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Michigan news briefs: Great Lakes drilling wins OK from Senate

June 1, 2001

LANSING

Great Lakes drilling wins OK from Senate

Energy companies could drill for oil and natural gas under Michigan's portion of the Great Lakes under bitterly contested legislation approved Thursday by the state Senate.

Such drilling would have to be directional, or on a slant from a drilling base on land at least 1,500 feet from the shore. Republicans, who sponsored the bills, said they would impose numerous safeguards to protect the Great Lakes and other sensitive areas from pollution.

"These are tough and stringent requirements," said Sen. Bill Schuette, R-Midland, sponsor of the legislation. "What it says is hands off the shorelines of the Great Lakes."

But Democrats argued the measure was a sellout to oil companies and said it poses the threat of Great Lakes pollution. They called for continuing the moratorium on leasing Great Lakes lands for oil and gas exploration.

"It is a sad day in the state Senate," said Sen. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, the leader of Senate efforts to continue the moratorium on drilling. "Some oil companies are going to make a lot of money off this."

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The leader of the Michigan Oil and Gas Association said such drilling would provide badly needed energy and that there is no threat to the environment.

"It's good news for everybody," said Frank Mortl, president of the association.

The drilling amendment was attached to two budget bills, which provide funding for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1. The bills, which return to the state House, would provide \$417 million for the state Department of Environmental Quality and \$260 million for the Department of Natural Resources.

The bills passed on party-line votes of 20-13. All those in favor were Republicans, and all those opposed were Democrats. Two members from each party were absent.

By the Associated Press

ANN ARBOR

U-M admissions policy is gathering support

Saying they represent a "stunning array of support for our position," University of Michigan President Lee Bollinger on Thursday praised more than 80 groups filing briefs in support of U-M's law school admissions policies with the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati.

The groups include 32 of the world's largest companies -- from General Motors Corp. to Steelcase and Coca-Cola Co. Others are the American Bar Association, the United Auto Workers, the National Organization for Women Legal Defense Fund, the American Council on Education, the National Asian/Pacific American Bar Association, Michigan lawmakers and former U.S. Attorney Saul Green.

U-M is defending its undergraduate and law school admissions policies, which consider race as a factor, in two lawsuits. The suits were filed in 1997 by white students who claim those

policies favor less-qualified minorities.

In March, U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman ruled the law school's admissions policy was unconstitutional. In December, U.S. District Judge Patrick Duggan ruled the undergraduate admissions policy was constitutional. Both cases are being appealed.

Many of the groups filing briefs in the law school appeal are also expected to file briefs in the undergraduate case by June 13, said U-M spokeswoman Julie Peterson.

"It is significant that these groups include both the largest corporations and one of the most influential labor unions; groups representing women and Asian students and virtually every university and legal organization," Bollinger said.

In the brief filed by GM and other corporations, the group said almost half the U.S. population will be minorities in 2050. "The nation's future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of a diverse student body," the group wrote.

Curt Levey, one of the lawyers representing the white students, said four groups including the National Association of Scholars, a group of conservative academics, and the Pacific Legal Foundation have filed briefs with the appeals court on their behalf in the undergraduate case.

Levey said although U-M has lined up an impressive group of supporters, "these cases are won on the law and the facts. All this effort may indicate they have real doubts that they can win on the law and the facts."

By Maryanne George

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