

GCSIntel, For The Week Ending Fri., July 20, 2007

Supremes: 'It's OK To ID Voters'

In a decision applauded by Republicans and scorned by Democrats, the Michigan Supreme Court on Wednesday held that a 2005 law that would require voters to show their driver's license or state ID card before voting is constitutional.

The opinion was issued in response to an April 2006 request from the Michigan House that the Court render a decision about the constitutionality of the law. The requirement, which has long been pushed by Republicans and opposed by Democrats, was snuck into a bill dealing with school election reform back in 2005 and signed into law by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The high court's GOP nominated majority in an opinion written by Justice Robert Young held that "the photo identification requirement contained in the statute is facially constitutional under the balancing test articulated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Burdick v Takushi*. The identification requirement is a reasonable, nondiscriminatory restriction designed to preserve the purity of elections and to prevent abuses."

The court also held that because the new law doesn't require voters to pay a fee as a condition of exercising the right to vote, it is therefore not an unconstitutional poll tax.

Justice Michael Cavanagh in a dissent said that the matter wasn't about preventing fraud.

"This case is simply about protecting the right to vote for all Michigan citizens," wrote Cavanagh. "As the Michigan constitution provides 'All political power is inherent in the people. Government is instituted for their equal benefit, security and protection.' Today's decision ignores this constitutional principle and endorses misguided legislation that significantly impairs the fundamental right of thousands of our citizens to vote."

House Dems May Be Looking At Trimming Back Charter Funding

In an interview this week, House Education Committee Chair Tim Melton (D-Auburn Hills) said that he and his colleagues might be looking at a lower per-pupil foundation grant for charter schools that only offer K-5 or K-8 education.

The argument is that it costs less to educate students in the lower grades than it does in high school grades. Public schools that are host to early grade charters, Melton said, aren't getting the funding subsidization that comes with the lower grade students. Then when those students leave the lower grade charters they come back to the public school for their more expensive, high school years.

"A lot of the charters are K-8 or K-5, so they're getting the per-pupil allotment, which is the same for every age, even if they don't do the high schoolers," he said.

Melton added that in the fall, House Democrats would roll out a more comprehensive set of education policy recommendations.

State Agriculture Director Steps Down

Mitch Irwin, director of the Department of Agriculture, this week turned in his resignation to the Michigan Agriculture Commission.

"It's been a good ride," Irwin told members of the Commission which appoints the state's agriculture chief. In a letter Irwin said he's decided it's time for him to return to the private sector to pursue opportunities in his business development, investment and real estate business.

Irwin joined the administration of Gov. Jennifer Granholm in 2003 as director of the Department of Management and Budget and later replaced Dan Wyant as agriculture director.

House/Senate To Meet Five Days In August

Both the House and Senate earlier this week announced that they'd only be holding sessions every Wednesday during August at 10 a.m.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who contends that lawmakers should stay in town until the state's roughly \$1.8 billion budget deficit for fiscal year 2008 is settled, has roundly criticized the attendance of members of the House and Senate.

Members of the Legislature contend there is little for members to do until the governor and legislative leaders arrive at a deal settling the issue. Once a deal is agreed to, the voting can take place.

The schedule that was announced was penned as "tentative," so obviously it could change at any moment should a deal be reached.