, EFCA's passage was widely considered inevitable as part of the incoming Obama administration's early legislative push. But then the heavily unionized automotive industry in Detroit reached a critical point, requiring a federal government bailout to avoid bankruptcy. At the same time, UAW leaders balked at further concessions, providing a very public example of union stubbornness and irresponsibility. Not surprisingly, opposition to EFCA grew, and the bill's progress through Congress was delayed. On March 24, Sen. Arlen Specter, R-PA, announced that he was withdrawing his support from EFCA, making passage of

the bill much less likely. Union supporters have indicated that they will continue to push for passage. Undecided senators may also be persuaded to support compromise legislation intended to make organizing easier for union officials.

As the legislative debate over EFCA continues, the stakes for Michigan are high for two reasons. First, any legislation likely to pass would probably lead to the establishment of unions in workplaces where union support is weak. Weaker union support in the workplace means more union opponents who — given the choice — would probably opt out of joining the union and paying union dues, an option that is available in states with right-to-work laws but not in Michigan. For unions, there

will be a strong incentive to focus on states like Michigan where they can be assured of receiving dues from all workers, even if support in the workplace is weak.

Second, because the card-check process is vulnerable to abuse, unions will be tempted to resort to intimidation to secure signed authorization cards. Intimidation is both easier to engage in and more tempting when one has the advantage of numbers. Intimidation tactics are also harder to resist when one cannot be sure that the powers that be will protect you. Michigan, with its sizeable number of labor officials and politically entrenched unions, is prime territory for rough recruiting methods. Many of the compromise proposals that have been made in Washington may also be vulnerable to abuse in ways similar to the original card-check bill.

Some commentators have suggested that EFCA would help Michigan by promoting unions in parts of the country where they are weak, evening the playing field for Michigan employers. But the exact opposite is more likely — that EFCA would strengthen unions in Michigan. Either way, those who hold to this theory are making a not-so-well hidden admission that unions are a drag on the state's economy. Michigan voters should not count on the rest of the country to “help” Michigan by repeating our mistakes.

Michigan would be far better off dealing with its own problems. Rather than expecting workers in other states to shoulder our self-imposed burdens, we should work to establish a healthy balance in labor relations, one in which unions are lean, accountable

and focused on their members. Passing a right-to-work law would put Michigan in the company of states that have been adding jobs for decades and make unions accountable to the men and women they represent. Just as important, it would represent Michigan residents taking charge of the policies that are key to revitalizing our state.

The Michiganvotes.org vote tally for House Resolution 10 is located below Contact information for the legislators is on pages 10 and 11. ■

Paul Kersey is director of labor policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. He may be contacted at kersey@mackinac.org. This article is adapted from a similar commentary published on March 9. For additional information and an opportunity to comment on this issue, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.

Check MichiganVotes.org

“Secret Ballot” Legislators who voted TO END SECRET BALLOT union elections:

HOUSE REPUBLICANS (1)

Rocca (R)

HOUSE DEMOCRATS (66)

Angerer (D)	Dillon (D)	Johnson (D)	Melton (D)	Slezak (D)
Barnett (D)	Donigan (D)	Jones, Robert (D)	Miller (D)	Smith (D)
Bauer (D)	Durhal (D)	Kandrevas (D)	Nathan (D)	Spade (D)
Bennett (D)	Ebli (D)	Kennedy (D)	Nerat (D)	Stanley (D)
Bledsoe (D)	Espinoza (D)	Lahti (D)	Neumann (D)	Switalski (D)
Brown, L. (D)	Geiss (D)	LeBlanc (D)	Polidori (D)	Tlaib (D)
Brown, T. (D)	Gonzales (D)	Leland (D)	Roberts (D)	Valentine (D)
Byrnes (D)	Gregory (D)	Lemmons (D)	Schmidt, R. (D)	Warren (D)
Byrum (D)	Griffin (D)	Lindberg (D)	Scott, B. (D)	Womack (D)
Clemente (D)	Haase (D)	Lipton (D)	Scripps (D)	Young (D)
Constan (D)	Hammel (D)	Liss (D)	Segal (D)	
Corriveau (D)	Haugh (D)	Mayes (D)	Sheltrown (D)	
Coulouris (D)	Huckleberry (D)	McDowell (D)	Simpson (D)	
Dean (D)	Jackson (D)	Meadows (D)	Slavens (D)	

Legislators who voted TO PRESERVE SECRET BALLOT union elections:

HOUSE REPUBLICANS (40)

Agema (R)	Daley (R)	Haveman (R)	McMillin (R)	Proos (R)
Amash (R)	Denby (R)	Horn (R)	Meekhof (R)	Rogers (R)
Ball (R)	DeShazor (R)	Jones, Rick (R)	Meltzer (R)	Schmidt, W. (R)
Bolger (R)	Elsenheimer (R)	Knollenberg (R)	Moore (R)	Schuitmaker (R)
Booher (R)	Genetski (R)	Kowall (R)	Moss (R)	Scott, P. (R)
Calley (R)	Green (R)	Kurtz (R)	Opsommer (R)	Stamas (R)
Caul (R)	Haines (R)	Lori (R)	Pavlov (R)	Tyler (R)
Crawford (R)	Hansen (R)	Lund (R)	Pearce (R)	Walsh (R)

HOUSE DEMOCRATS (NONE)

Legislators who DID NOT VOTE:

Cushingberry (D) Hildenbrand (R) Marleau (R)

CREATING COOL

from Page 3

living in garrets in New York's Greenwich Village during the fin de siècle or Paris' Left Bank in the 1920s and '30s, where Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, Henry Miller and hundreds of other writers and painters plied their trade. Think of Stephen Crane and Walt Whitman roaming the Bowery, willingly seeking inspiration in the deprecation found there. Think of Harlem, where Charlie Parker, Lester Young and Dizzie Gillespie reconfigured jazz by creating bop, and Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg invented Beat literature. Think of the Haight-Ashbury District in San Francisco where the Grateful Dead, the Jefferson Airplane, Moby Grape, the Charlatans and Country Joe and the Fish psychodelicized the world. Think of Lincoln Park's own MC5 and their Elektra Records cohorts the Stooges sharing cheap housing in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti while crafting some of the most sublime musical anarchy ever dispatched to vinyl, or, more recently, the Hamtramck loft where Jack and Meg White kick started the garage rock resurgence when they released the first White Stripes album in 1999.

None of these cultural explosions occurred because some government entity decided that pouring taxpayer dollars into an area or throwing grants

at institutions or individual artists would promote an artistic renaissance or "cool city." Cool cities happen organically. They can't be planned. Organic revival happens because people see the price-point as too good to pass up. An artist community attracts new like-minded citizens to the neighborhood as well, eventually prompting coffee shops, book stores, clubs and restaurants to cater to a widely diversifying clientele. The Old Redford location, for example, is planning to build a coffee shop where artists can meet and share ideas. Eventually older couples, who could live more expensively, relocate to areas seeped in the creative arts because they like the pervasive cultural vibe.

Rather than bemoaning the cutting of government subsidies for the arts, perhaps artists should celebrate the opportunities that low-cost housing affords them by following the lead of those artists migrating to the Old Redford and Northeast Detroit areas. If history is any indication, we just might witness the spontaneous blossoming of Detroit as a new cultural Mecca. ■

Bruce Edward Walker is communications director for the Property Rights Network at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. He may be contacted at walker@mackinac.org. For additional information and an opportunity to comment on this issue, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.

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-----Original Message-----

From: Shannon [last name redacted] [mailto:XXXXX@yahoo.com]

I received your spring issue, read it cover to cover and have come to the conclusion that you are nothing more than corporate shells hiding behind your "educational institute" tax exempt status. Added to my agenda of things to do: eliminate the ability of corporate lobby organizations to collect funds from our corporate masters and then pass their anti-worker, anti-human being agendas off on taxpayers as newsworthy information.

Please, do the citizens of Michigan really need to know how much money Farmington Hills Schools spent on hardware supplies? Why not report on something that really matters to Michigan citizens. How many jobs have Michigan based companies shipped to cheap labor countries over the last ten years? Right-to-Work Laws? You must be joking. Michigan corporations aren't afraid of unions - they're afraid of having to share a reasonable portion of their profits with the workers that actually make the profits. Children in China work for so much less than a U.S. adult trying to support a family.

Your "newspaper" is a disgrace and does a terrible disservice to the citizens of Michigan.

Shannon [last name redacted]
Sterling Heights

CONTEST WINNER!

Reader raises awareness of school bill

THE OAKLAND PRESS March 29, 2009

PROPOSED SCHOOL BILL SHOULD NEVER PASS

I subscribe to the "Michigan Capitol Confidential," published by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

In the latest issue, an article titled "Sneak Attack" made me aware of Michigan House Bill 4141, which was submitted by the last lame duck session of the Michigan House of Representatives, under the radar and with little debate.

This bill provides Michigan school districts the ability to bypass some of the limitations of Proposal A passed in 1994. In summary: HB 4141 changes the rules with which school districts can use sinking funds, using these funds in much the same manner as bond issues.

According to the article, this bill "would create a whole new 5-mill property tax opportunity" and an estimated \$3.2 billion to \$7.2 billion in additional tax revenues.

Leave it to the Michigan Legislature to once again stick it to the already overburdened taxpayer.

I encourage Michigan residents to contact their state legislators and ask them to reject this bill when it comes before them.

—Joe Vlk, Oxford



Mr. Vlk is a winner of the Michigan Capitol Confidential letter contest and will receive the framed original of the Henry Payne cartoon from the front page of the Jan/Feb 2009 issue. Readers who mention "Michigan Capitol Confidential" when writing to lawmakers or newspapers are encouraged to submit their entries to:

Michigan Capitol Confidential
c/o Contest
140 West Main Street
Midland, MI 48640

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PROPERTY TAX

from Page One

district operating expenses are funded on a per-pupil basis from the state's School Aid Fund, which is itself funded through a combination of earmarks from the state sales tax, the personal income tax, an education property tax, business taxes and more. According to the Michigan House Fiscal Agency, FY 2008 funding ranged from a minimum of \$7,204 per pupil to a maximum of \$12,387. Now at \$13 billion per year, the SAF is the largest single expenditure of state government.

According to Michiganvotes.org, House Bill 4313 would "allow school districts to levy up to three mills for ten years to buy or fix school buses, and to buy computers" and that "the tax increase election would be either on May or November election days." Under Proposal A, school districts may hold bond elections to construct or make improvements to buildings. Sinking fund mills are currently an extension of this power, allowing districts to put away money to pay principle on those bond debts and to make capital improvements — but not for operating expenses such as school buses and computers. One original justification for Proposal A, approved by 69 percent of Michigan voters, was to put an end to local millage elections for operational funding by creating the SAF's large pool of foundation allowance money at the state level.

Proposal A's constitutional protections against a return to these local millages are such that some legal experts believe that it would require a three-fourths supermajority vote in both chambers of the Legislature to reinstate the millage votes. If true, this would require 83 votes in the House of Representatives, but HB 4313 received only 74 favorable votes on March 24.

According to the HFA, fewer than half of Michigan's school districts now have sinking funds

and more than 80 percent of those districts levy less than 2 mills, rather than the 5 mill legal maximum. The Michigan Chamber of Commerce, a staunch opponent of HB 4313, notes that if the use of sinking funds is expanded to operational spending, then there will be a powerful incentive for many more districts to hold sinking fund elections seeking much higher property taxes.

Calculating the potential impact of the sinking fund expansion that the House approved in December 2008, the Michigan Chamber warned that it could lead to property tax hikes of \$3.2 billion to \$7.6 billion. While the version of HB 4313 passed by the House is restricted to spending on buses and computers, and was thus slightly more limited than the 2008 version, the business group's opposition to expanded taxing power remained high.

...the MIRS newsletter noted that the "story in the House is that the Michigan Chamber of Commerce has basically told Republicans that anyone on the GOP side of the aisle who votes yes on HB 4313 can expect to have the Chamber oppose them in future primaries."

"Since 1994," noted a Michigan Chamber statement before the HB 4313 vote, "school funding for operations is up 99% and school debt funding (like sinking funds) is up 269%! It seems logical that administrators should be able to run their districts without trying a sneak attack on taxpayer's wallets." Elsewhere, the Michigan Chamber noted that total inflation was up only 33 percent from the passage of Proposal A in 1994 until 2007.

Demonstrating the seriousness of the hostility to HB 4313, the MIRS Capitol Capsule newsletter

noted that the "story in the House is that the Michigan Chamber of Commerce has basically told Republicans that anyone on the GOP side of the aisle who votes yes on HB 4313 can expect to have the Chamber oppose them in future primaries." Ultimately, 11 Republicans decided to do just that. Other business groups opposing HB 4313 included the Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the Michigan Manufacturers Association and the Michigan Association of Realtors.

Rep. Tonya Schuitmaker, R-Lawton, one of the Republicans



Rep. Tonya Schuitmaker, R-Lawton.

to vote for the proposal, compared the spending of additional tax dollars by schools to spending by businesses.

"I see it very analogous with companies that need capital improvements for technology," she told MIRS.

Rep. John Walsh, R-Livonia, noted that he initially favored HB 4313, but then turned against it due to "overwhelming" opposition when he pitched the idea to his local businesses.

Another opponent, Rep. Phil

Pavlov, R-St. Clair, made note of Michigan's rapidly falling home prices and wondered how raising taxes on those homeowners would bring about better public education.

The Michiganvotes.org vote tally for HB 4313 is below. The bill is now before the Senate Finance Committee, chaired by Sen. Nancy Cassis, R-Nov. The contact information for all lawmakers is on pages 10 and 11. ■

Kenneth M. Braun is the senior managing editor of Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be contacted at braun@mackinac.org. For additional information and an opportunity to comment on this legislation, please see www.mackinac.org/10424.

Check MichiganVotes.org

"Property Tax Protections Assaulted Again" Legislators who voted TO ALLOW public schools to expand the use of sinking fund property tax spending:

HOUSE REPUBLICANS (11)

Ball (R)	Hansen (R)	Opsommer (R)	Proos (R)	Schuitmaker (R)	Tyler (R)
Booher (R)	Lori (R)	Pearce (R)	Rocca (R)	Scott, P. (R)	

HOUSE DEMOCRATS (63)

Angerer (D)	Cushingberry (D)	Huckleberry (D)	Meadows (D)	Simpson (D)
Barnett (D)	Dean (D)	Johnson (D)	Melton (D)	Slavens (D)
Bauer (D)	Dillon (D)	Kandrevas (D)	Miller (D)	Smith (D)
Bennett (D)	Donigan (D)	Kennedy (D)	Nathan (D)	Spade (D)
Bledsoe (D)	Durhal (D)	Lahti (D)	Nerat (D)	Stanley (D)
Brown, L. (D)	Ebli (D)	LeBlanc (D)	Neumann (D)	Switalski (D)
Brown, T. (D)	Espinoza (D)	Leland (D)	Polidori (D)	Tlaib (D)
Byrnes (D)	Geiss (D)	Lemmons (D)	Roberts (D)	Valentine (D)
Byrum (D)	Gonzales (D)	Lindberg (D)	Schmidt, R. (D)	Warren (D)
Clemente (D)	Gregory (D)	Lipton (D)	Scott, B. (D)	Womack (D)
Constan (D)	Haase (D)	Liss (D)	Scripps (D)	Young (D)
Corriveau (D)	Hammel (D)	Mayes (D)	Segal (D)	
Coulouris (D)	Haugh (D)	McDowell (D)	Sheltrown (D)	

Legislators who voted AGAINST letting public schools expand the use of sinking fund property tax spending:

HOUSE REPUBLICANS (32)

Agema (R)	Denby (R)	Hildenbrand (R)	Marleau (R)	Rogers (R)
Amash (R)	DeShazor (R)	Horn (R)	McMillin (R)	Schmidt, W. (R)
Bolger (R)	Elsenheimer (R)	Jones, Rick (R)	Meekhof (R)	Stamas (R)
Calley (R)	Genetski (R)	Knollenberg (R)	Meltzer (R)	Walsh (R)
Caul (R)	Green (R)	Kowall (R)	Moore (R)	
Crawford (R)	Haines (R)	Kurtz (R)	Moss (R)	
Daley (R)	Haveman (R)	Lund (R)	Pavlov (R)	

HOUSE DEMOCRATS (3)

Griffin (D)	Jones, Robert (D)	Slezak (D)
-------------	-------------------	------------

Legislators who DID NOT VOTE:

Jackson (D)



SHOW MICHIGAN
THE MONEY!

ON MAY 5, TAXPAYERS IN **GRAND RAPIDS, COMSTOCK PARK AND OTHER** MICHIGAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS WILL ELECT THEIR SCHOOL BOARDS. WILL THESE SCHOOL BOARDS TELL TAXPAYERS HOW THEIR MONEY IS SPENT?

On Jan. 16, 2009, the Farmington Public Schools wrote a check for \$362.83 to Jean's Hardware. What did they buy? What other checks did they write?

Thomas Jefferson envisioned that the finances of government should be "as clear and intelligible as a merchant's books," allowing "any man of any mind" to "comprehend them, to investigate abuses and consequently to control them." Because the Farmington Public Schools puts its check register online — making the district's finances an open book to anyone with a Web browser — all that is needed to make Jefferson's vision a reality is curiosity and less than five minutes of your time.

Anybody can do it, any time, without an appointment. And you don't need to ask for permission: Farmington doesn't even bother to know who is checking or why.

But to get this same information from most of Michigan's other school districts you will need to ask them first. You might even need to know how to file a Freedom of Information Act request that tells them who you are; it might cost you money; and you may have to wait more than a week for it to arrive.

Michigan Capitol Confidential readers: The "Show Michigan the Money" project needs YOUR help!

The Michigan House Fiscal Agency reports that the state's public school districts collectively spend more than \$17 billion of the taxpayers' money each year. The goal of the Show Michigan the Money project is to get all of the state's 551 school districts to follow Farmington's example.

Log on to check our listing of every school whose checkbook is an open book:
www.showmichiganthemoney.org/9329.

Chances are you won't see your local school district on the list. If you don't, we'd like you to contact district officials and ask them to participate.

You may do this by writing, phoning or e-mailing your superintendent or school board members. Or — best yet — attend a school board meeting and ask in person. Sometimes, all that you need to do is ask nicely: Farmington and several other districts on our list made plans to provide online check registers within just days of us making the request.

Please encourage your schools to check out our Web site and contact project director Kenneth M. Braun (braun@mackinac.org) with questions or to let him know that they have decided to show Michigan the money! Michigan Capitol Confidential will report the results in forthcoming issues.

MICHIGAN
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FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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Transparency.org

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CAPITOL CONFIDENTIAL

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WHY WE GIVE PARTY AFFILIATIONS:

The Legislature is managed as a partisan institution. Lawmakers segregate themselves by party in matters from daily meetings to seating. They have separate and taxpayer-financed policy staffs to provide them with research and advice from differing perspectives. As such, gaining a full understanding of the vote of an individual lawmaker requires knowing his or her partisan affiliation.

WHO ARE YOUR LAWMAKERS?

To find out which lawmakers represent you and to view interactive legislative district maps, please point your web browser to www.mackinac.org/9313.

If you do not have Internet access, then you may obtain copies of legislative district maps by calling 989-631-0900 or by sending a written request to us at: Mackinac Center for Public Policy, c/o MiCapCon District Maps 140 West Main Street, Midland, MI 48640

Did you know?

Members of the Michigan House and Senate are the second highest-paid state legislators in the United States, behind California.

Base member annual pay: \$79,650

Additional annual expense allowance: \$12,000

Supplements are paid to the following 12 legislative officers:

- Speaker of the House: \$27,000
- Majority leader in the Senate: \$26,000
- Minority leaders in both House and Senate: \$22,000
- Majority floor leaders in both House and Senate: \$12,000
- Minority floor leaders in both House and Senate: \$10,000
- Chair of Appropriations Committee in both House and Senate: \$7,000
- House speaker pro tempore and Senate president pro tempore: \$5,513

In more than 30 states, the position of state legislator is a part-time job with a salary of \$30,000 or less. Texas — the second most populous state and second largest geographically — pays lawmakers \$7,200 per year.

Some pay much less: New Hampshire legislators are paid a salary of \$200 for a two-year term of office, Alabama pays \$10 per day and New Mexico offers no salary at all — just expenses. ■

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—
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I'M JUST A BILL

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A sampling of proposed state laws, as described on MichiganVotes.org

To comment on these bills, please see www.mackinac.org/10424

HOUSE BILL 4478 **Authorize Boy Scouts specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Rep. Jeff Mayes, D – Bay City

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate honoring the Boy Scouts of America, with the premium revenue going to the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts would have to submit a report to the state describing how they spent the money.

SENATE BILL 128 **Authorize “In God We Trust” specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Sen. Cameron Brown,
R – Fawn River Township

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate with the motto, “In God We Trust,” and the extra money charged for it going into the state general fund. The bill does not require any report detailing how the money is spent.

SENATE BILL 199 **Authorize Boy Scouts specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Sen. Roger Kahn, R – Saginaw

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate honoring the Boy Scouts of America, with the premium revenue going to the Boy Scouts of America. The Boy Scouts would have to submit a report to the state describing how they spent the money.

HOUSE BILL 4352 **Authorize “Michigan heritage” specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Rep. Mike Huckleberry, D – Greenville

The bill proposes to authorize a “Michigan heritage” specialty license plate, with the premium revenue going to state and local history programs. The plate would be exempt from the start-up fees that are required for other specialty plates.

SENATE BILL 135 **Authorize Humane Society specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Sen. John Pappageorge, R – Troy

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate honoring the Michigan Humane Society, with the premium revenue going to the Humane Society for pet sterilization.

SENATE BILL 324 **Authorize Ducks Unlimited fundraising plate**

Introduced by state
Sen. Bruce Patterson, R – Canton

The bill proposes to require the Secretary of State to develop a Ducks Unlimited fundraising license plate, with fees collected for the plate going to the Michigan Chapter of Ducks Unlimited for the protection, enhancement, and acquisition of wetlands and associated uplands in this state.

HOUSE BILL 4167 **Authorize Humane Society specialty plate**

Introduced by state
Rep. Kimberly Meltzer,
R – Clinton Township

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate honoring the Michigan Humane Society, with the premium revenue going to the Humane Society for pet sterilization.

SENATE BILL 49 **Produce “I Believe” license plates**

Introduced by state
Sen. Roger Kahn, R – Saginaw

The bill proposes to require the Secretary of State to produce “I Believe” vehicle license plates.

SENATE BILL 59 **Authorize Habitat for Humanity fundraising license plate**

Introduced by state
Sen. Mark Jansen, R – Grand Rapids

The bill proposes to authorize a specialty license plate honoring Habitat for Humanity, with the net proceeds from its sale going to that organization for the construction of more homes.