

## **GCSIntel For The Week Ending, Fri., July 27, 2007**

### **Paul Condino – Most Definitely In The Arena**

Ask House Judiciary Committee Chair Paul Condino (D-Southfield) what issues he has sponsored legislation on over the past four years and he'll pause as if wondering where to begin.

As a member of the House minority party last session, Condino carried the water for Gov. Jennifer Granholm with legislation on her tax reform plan. He has repeatedly sponsored legislation (the so-called Kreiner bill) to redefine how Michigan courts determine the level of settlement payments automobile crash victims receive for serious injuries. And he insists the effort will bear fruit. He has sponsored legislation to allow drug analysis field-testing to be admissible in preliminary exams.

Rephrase the question. What issue hasn't he been in the middle of? Now he pauses again. Cormorants. He hasn't sponsored legislation on cormorant control. But he does have environmental legislation on sewage overflows.

That tells the tale of Paul Condino's brief four and a half years in the legislature. The list of issues he hasn't been involved in is easier to compile than the list of issues he's been enmeshed in. And the word enmeshed isn't used lightly – enmeshed, deeply involved with – issues he advocates for passionately.

Apparently never balking on the hard stuff - Condino has been a leading voice for the House Democrats on numerous issues. When Republicans took up the issue of reforming taxes a couple years ago Condino held his own in the inevitable rhetorical battles – scoring points where he could for the Democrats.

As the representative of arguably the most liberal district outside of Detroit, Condino can afford to be firebrand at times. And he plays that role when appropriate. Few would accuse him of not fighting the “good fight” for what he believes in.

Yet along with the passion, Condino seems to possess an eye for the practical – a sense of what can realistically be achieved outside of the rhetoric.

It's no secret that he was a key player in getting Rep. Andy Dillon (R-Redford Twp.) elected House Speaker. That was Dillon, the conservative Democrat – backed by Condino, a champion of many so-called liberal issues. But to Condino, Dillon represented the best chance for the Democrats to keep control of the House a bridge to the center where power may have a legitimate chance to accumulate, a practical choice. This may be what sets Condino apart from many lawmakers. He speaks his mind, but looks for common ground.

Repeatedly, Condino has been selected to represent his caucus in key negotiations. First by former House Democratic Leader Dianne Byrum, and now by Speaker Dillon.

He was in the middle of the negotiations on the replacement for the Single Business Tax (SBT), while also juggling other issues he deeply believes in – such as judicial accountability and increasing access to the child adoption process.

Then, fresh from the SBT replacement talks, Dillon placed Condino right in the middle of the ongoing negotiations on how to solve the 2008 budget mess – another roll-up-your sleeves and get in the trenches assignment.

Ultimately, a distinction is made between those who can simply make a pitch and those who always seem to be in there pitching. Agree with him or disagree with him, no one can say Condino has been content to be a bystander. Curse him or applaud him, Paul Condino is right in the thick of things – at the very center of the arena.

## **News From The Week**

### **Supremes Toss Challenge To Same Sex Benefits**

The Michigan Supreme Court on Wednesday tossed out a legal challenge to same-sex benefits offered by the Ann Arbor School District that was mounted by a group of taxpayers.

In *Rhode v Ann Arbor Public Schools* the high court held that the group of taxpayers lacked standing. The challenge was mounted following the 2004 passage of a state constitutional amendment that defined marriage as between one man and one women.

### **Size Of Proposed Phone Tax May Be Shrinking**

Wednesday, it was reported that the size of a proposed monthly, per line phone tax that would support law enforcement services may be shrinking.

Originally the tax was proposed at \$1.35 per-line, per-month. Sources indicate that amount may be shaved to somewhere between 80 and 99 cents per month. The proposed fee is being pushed by House Appropriations Committee Chair George Cushingberry and will in part allow the state to supplant some \$40 million in General Fund dollars that are going to support the Michigan State Police.

Apparently, at the heart of the reduction of the tax was the fact that at \$1.35 the proposal would bring in \$200 million. Democrats backing the proposal had only planned on around \$135 million.

### **Legislation To Establish No-Fault Medical Fee Schedule Struggles**

A proposal being pushed by the Chair of the House Insurance Committee as a means of lowering no-fault auto-insurance costs wound up stalling in committee Wednesday when sufficient 'yes' votes couldn't be rounded up.

Under HB 4792, sponsored by Insurance Committee Chair Virgil Smith (D-Detroit), the medical fee structure that is used to reimburse medical providers for care given to

workers' compensation accident victims would be applied to medical care provided to accident victims covered by the state's no-fault auto insurance system.

Industry claims the proposal would generate total premium savings of between seven percent and nine percent. Hospitals argue the proposal would just force others to pick up the costs that auto-insurance companies will be shedding under the proposal.

Democrats, including a number of Smith's colleagues representing Detroit, which has been hardest hit by escalating insurance rates, argue the bill provides a benefit to the insurance industry with no guarantee that companies will turn around and reduce rates.

### **House Committee Moves Smoking Ban Bill**

Legislation that would ban smoking in all public places in Michigan moved out of the House Commerce Committee on an 11 to 5 vote Tuesday.

HB 4163 would essentially have Michigan join the growing ranks of states and nations that prohibit smoking in restaurants and bars.

The bill passed amid warnings from bar owners and casino operators that the ban would cost them lost business as smokers moved to Indiana casinos where the ban wouldn't apply.