

another intense primary in 2004.

In his statement, Mr. Gosselin emphasized his consistent anti-tax stand, expanding that to say he would oppose any effort to create toll roads in the state.

LEGISLATORS ANNOUNCE BILLS TO CREATE FIRE SERVICE

A package of bills introduced in both houses will move the state's fire marshal to the Department of Labor and Economic Growth and was hailed by its sponsors as a way of ensuring both finances and policy in a new Bureau of Fire Services.

Sen. Mike Prusi (D-Ishpeming) said at a press conference it was unusual to have any issue that draws support from both House and Senate Republicans and Democrats but the officials felt it was necessary to prevent funds cuts to the state's ability to train fire fighters.

Essentially the bills will codify what Governor Jennifer Granholm has begun through a series of executive directives to consolidate resources while improving overall emergency management and homeland security efforts.

The bills create the Bureau of Fire Services in DLEG, and transfer the office of fire marshal to the bureau from the Department of State Police. They also transfer the Fire Fighting Training Council to the newly created bureau and provide tort immunity to firefighting instructors. The package also requires local governments to apply to the new bureau for permits to use fireworks.

BUSINESS LEADERS URGE SUPPORT OF SENATE CURRICULUM

The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce urged the Senate to act quickly on that chamber's version of a mandated high school curriculum.

In an email to Senate members Tuesday, the business groups argued that the bill (SB 1124) was needed to show the importance of education in the state.

"We believe that completion of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, that includes the Michigan Merit Core and the 21st Century Applied Learning Core, will restore value and meaning to the high school diploma," said Jim Sandy, MBL EE executive director, in the email. "Michigan's economic future depends heavily on an innovative and well-educated workforce; the adoption of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is a positive step toward that goal."

State Board of Education members also discussed the legislation being considered in both chambers at their meeting Tuesday. Of primary concern to board members was that the final legislation not allow students to opt out of the curriculum too quickly.

"If that's true, we can't have it," she said of efforts to allow students to opt out before at least taking some of the required courses.

The version of the curriculum adopted by the board would have allowed students to waive certain requirements at the end of 11th grade if it was clear they would not be able to meet those requirements by the end of their senior year.

MUNICIPALITIES CALLING FOR CABLE AGREEMENTS

Cities and townships in Michigan are passing resolutions urging AT&T and Verizon to seek local franchise agreements for cable television. Such agreements are critical to local residents ensuring they receive equitable service, officials from both the Michigan Municipal League and the Michigan Townships Association said.

legislative spring break.

On Tuesday the House also unanimously passed HB 5747 and HB 5748, which would outlaw and provide sentencing guidelines for human trafficking.

FIRE BILLS WIN UNANIMOUS HOUSE PANEL OK

Passing legislation out of the House Appropriations Committee on a unanimous basis doesn't come around often, but on Wednesday, the unified consent of the panel members was in abundance with the passage of a 12 bills aimed at streamlining fire services and policies under a new Bureau of Fire Services within the Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The package, HB 5860, HB 5861, HB 5862, HB 5863, HB 5864, HB 5865, HB 5866, HB 5867, HB 5868, HB 5869, HB 5870, and HB 5871, was introduced with bipartisan and bicameral support, with similar bills in the Senate.

Generally, the legislation puts into statute Governor Jennifer Granholm's Executive Order 2003-1, which transferred duties of the fire marshal division of the Department of State Police to DLEG. While all duties and responsibilities transfer over to the new department, arson investigators still will be under the State Police.

Rep. Gino Polidori (D-Dearborn), a retired fire chief, said the legislation is long overdue and that bringing all the divisions and policies under one roof makes sense.

Also during the committee meeting, the panel unanimously passed transfer of funding for the Department of Human Services to provide 50 percent of the cost associated with hiring 51 additional Child Protective Services workers. The remaining 50 percent of costs was covered by a supplemental budget bill (SB 242), which was passed by the House last week.

STATE WATCHING, NOT INTERRUPTING, DETROIT SICK-OUT

While the Department of Education is watching events in Detroit Public Schools, so far the sick-out staged Wednesday is a local event, said spokesperson Martin Ackley. "It's up to the local district to deal with their teachers," he said.

Some 800 teachers in the district called in sick Wednesday, forcing some schools to close, over proposed pay increases for principals and administrators while teachers were giving up five day's pay under a contract agreement to help reduce a deficit in the district.

Administrators argued the pay increase was to make up for pay cuts they took last year.

Union officials expected all teachers back to work Thursday, but were still hoping the event would encourage the district administration to meet with them to discuss the pay issue.

Officials said they were not seeking to reopen the contract, but to discuss the pay disparities.

TRAFFIC FATALITIES DOWN IN '05; MOTORCYCLE DEATHS UP

For the sixth straight year, Michigan recorded a drop in the number of fatalities due to traffic accidents, the State Police reported Wednesday. However, it said motorcycle fatalities were sharply higher, nearly doubling to 122 from the 79 in 2004.

The 2.6 percent decline, to 1,129 traffic deaths, follows last year's 10 percent drop that brought the state to the lowest number of fatalities since 1945. That was credited to increased seat belt use and new drunken driving penalties.

DWCCMH to become an authority that's independent of Wayne County government so county officials stop allegedly siphoning away money for other reasons.

To come up with this number, Republicans said they used a number DWCCMH officials used themselves when noting the amount of money in administrative costs they feel they can change without legislative action that would make them an authority.

Sen. Shirley **JOHNSON** (R-Troy), a sponsor of the DWCCMH authority bill Granholm vetoed last session, said she wanted to see the bureaucratic efficiencies created in the Oakland County community mental health duplicated in Wayne County. She said she believes the new leadership can make it happen, but she wants to give officials a nudge to make sure it happens.

"Sometimes a kick in the butt is the best thing that can happen," Johnson said. "They've been promising, promising, promising, promising, promising and nothing has happened."

Clarke said this drastic of a cut is not appropriate for an agency that is reaching out through some new programs to address mental illness in children. To put this burden on DWCCMH would "cripple the agency" and feed the perception that Republicans have some type of vendetta against Detroit.

For the most part, however, the DCH budget Republicans put on the table today closely resembles what the governor put out in February. Sen. Deb **CHERRY** (D-Burton) said the majority's FY 2007 offering is more palatable than their FY 2006 budget, but she would likely have more amendments when the budget shows up in the Senate Appropriations Committee next week.

Republicans also are suggesting the following changes from the administration's budget:

- Saving a net \$12 million (\$5 million GF) by hiring \$2 million in new DCH staff to better audit the money that's coming in from the federal government and going out the door to recipients
- Saving \$22.9 million (10 million GF) by recovering money the state overpaid for pharmaceuticals as was pointed out by a recent audit
- Asking the federal government for a combined \$20 million to support medical technology and health behaviors.
- Increasing the minimum hourly rate for adult home care workers to \$6.10 an hour unless the proposed minimum wage increase isn't passed. The Senate passed a bill increasing the minimum wage for all workers to be \$6.95 an hour until next summer, when it will be \$7.15.
- Setting aside \$5.15 million in GF money for local health operations for hearing and vision screening.
- Giving \$100,000 to efforts to clean up the public health disasters caused by methamphetamine production.

Proposal Contains State's Fire Services

Lawmakers introduced 25 bills today that would pull together the state's different fire services under a new roof called the state Bureau of Fire Services, which would be located under the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG).

In a rare show of bi-partisanship across both chambers, legislators heralded their proposed bureaucratic unification as a move that would protect fire training money and offer local officials a more direct pipeline to state fire officials. This, in turn, is projected to improve the state's emergency management and homeland security efforts because it should mean better coordination on training and resources.

The bills, in effect, follow an executive directive Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** issued last November that ordered all state departments that have any piece of a state fire service located under its umbrella to give her a good reason why that piece is better served under their department as opposed to a unified Bureau of Fire Services.

One of the problems with having fire services scattered about the bureaucracy is making sure that all of the appropriate pieces are properly funded, said Sen. Valde **GARCIA** (R-Howell). Last year, the Fire Fighter Training Council was shoved under the Bureau of Construction Codes, which made it difficult for the council to get the \$1.6 million it typically receives.

Fire Marshall Andy **NEUMANN** will head up the new Bureau of Fire Services.

Lawmakers heading up the effort in the Legislature include Garcia, Rep. Chris **KOLB** (D-Ann Arbor), Rep. Dave **FARHAT** (R-Muskegon) and Sen. Mike **PRUSI** (D-Ishpeming). They were joined at today's press conference with about 10 of their legislative colleagues and members from the Michigan Fire Service Coalition, which is made up of local fire administrators and unions.

GOP Wants Its Mark On Road Projects

The governor's hope of stirring up some dust on local projects this summer has run into a legislative pothole.

The sponsor of legislation to rewrite the state's transportation funding vehicle, Public Act (PA) 51, revealed that Senate Republicans want to add a "legislative oversight" component to the measure.

Bill sponsor Sen. Mike **PRUSI** (D-Ishpeming) is not pleased.

"They want to turn it into a political free for all and pick the projects themselves," he told *MIRS*.

Prusi got the word on the change when he talked with the Senate Majority Leader Ken **SIKKEMA** (R-Wyoming) about the plan last week.

The governor's original intention was to allow the Michigan Municipal League, the Country Road Association of Michigan, the Department of Transportation and the public transit concerns divvy up the \$400 million in federal aid with a \$80 million match from the state.

She made the announcement without consulting with GOP legislative leaders, but predicted there would be bi-partisan support for the first-of-its-kind state aid for a local match.

From the outset, the change to PA 51 drew concerns and now Prusi said the call for legislative oversight threatens to delay construction this summer.

He predicted lawmakers would go over the proposed projects with a "fine tooth comb" and ask questions such as "Did I get one in my district?" or "Does a marginal (lawmaker in a close race) get to hand out a check?"

Prusi warned, "If we want the dirt to fly, move my bill."

He said he will take a look at the substitute to see "how strictly they do" the oversight function before he comes out against the revision.

*(Contributed by Senior Capital Correspondent Tim **SKUBICK**.)*

DEQ OK For '07, '08 Another Story

A Senate panel today laid out its Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) spending plan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 with a bill that has the department spending only a fraction more than what Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** set aside for the DEQ.

The governor recommended spending \$370.2 million (\$33.3 million General Fund) while the Senate subcommittee moved SB 1086 with \$372.1 million (\$32.9 million General Fund). Outside of a \$434,000