

Coffeebreak for week of June 28

Early Reading Programs Will Help Young Children Read to Learn

Nineteen Michigan public school districts have an opportunity to receive state funding to help improve school children's reading ability in a new pilot program developed by legislators. The legislation is a result of many school officials and parents identifying the lack of suitable reading skills among the most important factors affecting their children. Under the measure, schools will no longer lack the resources to implement early reading intervention programs. An amendment to the school aid budget proposed in the Michigan Senate provides qualifying pilot schools \$5 million for the development and implementation of early reading intervention programs. Reading is a fundamental tool for the future. Children spend their first grades learning to read and the rest of their education years reading to learn. The schools districts eligible for the pilot funding must have at 1,500 enrolled in kindergarten through the twelfth grades and at least 8 percent of the entire student population deemed "learning disabled".

Michigan Voters Get Early Presidential Primary

Michigan voters can take the lead in choosing presidential candidates under legislation being signed by the Governor. Michigan's primary date has been moved from the third Tuesday in March to the fourth Tuesday in February. Without the change, voters would have had to wait until March 21, long after many other states had already sealed the outcome of the nomination process. The top candidates invest their time and money in states where the primary gives them a strong and early advantage. Michigan will now be added to the top of the list with the new early primary and 18 electoral votes. An earlier primary gives presidential candidates a tremendous incentive to secure the commitments of Michigan voters, and increase our state's prominence in the national election. Adopting the legislation solidifies Michigan's importance in the choosing of future presidents.

Senate Concludes Busy First Half of 1999; Many New Initiatives Complete

The Michigan Senate has wrapped up the first half of 1999 by completing work on a number of family-focused bills including two major tax cuts, expanding educational opportunities, enhancing services for seniors and toughening crime measures. Over the last six months legislators have not only completed their original goals for Michigan families, they have also passed several additional initiatives that will set Michigan apart from the rest of the country. Some of the most important accomplishments of the session include: a cut in the state's income and business tax, Merit Scholarships for high school students, urban school accountability reform, an urban homesteading program, prescription drug relief for senior citizens and protections for children against Internet crime. In addition, legislators completed work on the state's budget for 2000. These bills included increased funding for both K-12 and higher education, money for additional nursing home inspectors and a new senior citizen drug prescription plan.

Phase One of Clean Michigan Initiative Receives Legislative Approval

Michigan's environment receives its first financial boost from the Clean Michigan Initiative in 1999 - 2000. The legislation has allocated \$233 million of \$675 million in the CMI bond to various statewide environmental cleanup, pollution prevention, and redevelopment projects. The citizens of Michigan made environmental clean-up a priority when they approved the Clean Michigan Initiative bond last November. This wise investment targets dollars to specific projects and programs aimed at achieving a future of environmentally friendly economic prosperity. The bill specifies five areas of environmental programs that will receive funding. Brownfield Cleanup and Redevelopment Projects will receive more than \$72 million in funding. Waterfront redevelopment grants will receive \$20 million. Nonpoint source pollution prevention and control projects will receive grants totaling \$12 million to be awarded to nonprofit groups and local governments to aid in the carrying out of watershed management plans and to encourage activities to reduce nonpoint source pollution specific to various communities. Prevention programs that are necessary to improving and protecting Michigan's soil and water will also receive some of the funding money.

Transportation Enhancement Grants Benefit Communities

Communities across the state will benefit from the largest ever transportation enhancement grants announced by the Department of Transportation. The \$64 million program provides funds for enhancing the appearance, safety, and economic benefit of roads and pedestrian facilities and compliments the major investment Michigan has already made to its roads and bridges. These funds are a real investment for the future and beautification of Michigan.

NOTE:

The CMI piece and the Transportation Grant piece can be localized. Contact your writer in SMCO if you do not have the information.