



Friday, July 11, 2008

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An Interview With House Minority Leader Craig DeRoche (R-Novi)

Centerpiece

Q. At the beginning of the year there was a lot of talk about renewed efforts to be more bipartisan. Is there more agreement among the House, Senate and Governor?

A. I think that the majority in the House of Representatives has more or less squandered this session on partisanship. To end on a positive note, I would say in talking to the (Democratic) members, they realize it now. It's a little late. I wish people would have seen that earlier. I think going into next session, regardless of which party is in control, hopefully some lessons have been learned over what's been done in the last two years.

Q. How would you describe your relationship with Andy Dillon?

A. Professional.

Q. Would you have pushed your constitutional convention proposal if the Reform Michigan Government Now (RMGN) wasn't headed for the ballot?

A. I think we need some fundamental changes to Michigan's government if we're going to better serve the public and get better results out of Lansing. Two things. One, we need to change the representatives that are in power. They have clearly failed, but I also think that fundamental reforms at a constitutional level need to be put into place to restructure our government.

If the RMGN wasn't on the ballot, I would go for this proposal. I pushed it last spring. It was reported and Rep. Dave Hildenbrand (R-Lowell) produced the resolution. It's something that I've been thinking about and discussing with other people predating the 1994 elections. It's something I've been in support of for some time.

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Some of the flaws in our structure of government have shown themselves. They happen to become more clear when the people in power amplify some of these things that we need to change. A lot of people don't fully understand the difference between the constitution and policy and laws. The constitution was mostly set up to preserve people's rights and define the role of government in the state of Michigan. What we saw over the last two years was that the Legislature is not limited in the taxes they could raise on the public. We saw property values go down, but the property tax go up. That's constitutional.

People are paying attention now because of this reform proposal written by special interests for partisan interests is actually moving toward the ballot. I think that it would draw more attention to positive action for citizens and allow citizens to participate in changing the constitution rather than letting partisan groups write their own constitution.

Q. Are you supported by the Senate Majority Leader and your party in pushing the con-con issue?

A. I don't think that this is something that the Republican Party or our caucus is taking a position on. It's something I support and, apparently, it's something that the Governor supports. Probably in my caucus and the Democratic caucus there are people that would be very against a constitutional convention.

There are people that say opening up a constitutional convention would undo the gains their particular interests have won over the last 45 years. I understand their concerns, but I think it's unrealistic that we would turn back the clock on protections that have been put in place over the last 40 years.

All of those have been put into place with the support of the electorate. I think the life issues have very large support and have been won through the process over the years. If anything as far as the businesses issues go, I think the con-con would likely restrict the ability to tax voters. I would be optimistic and say we could take the things settled over the last 40 years and change the new issues yet to be resolved.

Q. Do you have any advice for Republican House members going into this election?

A. We stand to do very well in this election. I think Michigan voters are smart and they vote the person more so than the party, but that being said, the top of the ticket will do very well on the state representative seats. Whether John McCain wins Michigan, he will win the majority of the representative candidates. We have the best candidates since 1998 and they're doing everything right. They're working hard. They're talking to people in their districts. The people in their districts realize that the Dems have not represented their interests but Lansing's special interests.

In 2006, recruiting wasn't where it needed to be in terms of open seats and incumbents didn't work as hard as they needed to. Those were hard lessons to learn, and we made changes.

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Q. What's next for you professionally?

A. I'm going into business. I'd like to create some jobs and investment in the state of Michigan. I'll run for office again someday, but I made myself a promise before I ran that I would never depend on my government for income. I will not become a product of the system.

I've always owned my own businesses and have been involved in the business world. I was successful before being elected state representative to serve in the House, but now I'd like to build those businesses back up. My focus is in insurance and software.

GCSEye On The Capitol

Kuipers Keeping Gubernatorial Door Open

Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland) has been flirting with the idea of running for governor. During an interview with *MIRS* this week, the second-term Senator said he's been talking with some people about the possibility of running in 2010.

The term-limited Republican senator also said he wants to change the state university funding system to match the K-12 per-pupil system. Kuipers wants to establish a foundation grant so schools get compensated based on the number of students who attend the school. Kuipers said this funding mechanism would stop the annual dogfight among schools for state funding.

Business Leaders Determined To Kill RMGN

Lansing business leaders are rallying their troops in an effort to kill the Reform Michigan Government Now (RMGN) petition drive before it gets to the ballot, arguing that the proposal would rewrite the constitution without any judicial review.

The RMGN cuts legislative, executive and judicial salaries. It cuts the legislature by 25 percent, the Supreme Court by two posts, the Court of Appeals by seven posts, and limits administrative boards and commissions. The proposal also allows for no-reason absentee voting, opens the courts for environmental lawsuits and encourages racially diverse juries.

The proposal also replaces the Judicial Tenure Commission with a mostly citizen body to discipline judges and hands the legislative redistricting process to an appointed body that will "draw lots" to break ties.

The proposal constitutionally protects the Legislature from the Freedom of Information Act, and creates an independent Office of Elections, separate from the Secretary of State. It also creates constitutionally mandated competitive seats and bans illegal aliens from voting.

The Legislature has until 60 days before the General Election (Sept. 5) to put its own proposal on the ballot with two-thirds support from each chamber.

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Elections Bureau Director Chris Thomas said opponents of the 36-point proposal could argue that his office would do its best to adequately describe the massive proposal on the ballot in 100 words, as required by law.

Stem Cell Signatures Make Way To SOS

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

This week the group supporting the issue turned 570,016 signatures to the Secretary of State, nearly 200,000 more than the 380,126 required to place it on the November ballot.

Michigan Factoid:

The Siphon Bridge in Manistique was built in 1919 in this Upper Peninsula city as a unique span supported by water that was atmospherically forced underneath it.

Debate over what the proposal actually means is already heating up. Ballot proposal proponents, Michigan Citizens for Stem Cell Research (MCSCR), say they want to "modernize embryonic stem cell research laws in Michigan."

Proposal opponents, such as Citizens Against Unrestricted Science and Experimentation (MiCAUSE), argue that the proposal will allow for unregulated and unrestricted experimentation on human embryos.

The Week Ahead

Senate Coming Back To Session?

The Senate is scheduled to meet Thursday, and the House is scheduled to return the following week. If the two bodies come back, the top two items on the agenda will be the passage of the state's massive General Government budget, which includes revenue sharing and the Strategic Fund, and the K-12 budget.

However, even if legislators return to town, it's unlikely work on the Capital Outlay or Department of Transportation budgets will be finished. On the latter budget, lawmakers and the administration are on opposite ends as to whether state taxpayer money should go into a proposed international bridge known as the Detroit River International Crossing (DRIC).

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