

Lame Duck Session Passes Many Bills, While Others Await New Members

The 2014 Michigan Legislature's Lame Duck Session managed to pass several bills, while some proposed legislation did not pass muster.

Two failed bills, sponsored in part by Republican Eileen Kowall, dealt with medical marijuana. One would have made it easier for users to purchase marijuana and to use different forms of marijuana. People who have trouble smoking the product could take medical marijuana in brownies and oils. The other bill would allow communities to decide if they would let medical marijuana dispensaries in their towns and allow towns to regulate them.

Both bills passed the House, but the Senate did not take them up.

Dozens of bills passed on the last day of 2014. Included in these were the following:

- 1) A bill to ease the process to get a nonviolent criminal record expunged. Under the bill, people with one felony and two misdemeanor convictions can apply to get either the felony or misdemeanors expunged.
- 2) Another bill that will make it more expensive to get a recount of election results. Before passage of this bill, a candidate requesting a recount needed

to pay ten dollars a precinct to get a recount underway. Under the new bill, that amount would be increased to twenty-five dollars per precinct. For candidates who lost by more than fifty votes, the cost for a recount would increase to one hundred twenty-five dollars a precinct.

- 3) A bill to address a federal court ruling concerning U. S. Representative John Conyers. Even though he had enough valid signatures, Conyers was eliminated from the ballot because the circulators were not properly registered to vote. A federal judge said the requirement was unconstitutional and put Conyers back on the ballot. Because of this ruling, a bill was passed so that people who circulate petitions for candidates or ballot issues do not have to be registered voters or residents of the district where a candidate is running.



The most controversial bill passed during Lame Duck was the bill to **FIX MICHIGAN ROADS**. The legislature completed work on a package that would raise over one billion dollars for transportation infrastructure.

In addition, the package would raise three hundred million dollars in new revenues for public education and nearly one hundred million dollars for local governments. **All of the changes will be placed on a statewide ballot question on May 2, 2015.** If voters reject the plan, only legislation regarding an internet sales tax (known as the Main Street Fairness Plan) will remain in place. This plan is made up of the following parts:

- \$ The sales tax on gasoline will be eliminated (tax reduction of approximately \$700 million).
- \$ Michigan sales tax would be increased from 6 to 7% (tax increase of \$1.34 billion).
- \$ Increased driver registration fees and overweight truck fees will be collected (tax increase of \$95 million).
- \$ Companies with a “nexus” in Michigan must collect sales tax revenue for online sales (tax increase of \$40 million).
- \$ Earned Income Tax Credit would be restored to 20% of the federal tax level (reduction of \$260 million).
- \$ Transform current per gallon motor fuel tax to wholesale tax and increase the rate to raise \$1.2 billion for transportation infrastructure.

When factoring in the various tax increases and tax reductions, the Main Street Fairness Plan would raise overall revenues by approximately \$1.8 billion. The new money, when fully phased in,

would primarily be divided between roads and bridges (41.3 billion); public education (300 million); local government (\$94 million); and public transportation (\$112 million).

Other pieces of the agreement include:

- \$ The School Aid Fund will only be used for K-12 and community colleges, not universities. This reverses a trend started several years ago when up to \$200 million was removed from the School Aid Fund to pay for university operations. Commitments were made by the governor and legislative leaders to restore the lost funds for universities through the General Fund.
- \$ The creation of a study to examine the true cost of education and the goal of providing a better indication of K-12 spending needs.

The House and Senate debated the final road package for weeks and in the end, the ballot proposal was passed overwhelmingly in the House, but barely made it through the Senate. Many Senators expressed concern that voters might shy away from such a complicated proposal. Over the next few months, backers and detractors of the plan will have the opportunity to sway voters one way or the other.

Special thanks to Chuck Agerstrand, MEA Retirement/field consultant for the MEA, for the sharing this information.



MiARA Members Will Miss Two Longtime Congressional Friends of Union Workers

Senator Carl Levin has served in the United States Senate longer than any other Senator from Michigan. During his 36 years serving his constituents, Levin never lost sight of what affect government has on the “little guy.”

Carl was noted for being a watchdog over Pentagon spending. He was part of congressional inquiries into the causes of the 2008 financial crisis, abusive credit card practices, the Enron scandal, offshore tax havens for wealthy individuals and corporations, to name a few.

Recently he was trying to find out about the treatment of detainees after the September 11, 2001, attacks. He was noted in an intelligence report that criticized the interrogation techniques used by the Central Intelligence Agency.

In his farewell speech, Levin stated that he and his wife, Barbara, plan to remain in Michigan. He praised his staff, and said that, “Congressional gridlock created by partisan politics was not part of his decision to retire.” He went on to say that the next Congress would attack the “growing gap in our society between a fortunate few and the vast majority of Americans whose fortunes have stagnated or fallen.” Senator Levin called for education, worker training and research improvements, to be paid for by closing “egregious tax loopholes that serve no economic purpose.”

Michiganians will always thank Carl for his dedication. MiARA members will miss Carl as he was often a champion for progressive causes.

(Much of the information from this section was from the Detroit Free Press, December 12, 2014 article by Todd Spangler.)



After serving 59 years in the United States House of Representatives, the “Dean of the House,” The Honorable John Dingell, announced his Retirement.

The Dingell name was not new to politics when John David Dingell, Jr., was elected to Congress in 1955. His father, John David Dingell, Sr., served in the House from 1933 until September 1955. His wife, Debbie Dingell, was elected to fill John’s seat at the last election.

Congressional Representative Dingell was a champion for a National Health Care System and at the beginning of every session he introduced a bill, first introduced by his father that provided for such a system.

Dingell was a veteran of WWII. He tried to help his fellow veterans, which was evident in his support for veteran’s hospitals. The Veteran’s Hospital in Ann Arbor is named in honor of him.

Since Taking Control in 2011, the Republicans in Congress Have:

- 🗨 Held 54 votes to repeal health care for millions of Americans, costing taxpayers approximately \$78 million (CBS News)
- 🗨 Refused to hold votes on raising the minimum wage, equal pay for women, or fixing our broken emigration system (Washington Post)
- 🗨 Shut down government for 15 days, costing taxpayers more than \$25 billion (Standard and Pools)

🗨 Overseen the two least productive sessions of congress in over 60 years (NBC)



"The deeper purpose of democratic government is to assist as many of its citizens as possible ... to improve their conditions of life, to retain all personal liberty which does not affect their neighbors, and to pursue the happiness which comes with security and opportunity for recreation and culture."

--Franklin D. Roosevelt in his annual message to Congress January 6, 1937.

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**The next MiARA General meeting is scheduled for March 19, 2015.
 Help celebrate the 50th anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid.
 Watch for details in the February newsletter**