



Friday, July 18, 2008

MANAGEMENT

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Centerpiece

First-term Rep. Brian Calley (R-Portland) is emerging as a key House Republican caucus leader. He's currently running the House GOP's campaign effort as the caucus is facing a difficult year when far more of the term-limited members are of GOP persuasion than of Democratic persuasion.

In 2008, 16 Democrats are term-limited compared to 28 Republicans.

GCSIntel sat down this week to talk with Calley about that effort.

Q. Why did you decide to head up your caucus' campaign effort?

A. The previous chairman had some changes in future plans, and it left a real void in the caucus so my appointment by the minority leader as the chairman of the caucus was more an emergency type of situation. We really needed someone to take on the heavy responsibility in a very tough year, and of course I would do anything for my caucus, understanding full well what the political risk for heading up a group campaign and the type of year we're going into where the environment for Republicans is so bad.

Our plan is to get back to the basics. You have to physically meet people face to face. You can't rely on advertising and mailing, and you've got to present them with ideas that are compelling and any ideas they believe are credible.

Q. Which seats need the most attention?

A. The opportunities abound across the state. We do have a lot of open seats so we'll have to pay very close attention to maintaining and preserving those seats. Consider seats like the 51st district currently held by term-limited Representative David Robertson (R-Grand Blanc Twp.) and the Battle Creek seat in the 61st district, where Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek) is an outgoing incumbent that's done such a fantastic job. They've done a great job representing their districts and even while they're in a tough political environment, they've still seen strong support from constituents.

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When you have seats like that, you pay close attention.

Rep. David Law (R-West Bloomfield) is running for Oakland County prosecutor. That's a seat that we've had to work to maintain in the past. The good news is that we have fantastic candidates particularly in seats we currently hold. We have candidates that are working really hard and are fired up and have messages that resonate well in the district.

On top of that, we have a group of incumbents that are doing a great job. Some seats have been challenged in the past just because they've been very evenly divided seats. For our incumbents, they've done such a wonderful job representing their constituents they'll be able to put those elections away early and they'll be able to make their districts more solid than what they would appear to be on paper. For example, you could not ask for a better representative than Rep. Ken Horn (R-Frankenmuth). You can say the same for Tim Moore (R-Farwell). Those are challenging districts by the numbers, but our incumbents are just that good.

Turning to the truly open seats where Dems currently hold, there's a fantastic set of candidates. The Alpena seat. I believe you'll see another strong candidate for the (Aldo) Vagnozzi (D-Farmington Hills) seat. When it comes to the idea of taking out an incumbent, it's the hardest job we have in front of us.

Q. Is it realistic to think Republicans can take back the House?

A. I think that our focus really has to be 2010. 2010 is when the lines are redrawn and we have to make sure that we come out of this election within striking distance of taking majority in 2010. The idea of taking back majority in 2008 is, honestly, going to be the major uphill battle for us. But so many political lifetimes are between now and November, and anything's possible. But today the wind's at our face to a certain extent, and we have to be sure in the next election to overcome that.

Q. How will the tax increase and voter dissatisfaction with the budget debacle last year impact the election?

A. I don't think that it makes any sense for people in politics today to talk about political parties. My belief is that this state is particularly done with politics, and the key to winning an election simply will be putting forth the best ideas that will move our state forward. I think in the long term that will be a big improvement over the people in charge of making public policy. It's a change and an improvement that our citizenry is forcing, and it will be positive.

Q. How do you plan to separate your candidates from the party?

A. In each of our races around the state, the candidates themselves have to be able to present compelling ideas that the people in their district believe will work. This is most effectively done by individuals who are running for office, not some central party structure. That's where our best opportunity lies — with our candidates — and all of them are going to push for political objectives that help their citizens regardless of whether or not it aligns with their party's agenda.

When *MIRS* did a review of last year's voting records and came up with the most conservative rankings, many times I voted liberal or Democratic. Mine was about 75 percent, which means one out of four times I voted a different way than what's conventionally seen as Republican. That gives me more credibility back home. To whatever extent we can get candidates to do that, it will stick out as something special and different.

Taxes for example, if you take the question of the tax increase last year, our whole system is run on taxes. We all understand that a certain amount of taxes is going to be necessary to run our government. The place where different people in politics today take a fork in the road or show some difference is what level should government be at. The tax increase itself is one thing, but the context of the tax increase is what people back home find most dissatisfying. The cost of everything is going up right now, personal income is stagnant. In that context, our state government said to the people we need you to pay more for the same government so I think there are, frankly, a lot of Democrats out there that will be running against a tax increase not because of a platform or it's an issue the party agrees with, but that's a reasonable position given the circumstance of our citizenry today.

GCSEye on the Capitol

Union PowerPoint Tags RMGN As Democratic Takeover

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy posted a union PowerPoint presentation on its site that says the Reform Michigan Government Now (RMGN) ballot proposal is all about the Democratic Party taking over state government.

The presentation particularly homes in on the Supreme Court and the union's strategy to come out on top in 2010 when the state goes through redistricting.

A Mackinac Center intern discovered the presentation, which was on the UAW Region 1-C website a few weeks ago, and posted it on their blog. The Democrats who responded to the posting didn't talk in detail about the posting but instead said they support the RMGN.

Governor/Senate Battle Over LCC Appointment

The Senate and the Governor are embarking on an intense battle over Liquor Control Commission (LCC) appointments.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm withdrew her appointment of Colleen Pobur to the LCC when the appointment was met with criticism in the Senate this week. However, she quickly reappointed her in place of a Republican after the chamber adjourned. Democrats claim Pobur isn't being given due process.

Republicans say Pobur isn't qualified and are outraged that current LCC Commissioner Judy Allen — a former GOP Senate staffer — isn't being re-nominated.

Stem Cell Campaign Loses Field Team

Top organizers for the CureMichigan campaign, which aims to get the stem cell issue on the ballot, resigned this week, putting the campaign in limbo.

Campaign Director Mark Burton, Field Coordinator Ben Miller and Communications Director Amber Shinn handed in their resignation letters. Apparently the three have been in conflict with newly appointed chairman, Larry Owen.

Owen was added to the team five weeks ago to help bring money to the campaign. Apparently the board is now conflicted over Owen's decision to replace the three managers as soon as possible.

The Week Ahead

Budget Work Lingers

The conference committee on HB 5816, the massive so-called General Government budget that covers dozens of state agencies as well as the Legislature and the Executive Branch is scheduled to meet on Wednesday.

Michigan Factoid:

Michigan's Isle Royal Park shelters one of the largest moose herds remaining in the United States.

-- Source: www.50states.com/facts/michigan.htm

The House also reconvenes that day after a three week break for the July 4th holiday. The lower chamber did meet last week, but no votes were cast. Look for the lower chamber to deal with the School Aid Budget and possibly the General Government budget.

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