



Friday, August 1, 2008

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Centerpiece

Rep. Jack Brandenburg (R-Harrison Twp.), a term-limited lawmaker, is known for his independence. Now the lawmaker is working to ensure that his son, Bryan, fills his shoes. This week, GCSIntel talked to Brandenburg about that effort and his six-year career in the Michigan House.

Q. How involved are you with your son, Bryan Brandenburg’s, House campaign?

A. I’m his dad. You have to understand something. I’m going to be out here every day helping. I tell him anything he wants to know. I told him — we started the campaign Feb. 29 — I told him, “You’re the candidate; it’s your head on the block. If there’s anything you want to know, anything you want to do and you want my opinion on it, I’ll tell you. If you ask me for my opinion, you’re going to get exactly what I think.”

He’s going to make a good representative because he’s always been a very hardworking young man. I’ve never known him to be broke in his entire life. He always found work to do. Number two, he’s very strong willed. Number three, he’s naturally tough. He’ll never back down, and he’ll never take a backseat to anyone. Number four, he likes people.

Q. Can’t refusing to “back down” be politically hazardous?

A. It’s never been hazardous for me. To tell you the truth, I think it’s extremely advantageous. People know exactly where you stand, and they — meaning the whole system — are not going to try to roll over you. A lot of people are very presumptuous in politics. That’s very dangerous.

When I was chairman of the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) budget, I made it very well known that I was going to cut their budget and to this day, even though I have a great respect for Jim Epolito, I don’t think we need the MEDC (Michigan Economic Development Corporation) as it is. I told him so, and I did cut their budget. I had a very big-time disagreement with Sen. Valde Garcia (R-Howell), whom I respect, but I was going to cut their budget come hell or high water.

It caused some tension, but once again, my leadership knows that once I make up my mind to do something, I’m doing it. Leadership didn’t make me stay a representative, the people did, and that’s where my loyalty stands.

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Q. Looking back at your six years in office, what is your proudest accomplishment?

A. We had a terrible situation in my district with PCPs. They had contaminated two full canals, 128 homes had property values that were deemed worthless, and I got an appropriation of \$750,000 for that. Two years later I got another \$500,000 on top of that to have the canals completely cleansed of the PCPs. I'm very proud of that.

I'm just as proud of cutting about \$260 million out of the budget in my 5.5 years as a state representative.

Q. Is there anything that you wanted to accomplish when you came into office, but didn't?

A. I feel pretty fulfilled right now. I feel very proud of the job I've done for my constituents.

Q. Has the relationship between the House, Senate and Governor become more or less partisan?

A. I have thought in my 5.5 years, unfortunately, that the House and the Senate and the Governor are very partisan. Despite the public rhetoric, I don't see any change.

I think term limits should be revised to invite more people to work together and build more trust. I think certain individuals should be more beholden to their constituents rather than special interest groups. I think that might build trust too. I don't trust a lot of people on both sides of the aisle because these people are so beholden to special interest groups and money.

Q. So you're not interested in working as a lobbyist?

A. I won't ever be a lobbyist. I've owned my own business for 28 years. I wouldn't want to be a lobbyist. That's a tough job. I'm going to work on my business for a year, and then I'm going to decide what I want to run for — state Senate, Macomb County CEO, U.S. Congress.

GCSEye On The Capitol

RMGN Battle Getting Hotter and Hotter

The Reform Michigan Government Now (RMGN) ballot proposal is holding all the headlines. The 490,000 petition signatures that RMGN has turned in were deemed "comparatively clean" by a Secretary of State source, increasing the odds that RMGN may get a favorable review by the state's Bureau of Elections.

RMGN's opposition, which is being headed up by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, is launching some challenges in court. The Chamber took RMGN proponents to court arguing that the group can't propose multi-sectional, multi-subject constitutional amendments; however, RMGN supporters argue Senate Republicans set their own precedent for making these changes last year.

Last year the Senate passed SJR I, which cleans up various provisions of the Constitution that have been invalidated through federal law or court action, such as the voting age being 21 and various other sections dealing with state and county representation. SJR I will not make this year's ballot unless it gets two-thirds of the House to sign off on it.

RMGN's lawyer promised to file a response to the Chamber with the Court of Appeals Friday, arguing that Michigan voters have had 10 different constitutional amendments put before them that deal with different sections of the constitution and various subjects.

Bill Gives Locals More Power To Tax For Roads

A bipartisan group of Representatives introduced a package of bills that would give local governments a greater ability to tax citizens for road repair funds.

The bills would allow counties to ask voters to agree to add money to the state gas, sales and real estate transfer tax and driver license and registration fees.

A portion of the package would also allow counties to ask voters for permission to levy a one percent sales tax. This portion, HJR HHH, would have to get approval from two-thirds of the legislature before it could get on the ballot.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm's transportation advisory committee is largely responsible for getting the package before legislators.

Cherry Meeting With Appropriate Gubernatorial Supporters

Though he hasn't announced a bid for governor, Lt. Gov. John Cherry is circling the wagons and talking to top Democratic supporters who could drive his campaign.

Cherry's had three meetings with Gov. Jennifer Granholm loyalists including Granholm's legal advisor, Kelly Keenan, Lansing attorney, Mark Fox, and former chief of staff, Rick Wiener.

Former House Speaker Curtis Hertel, his son, local Ingham County Commissioner Curtis Hertel Jr., Lansing businessman Joel Ferguson, former House Democratic Floor Leader and current Liquor Control Commissioner Pat Gagliardi and long-time GCSI multi-client lobbyist Patrick Laughlin are also among the crew talking to Cherry.

Michigan Factoid:

Of the six principal iron ranges, or areas, in the United States, three are located primarily in Michigan: the Marquette Range, all of which is found within the state, and the Menominee and Gogebic ranges, which are located in both Michigan and Wisconsin.

The Marquette Range was the first to be discovered by Douglass Houghton, Michigan's first State Geologist in the early 1840s. The Marquette Range will see an additional \$290 million investment from mining giant Cleveland Cliffs in the coming months and years to expand production and the firm's Empire and Tilden mine sites.

— Source: Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries/Cleveland Cliffs Press Release

The Week Ahead

It'll Be All About Primaries

Tuesday's primary election will be a major focus among Lansing insiders this coming week. The question remains will there be any incumbents who are knocked off along the way?

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