



Friday, December 11, 2009

MANAGEMENT

Nell Kuhnmuench

Michael D. Hawks

Stephen E. Young

Kirk A. Profit

Kenneth Cole

Centerpiece

This week, GCSIntel sat down with Rep. Robert Dean (D-Grand Rapids). Last week, Dean announced his intentions to run for the 29th Senate District currently held by term-limited Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood).

Since 1980, the 29th has been a GOP Senate seat. GCSI talked to Dean about his decision to go for the Senate after three years in the House and his view of the district. Dean also spoke of his view that the state needs to look at privatizing more services.

Q. Now you've decided to run for Senate, correct?

A. The 29th district presently is being occupied by Bill Hardiman, and he is term-limited. The way I began to look at it, from 28 to 31 of the State Senators are term-limited, so it's a huge turnover in that chamber. Our state is in such dire straits. We could literally go off the financial cliff. So, I began to look at experience and experienced leadership — qualities I could bring to the table and could I be an asset in the Senate? And, I know I can.

This is my third year in the House. I served six years on the Grand Rapids City Commission and as president of the City Commission twice. I served as President of the Grand Rapids School Board -- six years there [total]. I know I bring a wealth of experience and would be able to bring about solutions and help get things done.

Q. Who else is looking at the race?

A. There is a lot of speculation about candidates. I know former Speaker Pro Tempore Mike Sak's name has been mentioned quite a bit. David LaGrand, who is president of the City Commission, is definitely looking to run, and that's just on the Democratic side.

On the Republican side, there are a number of people looking -- Dave Hildebrand, who's currently a State Representative. Former Speaker Pro Tempore Jerry Kooiman has been prominently mentioned. I think Dan Tietema, who was a candidate for State Representative and mayor, could possibly run.

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Donald Van Singel

William Zaagman

Erik Hingst

Adrian Hemond

James Miller

Barbara Farrah

Patrick Laughlin

Gary M. Owen

Q. Has that traditionally been a Republican seat -- do you think it's trending more Democratic?

A. Since 1980, it's been a Republican seat. I think it's trending back Democratic. It was reapportioned and it was majority Republican during the 1980s. So, I believe there is definitely a shift back toward Democrats in that seat.

Q. Serving on Appropriations, talk a bit about what you see happening on the state budget?

A. Unprecedented things in terms of tax restructuring and how we view state government and the role of state government. There is a limited role of state government. We saw during the boom years that there was an expansion of government services so we have to reassess what are state government's functions. There are some activities that really should be in private hands that are run currently by government. So we have to look really at what are proper governmental functions and what are essential services that we should be deliberating on.

Q. What are some government services that you point to that should be privatized?

A. There are a number of functions. One of the things that I sympathize with is privatization in terms of foster care . . . there's just so many. I could give you a litany of things.

We should be about security. We should be about helping our cities and municipalities in terms of neighborhood police and security.

Q. Your whole stance on privatization is pretty unique within your party isn't it?

A. Not necessarily. I think Democratic values have been about people. But, I think when you look at the times we're in, what really is the role of government? And, I think there is a limited role of government.

Q. So privatization is a good thing to explore?

A. Oh definitely, definitely. For me all things really are on the table and we have to look at everything in light of limited income [for the state], in terms of our ability to afford various services. We have to look at how we can be more efficient.

GCSEye On The Capitol

Smoking Ban All But In Place

Come next May Michigan's restaurants and bars will be all but smoke free under legislation that made it through both the Michigan House and Senate and is on the way to Gov. Jennifer Granholm's desk for signature.

Under the legislation, the only exemptions that would be provided are for cigar shops, specialty tobacco shops, the gaming floor of the Detroit casinos and home offices. Last year, the Senate had passed a complete ban that met resistance in the House over fears that it would result in lost revenues for the three Detroit casinos hurting the revenues flowing to the coffers of the City of Detroit.

The final compromise was offered up in the Senate by Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Ron Jelinek (R-Three Oaks).

"We live in a world of compromise," Jelinek said. "We can't always get our way." Jelinek had supported the total ban one year ago. Gov. Granholm is expected to sign the ban into law.

Gov. Rescinds Pro Rata Cut To Schools

Gov. Jennifer Granholm late Thursday gave the state's public schools a bit of a surprise Christmas gift by freezing what would have been a \$127 per pupil reduction.

The action was prompted by more than \$100 million in leftover funds from Fiscal Year 2009. As a result, the December check that school districts get from the state won't be reduced. Public schools will still see the \$165 per pupil cut that the Legislature approved as part of its 2010 budget.

"It's a pause that's based on data that the revenue office has seen," Granholm said. "We feel confident enough about the larger numbers that have come in that we believe that the \$127 will be softened, if not eliminated."

The announcement came the same day the Department of Education starts the process of cutting the checks to the school districts. Granholm said she called in state Treasurer Bob Kleine and Budget Director Bob Emerson to get a final lay of the land before the cuts were actually made to the checks.

Legislature Puts Education Reform Bills In Conference

Thursday, the Legislature passed the appropriate legislation, failed to concur where required, and all in all managed to send a "Race To The Top" (RTTP) package to a joint House-Senate conference committee.

"Race To The Top" offers from \$400 to \$600 million to the handful of states that make education reforms that are in line with the policy of President Barack Obama. These reforms are similar to the sort of market-oriented changes many Republicans have advocated (and teacher unions have opposed) over the past decade and a half.

Michigan Factoid:

December 10, 1915, marked the production of Ford Motor Co.'s one-millionth vehicle.

The legislation must be completed and sent to Gov. Jennifer Granholm before the holiday break in order for the state to make the Jan. 19 deadline for applying for the funds.

The Week Ahead

Members of the House return Tuesday and the Senate Thursday for the last week of session for 2009. The focus will be on passing Race To The Top (RTTP) legislation that would help qualify the state for \$400 to \$600 million in federal funds. Those bills are now in conference committee.

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