



Friday, March 6, 2009

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Centerpiece

GCSIntel this week spoke with House Labor Committee Chair Steven Lindberg. A Democrat from Marquette, Lindberg is a former teacher. Lindberg and his wife also owned a travel agency in Marquette for 27 years.

Q. Tell us your views on labor issues as the new chair of the Labor Committee?

A. You know, I think we're going to have some bills before us that we're going to need with the new stimulus package. There are some requirements in that package that we're going to have to meet legislatively. So we are going to move some real meaningful legislation.

I think we're going to do things, in all candor like we did today, that are more positional statements that represent our caucus stands on issues [Labor Committee took up a resolution that day to support the federal card-check labor election reform bill]. But, it really is my intention to take up substantive issues.

I don't know that we'll necessarily meet every week. But, like I said, I do think there's going to be some real important issues that come before this committee. In these times the middle class and labor are being assaulted like they never have before.

Q. As a former teacher, were you a member of a union?

A. Yes. I was a member of the MEA [Michigan Education Association].

Q. What was your experience like with being in the MEA?

A. You know, I was a teacher before we had a union, and I was a teacher after, and there is no doubt that the MEA created a better working environment. I think teachers got benefits they never would have gotten if we hadn't belonged to the MEA.

I didn't always agree with all their positions. When I was a teacher I wasn't real active in the union, but I certainly supported my organization, and at the end of the day we were concerned about our members, but we were also concerned about our community and our young people.

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A lot of the issues we did deal with dealt with class size, not just purely economic issues. My 30 years of teaching was a good experience and I think was enhanced by being an MEA member.

Q. We heard today from a small businessman who was very concerned about unions coming in and basically shutting him down because he couldn't afford what would come about as part of unionization. Do you believe those kinds of stories cause unfounded fears?

A. I do. I was also a small business owner. It was a travel agency. I feel for the issues that he presented today. There were years when our employees, and I always wished I could pay them more -- there were years they made more than my wife did [she owned the firm].

Number one, I never feared unionization even though we were a small employer. I think the employees recognized that we were doing everything we could. We ran open books. I felt I had a moral obligation to provide health care for my employees.

It was an expensive proposition, but it was a moral obligation. I think there were times they thought they should be paid more. They were younger and thought they were healthy. I think those employers that try to do everything possible for their employees -- I don't think they have anything to fear from the unions.

Q. Do you think unions are on the downswing right now?

A. I think if you look at the numbers, they are on the downswing. There are fewer union members than there were because of the auto sector and in many parts of the economy.

Do I think that's a good thing? Not necessarily so. It's the unions that helped create the middle class in this country. I've always believed that every working man or woman, whether they belong to a union or not, should thank unions for the 40 hour work week, for employee benefits and for better working conditions because those are the people that were on the forefront and dragged the rest of the people along.

I think it's what really created the middle class and that's what's driven our economy. I fear for an economy where we have a few haves and many have-nots.

GCSEye On The Capitol

State Unemployment Lurches Up To 11.6 Percent

The state announced on Thursday that unemployment in Michigan popped up to 11.6 percent.

The January 2009 jobless rate is 4.3 percentage points above the January 2008 rate of 7.3 percent. The month also marked the 20th straight month that total employment has dropped in Michigan, according to the Department of Energy, Labor & Economic Growth.

Divided Court Flips On Satellite Offices

The Michigan Supreme Court and a newly minted ruling coalition of four justices on Thursday reversed a November 2008 decision to close satellite offices for Michigan Supreme Court Justices in Detroit and Traverse City.

During an administrative hearing that took all morning, the tensions between the three remaining conservative members of the court, and GOP-nominated Justice Elizabeth Weaver was palpable and very visible.

The court also opted to place before the public three different rules spelling out how and when a justice would be disqualified from hearing a case. Conservative Justice Stephen Markman pointed out that of the court's 17 motions requesting a justice be disqualified, all of them were filed against conservative members of the court and 13 were filed by controversial attorney Geoffrey Fieger.

Speaker Takes Pass On Congressional Bid

Signaling that he's perhaps more interested in a gubernatorial bid, Michigan House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) said on Tuesday that he won't be a candidate for Michigan's 11th Congressional District.

The clarification removes a major challenger to current U.S. Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, a Republican that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has made a target for the upcoming 2010 race.

Michigan Factoid:

Berry Gordy, Jr. (born 1929), founded the Motown Record Corporation in 1959. Motown, which became the largest independently owned record company in the world, launched numerous black musicians into successful careers. Gordy, from Detroit, was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1988.

The Week Ahead

Next Wednesday the House New Economy and Quality of Life Committee will be taking up legislation dealing with the manufacturing of batteries in Michigan.

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