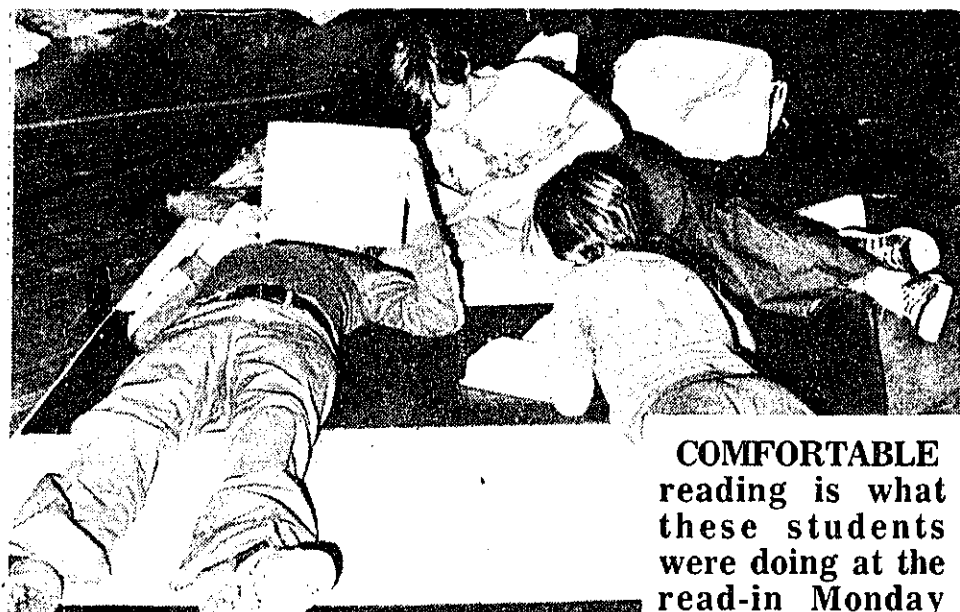


# State court to conduct hearing in Probate Court wage dispute



COMFORTABLE reading is what these students were doing at the read-in Monday afternoon in the intermediate school gym. The participants brought sleeping bags, beanbag chairs, etc., or used gym mats to sit or recline on.



Bulletin: Probate Judge W. Wallace Kent Jr. was notified Wednesday morning by the state court administrator's office that at the county's request, it will conduct a formal hearing on the pay dispute. No date has been set.

Tuscola County Probate Judge W. Wallace Kent Jr.'s mail is of more than passing interest this week.

Tuesday, he was still waiting for a letter from state Court Administrator Einar Bohlin granting him permission to issue an administrative order directing the county to pay higher salaries to seven probate court employees.

His action will undoubtedly be challenged by the county Board of Commissioners in circuit court.

Bohlin, in a letter to the county board dated Oct. 29, said he was prepared to approve Kent's administrative order unless the board could demonstrate before Nov. 14 that there still was reason to pursue a settlement.

The judge told the Chronicle Tuesday that he had been informed by telephone Friday by a member of the court administrator's staff that it was only a matter of "crossing the T's and dotting the I's" before the letter would be mailed.

The letter didn't come Tuesday, so Kent thought he might get it the next day.

The imbroglio goes back to January, when Kent, as he is allowed to do under state law, negotiated a labor contract with his employees.

The position of the county board all along is that the

probate court employees were covered in the less costly agreement negotiated for all courthouse employees for 1980-81.

IN AN ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE the dispute, the two sides agreed in February to have the court administrator's office conduct a study comparing wages of probate court employees with those of other courthouse employees and employees of similar-sized counties.

The probate employees later agreed to the recommended salaries contained in the study, which would give them a total of \$10,476 more than they would receive under the county contract. (The original difference had been almost \$15,000).

In July, Kent asked Bohlin for permission to issue the order mandating the county to pay the higher salaries to his employees.

The board responded by hiring a consulting firm to conduct its own wage study, which was submitted to the court administrator.

In his Oct. 29 letter, Bohlin rejected the results of the study, which he said contained little useful information, and imposed the Nov. 14 deadline.

ACCORDING TO COUNTY Commissioner Donna Rayl, chairman of the personnel committee the study confirmed the board's contention concerning salaries.

She said the board's labor attorney, Michael Ward of Kalamazoo, was to write a response prior to the deadline, to ask Bohlin what had happened to the committee that was supposed to make a recommendation to Bohlin concerning the dispute.

The committee would have been composed of a representative of the Michigan Association of Counties

(MAC), one from the Probate Judges Association and a court administrator's office staff member.

She added that establishment of the committee was up to Bohlin, who had apparently decided to make the decision himself, without a committee's advice.

THE ORDER, KENT said, will be directed to the county clerk, treasurer and personnel administrator, all of whom have a hand in payment of county employees. For them to ignore his order could invite a contempt of court citation and jail term, but the chances of that happening were "negligible."

If the county board appeals his order, he explained, it would have to ask the judge for a stay of execution of the order until the matter is resolved.

Rayl said the full county board has given the personnel committee the power to act, that is, have Ward file a court action, without going back to the entire board.

The board is also trying to get support from the MAC in its fight. "We feel this isn't only a problem of Tuscola county... it seems a precedent has been set in favor of the courts."

IN ANOTHER BUT RELATED matter, Kent told the Chronicle there is nothing he can do about the county board's decision to keep his pay supplement at \$5,000 in 1981, even though he doesn't like it and all other judges received an increase. His supplement has stayed the same all four years he has been probate judge.

Commissioners voted to keep his supplement the same, lest they be made a "laughing stock" for giving him an increase despite the

problems he has caused because of the dispute over pay for probate court employees.

Kent was paid \$34,950 in 1980, of which \$23,950 is paid by the state and \$6,000 comes from the county, but is mandated by the state. Those figures are the same

for all probate judges in the state.

The \$5,000 supplement that, Kent said, puts him 50th in pay of the 53 probate judges in Michigan. The probate judge in Lapeer county is getting \$38,950 this year; Huron county, \$41,250; and Sanilac county, \$43,752.



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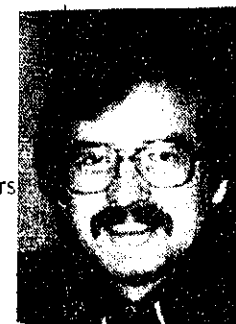
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## State school aid still question mark

Continued from page one

affects the amount each school district receives.

In addition to general state aid, which most school districts receive (Owendale-Gagetown is one that doesn't), all school districts receive various forms of categorical state aid, such as for transportation and driver's education.

At one point, Crouse said, the governor was proposing slashing transportation aid in half.

Such a cut, as opposed to taking away more from general state aid, would hurt rural school districts, where more students ride school buses, than urban ones.

But another form of categorical state aid, according to municipal overburden, which aids school districts in communities with high property taxes, such as Detroit. Cutting that instead of transportation aid would aid rural school districts.

Thus what form the final state aid package will take may depend on who wins the traditional battle of rural legislators versus those from the cities.

A more immediate problem for the district is that the state, due to its budgetary problems, is sending only half of its December state aid payment in December, with the other half coming in January.

Crouse anticipates the district will survive that handicap without payless paydays and get through the rest of this school year, despite reduced state aid, whatever the final amount, without laying off any employees. He does, however, expect financial problems in 1981-82, "no question about it."

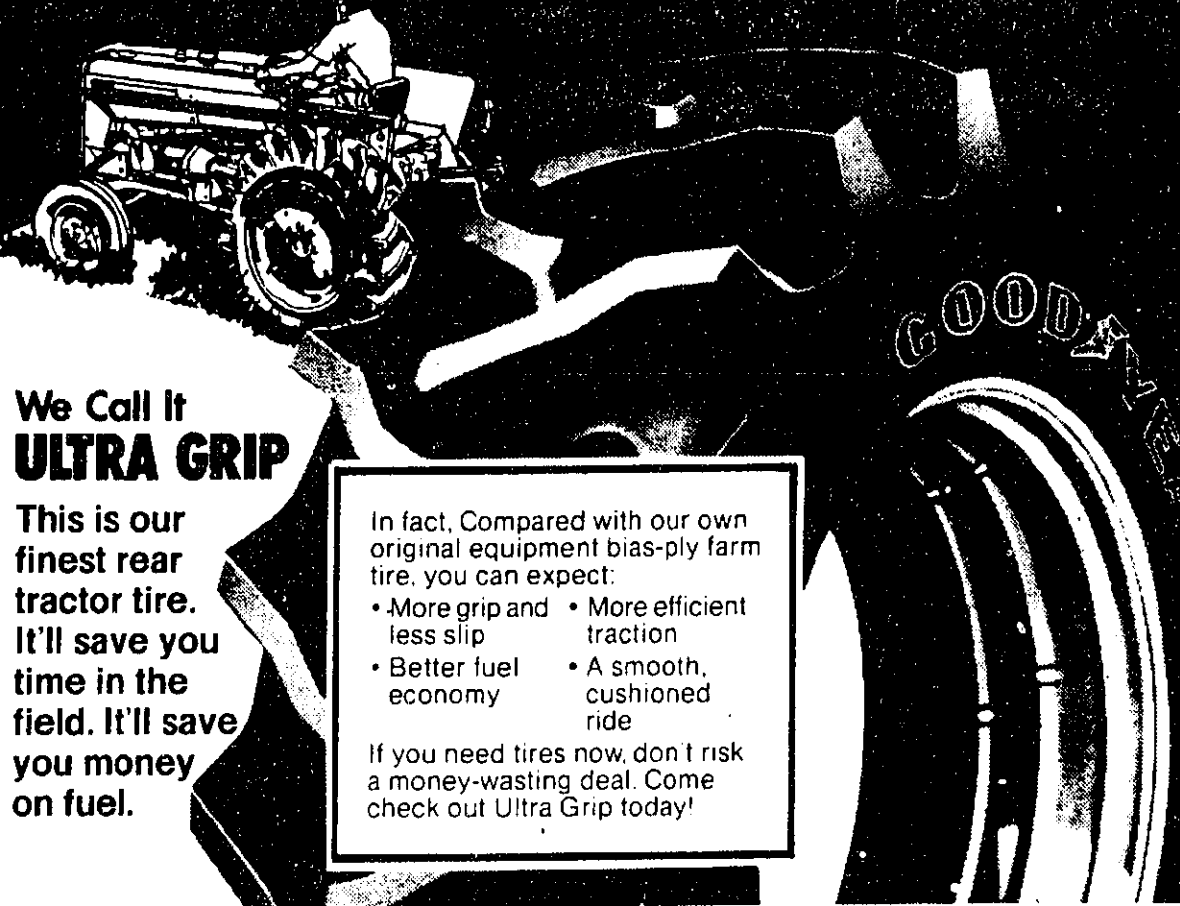
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