



Friday, October 30, 2009

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Centerpiece

This week, *GCSIntel* sat down with Rep. Bill Rogers (R-Brighton), the Republican leader of the House Freshman Caucus. This bipartisan group of freshman lawmakers has been making critiques of the budget process and stressing that the Governor and legislative leaders get the budget decided in a timely fashion.

On Thursday, House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) asked the House freshman caucus to put together a plan to balance the state's school aid fund shortfall by Dec. 1. Gov. Jennifer Granholm sent notice to school districts on Oct. 23 that, due to an anticipated shortfall in School Aid Fund revenue, she was going to reduce per pupil funding by \$127 per student on top of the \$165 per pupil cut the legislature made.

That new reduction is slated to go into effect unless the Legislature appropriates the necessary funding before the December 20 school aid payment.

Responding to the request, Rogers told the media yesterday: "How do you say no to a Speaker?"

The following are excerpts from *GCSIntel's* conversation with Rogers.

Q. The freshman caucus seems to be very active and involved this year. What's your reaction to what you've seen with the freshman caucus?

A. Right now what I'm seeing from the freshman caucus is we're still sticking together. We're working to build that set of relationships we need so that we can get that trust and maybe we can actually get something accomplished. In the same breath, I'm seeing extreme frustration at the entire process.

Q. What in particular are folks in the freshman class frustrated about?

A. I don't think that many of them felt, at least on the Democratic side, that they were part of the budget process at all. And, we keep hearing that the big three or the big four are talking about all of these things -- a deal was made -- no a deal wasn't made.

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Q. What's been your frustration with the budget process? Obviously being a minority member you have a different take on it?

A. My frustration is we were passing some budgets through appropriations with no money in it. How can you do that?

That's like saying take your checkbook and write checks. I had a customer at the bank – she had extra checks in her book; her account was empty. When I called her, she looked at me in all sincerity and said, "I still had checks left over."

Just like anything else, you can't spend money you don't have.

Q. How much traction do you see this freshman caucus getting?

A. Well, we've got a substantial number. If we all retain our seats we'll still have a lot of members here next year -- I should say in two years. That in and of itself will create enough traction. And, we're starting to get our legs under us and understanding the system. So, I think it's going to be a fair amount of traction over time.

And we're not trying any kind of a coup. We're just trying to get the system back to where it's, shall we say civil, and there's real debate -- to allow the system to work.

Q. How would you describe participation at these freshman caucus meetings? Out of 44 to 46 freshman, how many are actually showing up at these meetings?

A. The last two meetings this week, over 30 and on the letter that we sent to the governor and to Senate Majority Leader Bishop and Speaker Dillon we had 100 percent participation. The exception unfortunately is the one individual who is ill and has not been in town.

Q. What kind of feedback have you gotten from leadership?

A. It's mostly been one of "keep us in the know so we're not blindsided by some press release." But, for the most part they've expressed absolute support. I went to them before we really started it when we were contemplating it. I said, "Look, this is what's been broached; this is what we think we really do need to do," and they encouraged it.

GCSEye On The Capitol

Final Budget In Place -- Gov Vetoes \$127M In Spending

Gov. Jennifer Granholm told reporters Friday morning that she will cut a total of 75 items out of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 budget at a price tag of \$127 million, but nearly half of that number includes cuts to the K-12 budget and the racing commissioner office, which had been previously announced.

The Governor, in a conference call, made another public appeal for citizens to call their House members and Senators to restore "unacceptable" cuts to revenue sharing, the Promise Scholarships, public health and K-12 schools.

Granholt made it clear that she did not veto money for private school scholarships or agricultural extension, but that money for the Michigan State Fair was axed out of the budget.

"This is the budget we have, but it's not the budget we need. I do not agree. I do not support," Granholt said. "This is not the last chapter."

Survey Suggests Voters Open To Doing Away With Lifetime Service Limit

A new survey released by the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) at Michigan State University found that 61 percent of Michigan residents support eliminating the 14 year total service ban contained in the state's 1992 constitutional term limits amendment and allowing lawmakers to return to service after a 4 year time out.

The question was asked during the IPPSR annual State of the State Survey. The poll also asked about a proposal first floated by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce to allow lawmakers to serve all 14 years in one chamber or the other. A total of 54 percent of those surveyed said they supported that change. Polling from four years ago was fairly similar when the Chamber found that 57 percent of voters supported such a change.

The IPPSR poll also asked about support for a revised redistricting plan where a non-partisan commission would draw district boundaries following the decennial Census. A total of 82 percent of voters supported that change.

Dead Duck -- Doc's Tax Utters Last QAAP

The 3 percent doctor's tax had been on life support in the Senate. On Wednesday, leadership pulled the plug.

Senate Majority Floor Leader Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) discharged from committee HB 5386, legislation establishing a Quality Assurance Assessment Program (QAAP) for physicians that squeaked by the House earlier this month. The tax would require all doctors to collect a 3 percent tax from patients, which would then be used to draw down more Medicaid money.

The concept, which has successfully been applied to nursing homes and hospitals, has physicians split.

The bill failed 32-4 in the Senate, with Sens. Mickey Switalski (D-Roseville), Deb Cherry (D-Burton), Buzz Thomas (D-Detroit) and Mike Prusi (D-Ishpeming) voting yes.

The move came after Senate Republicans reaffirmed their anti-revenue position in caucus. Gov. Jennifer Granholt has continued her push for revenues -- though over the last two weeks, she's focused only on money for K-12 -- so it appears the QAAP execution was meant to send a clear message. A caucus source also added that the action was directed at Sen. Roger Kahn (R-Saginaw), the Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee Chair, who held a hearing on the QAAP last week even though he doesn't support HB 5386.

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The Week Ahead

With the budget semi-resolved, look for things to return to a somewhat normal pace in the Legislature. Talk will likely continue on the revenue side of the picture as leaders continue to look at the state's revenue structure with an eye toward modernization.

DHS employees are also slated to make a presentation to a House committee about concerns over the flood of people needing service in DHS offices. Employees are concerned that crowded lobbies are fraying nerves and creating fire hazards.

Michigan Factoid:

Michigan is the only state made up of two peninsulas and is the only state on the mainland divided by water.

-- Michigan Trivia

A proposal that would open up the state's stem cell research laws is one step closer to the ballot.

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