



WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE REPORT

February 26, 2010

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Please route to all interested parties in your township.

ARE HEALTH BENEFITS FOR RETIRED LEGISLATORS A THING OF THE PAST?

The Senate debated legislation this week that would do away with retiree health benefits for future legislators. HB 4194 was offered by Rep. Diane Slavens (D-Canton Chtr. Twp.). Current legislators do not receive a defined benefit pension, which was offered to legislators in the past, instead they are part of a 401K plan. 4% of their salary is deposited into their retirement investment account and if the legislator contributes an additional 3% of their salary, the state will match the amount. At issue in this debate were the health benefits that are offered to retired legislators. Any legislator who leaves with six years of service receives health insurance including dental and vision coverage. The retired legislator is eligible for this benefit beginning at age 55. Prior to the enactment of term limits, legislators received a very generous defined benefit type pension along with lifetime health care with coverage that started as soon as they left the Legislature. Even though the legislation has passed both the House and Senate, the legislation still needs concurrence on Senate amendments.

STATE TO MAKE COMPUTERS AVAILABLE FOR ELECTRONIC POLL BOOKS

The Secretary of State's Bureau of Elections will soon be inviting municipalities to participate in the Electronic Poll Book grant project. Monies are available through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to provide computers, scanners and memory sticks to political jurisdictions to help provide for a more efficient and accurate election process. Local units of government will be eligible to receive a laptop computer for each precinct within their jurisdiction to be utilized with either a parallel paper poll book or to replace the paper poll book entirely. The Bureau will be providing further details on how this process will work in the very near future. In the meantime, city and township clerks are encouraged to consider whether to participate in the project. While the computer equipment will be provided at no cost to local jurisdictions, some questions have arisen about replacing the computers at the end of their life cycle and who would be responsible for maintenance cost.

LEGISLATION PUTS THE BREAKS ON DIGITAL BILLBOARDS

The House Great Lakes and Environment Committee took testimony this week on legislation that suspends the construction of electronic advertisement billboards. HB 5580 was offered by Rep. Rebecca Warren (D-Ann Arbor). In particular, the legislation would ban the construction of electronic or rotating highway billboards or modification of traditional boards into an electronic format until Jan. 1, 2012. At issue is the question of the safety of drivers as they pass the billboards. One study indicated that drivers are twice as likely to be distracted by this type of billboard; this is generally considered a selling point by those who rent out these spaces.

FORMER GOVERNORS SQUARE OFF

Hundreds of movers and shakers from across the state got a special treat this week when they attended the fundraising dinner for the Michigan Political Leadership Program. Former Governors James Blanchard and John Engler were the guest speakers for the night. Both men were well remembered for their individual battles when Mr. Blanchard served as governor and Mr. Engler was the Senate Majority Leader. So what happened when these former arch-rivals spoke from the same stage: complete agreement on some very important issues. Both men were extremely critical of term limits. They saw term limits as a barrier to resolving many of the state's problems. While both agreed that the constitution should be modified in this area, they also agreed that it should not be done through a constitutional convention. The third issue that saw both former governors in agreement was that neither one would comment on the performance of the current governor. The Michigan Political Leadership Program is operated by Michigan State University. The program trains 24 fellows each year from a multi-partisan perspective who are interested in becoming a better leader for their community and their state. Many township officials have participated in this program over the years.

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