

GCSIntel, Week Ending, Fri., August 3, 2007

Report Recommends Trimming Four Court of Appeals Judges

The State Court Administrator's Office (SCAO) came out this week with its annual Judicial Resources Report and recommended that four Michigan Court of Appeals judicial positions could be trimmed.

The recommendation is the latest salvo in an ongoing battle between William Whitbeck the Chief Judge of the Michigan Court of Appeals and Clifford Taylor, Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court.

Taylor announced publicly earlier this year that, due to the state's ongoing budget concerns, it would be better if Gov. Jennifer Granholm didn't fill two current vacancies on the Court of Appeals to save resources.

Whitbeck, who oversees the Court of Appeals, didn't quite see it that way. In comments to the media this week, Whitbeck questioned whether the state could reduce the size of the 28-member Court of Appeals bench since the constitution only refers to increasing the size of the court.

Human Services Chief Stepping Down

The director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, Marianne Udow, announced Wednesday that she'll be leaving her post at the end of the month.

A former Blue Cross/Blue Shield executive, Udow told her colleagues that she had stayed longer at the post than she anticipated.

"I had hoped to be able to help settle the Children's Rights lawsuit, and to see us through this most difficult 2007 and 2008 budget process," Udow wrote in a letter to Human Services workers. "Unfortunately, given Michigan's budget challenges, I have not been able to conclude a settlement of the lawsuit. Our budget discussions are well under way, however, and the Governor has made it clear she understands the need for adequate funding and a policy framework based on the needs of the people we serve and she will support nothing less."

Udow will be taking a job in Ann Arbor as the director of the Center for Health Care Quality and Transformation at the University of Michigan Health Center.

Budget Salvos Continue

As summer churns on, the heat continues to rise on the state's expected Fiscal Year 2008, \$1.8 billion budget shortfall.

Wednesday, Senate Minority Leader Mark Schauer (D-Battle Creek) held a press conference to tell Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) and his GOP caucus to get to work and start passing budget bills.

"It's August first and so far zero budget bills have been passed and sent to the House," Schauer said. "How's that for government efficiency?"

Shooting back, Bishop said the Senate majority caucus was "adamantly opposed to taxpayers reaching deeper into their pockets while state government overspends and expands."

This week both the Senate and the House began their one-day a week August schedule.

State Police Headquarters Gets Official Nod

The State Administrative Board's Building Committee on Wednesday gave its blessing for the state to move forward on a lease-to-buy proposal that would pay for a 148,000 square foot headquarters for the Michigan State Police in downtown Lansing.

The project, which would be built on the corner of Kalamazoo Street and Grand Avenue has been an on-again, off-again project dating back to the administration of Gov. John Engler.

Under this version of the deal, the State Police would pay \$3.68 million a year for 25 years to be headquartered in the building with the state having the option to buy the structure for \$1 at the end of the lease.

Republicans have been critical about the building project in that the site is within a floodplain. They have also argued that the state shouldn't buy a \$45 million building when it faces a \$1.8 billion budget deficit next fiscal year.

The new State Police headquarters project is being developed by Lansing developer Joel Ferguson. The next step will be for the full State Administrative Board to approve the project — at which point it would move forward.