

**GCSIntel -- Fri., June 29, 2007**

**Old Style Chair Making It Work In Term Limited Legislature**

Bombastic. Passionate. Confrontational.

Ask anybody in the state Capitol Building who's brushed up against Rep. George Cushingberry (D-Detroit) how they'd describe him and you're likely to hear a smattering of the above comments — or maybe even livelier ones.

But like him or not, few can dispute that the Democratic Representative from Detroit — who's chairing the powerful House Appropriations Committee this session — is an old school lawmaker.

After all why wouldn't he be old school? The bulk of Cushingberry's legislative experience came when he represented Detroit's 4th District from 1974 to 1982 long before voters enacted term-limits in 1992. After serving on the Wayne County Board of Commissioners for 12 years in the interim, Cushingberry returned to the Michigan House in January of 2005.

"I'm the dean now," Cushingberry said recently when asked about his return. "So, I went from being the young kid on the block to being the old man."

Cushingberry said the Legislature is a different place than it was in the 1970s and the 1980s. There's far less camaraderie and far less knowledge among the lawmakers of their own districts.

"The old legislators actually knew their areas much better," Cushingberry said. "Primarily because they did it over time and they studied it and they understood it better than we do today."

The old man — as he refers to himself — isn't afraid of taking on highly charged issues. Here's a few of ideas that he's been pushing this session:

The Detroit Democrat sponsored HB 4752 to tie Detroit School Board members' pay to that of Wayne County Commissioners. Meaning they'd go from \$30 a meeting to \$61,890. Not an inexpensive change for the Detroit Public School system.

Cushingberry argues that the legislation would increase the professionalism of the board and attract more qualified candidates. In an editorial on the concept The Michigan Chronicle took exception — "that's nonsense" concluded the Chronicle.

Another lightning rod idea that Cushingberry recently put out was HB 4859, legislation that would require jury boards to make sure their lists are in proportion to the population they serve. In other words, the bill would require juries to proportionally represent the population — despite a state Supreme Court ruling that says jury boards cannot choose jurors based on race.

Cushingberry is a passionate advocate for raising revenues to solve the state's fiscal year 2008 \$1.8 billion budget deficit. That advocacy has included appearing in Democrat sponsored town hall forums in 12 cities around the state, areas as diverse as Macomb County and East Lansing. Since this spring, the Capitol has been in a lather over how to solve the deficit — through cuts or increased revenues.

Former Rep. Leon Drolet, who's now term-limited and a member of the Macomb County Commission was sending literature into certain House districts and threatening recalls should lawmakers vote for a tax increase. In addition, Drolet was towing around a giant pig he affectionately calls "Mr. Perks." At one-point a frustrated Cushingberry took after Drolet and talk of recalls.

"Irresponsibility and lying to me is grounds for recall...and it's a lie to say we're trying to raise taxes. We're just trying to restore them" to previous levels before they were rolled back by former Gov. John Engler, Cushingberry said.

He concluded by warning "the Pig Man ought to watch out. Somebody might go after him."

The chairman is also pushing HB 4852, legislation that could generate between \$100 million and \$250 million by assessing a \$1.35 per line charge on cellular and landline phones. The bulk of the money would go toward enhanced 9-1-1 emergency services and other law enforcement causes. The bill would also help free up \$40 million of general fund now going to the Michigan State Police.

"I have some pretty strongly held feelings — that may be an understatement," commented Cushingberry. "But, things I feel strongly for I try to be an advocate for."

One thing is for certain; the Chairman is relishing his role with gusto.

"I'm having a ball," grinned Cushingberry.

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*This week in the news . . .*

### **State Passes New Business Tax**

The deadline was met. July 1 was the deadline that a number of top elected leaders and business groups had put down as do-or-die day for the state to adopt a new business tax to replace the Single Business Tax which expires at the end of the year.

Thurs., June 28, lawmakers put the final touches on what is deemed the Michigan Business Tax (MBT). Much of the business community was pleased, save the Michigan Chamber of Commerce who informed both the House and Senate that the measure was too flawed and would likely generate more revenue than the old SBT.

### **House Boosts Corrections, Community Health Spending**

The Michigan House this week pushed out budgets for the coming fiscal year that would boost spending on the Department of Corrections and the Department of Community Health by a robust 9 percent.

The budget increases come at a time when lawmakers are struggling to fill a projected \$1.8 billion budget deficit. The two departments represent roughly 55 percent of the state's general fund.

Word from the Senate side even before the bills moved was that the upper chamber intended to "thoroughly trim" the spending items.

### **Engler Advises GOP**

Former Gov. John Engler, in town on Thurs., June 28 to attend the funeral of former U.S. Rep. Guy Vander Jagt, met with members of the Senate Republican Caucuses at the offices of a local law firm.

He apparently took questions over legislative strategy and on the news of the day, but the exchange was not a "rah-rah" session. The current head of the National Association of Manufacturers did talk about trade with China and suggested that lawmakers enact some credits for companies that create patents in the state.

He declined comment to media after the session.