

Legislative Report for MAT
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April 2009

Representative Marty Knollenberg (R-Troy) has reintroduced legislation (HB 4080) that would end lifetime benefits for lawmakers. Knollenberg introduced the same measure last term -- it went nowhere. This year could be different. Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) has called for curtailing lawmaker benefits. "Lifetime benefits for six short years of work is completely out of touch with the realities those we represent are facing," Knollenberg said. "Citizens of Michigan are worried about supporting their families, keeping their homes and preparing for retirement. These concerns are what the Legislature must focus on, not how to take more money from citizens to pay for a structurally defunct budget."

Lieutenant Governor John Cherry has been directed by Governor Jennifer to find ways to further trim the size of state government. The mission for the Lt.Governor is to condense the state's 18 state departments into eight. One scenario tossed about is combining the Michigan Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Quality and the Department of Natural Resources together into a resource based mega department. MDA Director believes the MDA can best serve its mission as a unique entity and would prefer to be left alone and commented that the missions of the three departments are different.

Governor Jennifer Granholm has recommended turning over Michigan's wetlands program to the federal government. Granholm has made the recommendation because the program has been under funded and the prospects for adequate funding look bleak. However, it is doubtful the Legislature will go along with the idea of repealing Michigan's 30 year old wetlands program, one of only two in the nation that allows the state to oversee federal regulations. Both Senator Patty Birkholz, R-Saugatuck, chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee and House Great Lakes and Environment Committee Chair Rebekah Warren, D-Ann Arbor clearly prefer not to repeal it.

The House DNR budget committee continues to debate the DNR budget. Lynn Boyd, FMFM testified that 54,000 cords of timber went up for sale last year and 47,000 cords were actually cut. Boyd testified that the department would meet the 63,000 cord mandate in 2009. The department has requested the committee roll all timber line items, timber treatment, forest management and planning into one line item. The budget committee opposes this request. The 63,000 cord mandate was not included in the HB 4446, the Governor's DNR budget bill. We are actively lobbying to have the cord mandate included in the final budget bill in one form or another.

House Bill 4224, sponsored by Rep. Kate Ebi, D-Monroe, allows a slasher unit to legally travel down the road. Due to prompt action by sponsor Ebli, the bill received immediate action by the House. HB 4404, legislation to clarify the sales tax exemption on industrial processing equipment has been sponsored by Rep. Steve Lindberg. SB 198 has been sponsored by Senator Michelle McManus, R-Lake Leelanau. The bill clarifies the use tax exemption on industrial processing equipment. Both HB 4404 and SB 198 are not supported by the Department of Treasury.