



Friday, August 22, 2008

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An Interview With Representative Jack Hoogendyk (R-Kalamazoo)

Centerpiece

Rep. Jack Hoogendyk (R-Kalamazoo) is a term-limited member of the House who is the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate this year. He will face five-term incumbent Carl Levin (D-Detroit) in the fall. Known as one of the chamber's most conservative members, Hoogendyk is a former Kalamazoo County Commissioner and sales manager.

Q. What factors contributed to the Democratic shift in your district? How have you changed your campaign to address this change?

A. There are maybe two or three factors. One is Western Michigan University. It's grown — I think the employment base of Western tends to lean a little bit more left. As a university town, it seems as if there are a lot of students that are voting in Kalamazoo. I noticed that one township in my district where the student housing expanded has leaned a little more to the left. Quite frankly, I think they have a newspaper that leans left of center. I think that's had a little something to do with it.

It is interesting if you look at Kalamazoo County. In 2004 President George W. Bush lost Michigan but the only county to go Democratic in 2004 was Kalamazoo. I think it's due to the influence of the higher education community and the newspaper in this town.

I don't know how this will impact my campaign. It's a statewide race now, and I'm looking at the big picture. I'm certainly campaigning in Kalamazoo, but I recognize that the bulk of my voters are in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne Counties, and I'll have to spend the bulk of my time there.

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Q. In June, the Rasmussen poll had your opponent, U.S. Sen. Carl Levin (D-Detroit), with a 22-point advantage over you. That's a pretty big lead. What are you doing to change that gap?

A. The last Rasmussen poll was about 56 to 36. It's been staying around 20 points. At one point it was 58 to 32. I don't pay that close attention.

I'm not concerned about it because it's very early in the campaign. The campaign, to most voters, hasn't even started. I recognize the enormity of the task, but it doesn't mean that it can't be won. The big issue is getting the name recognition out, and that's a challenge because we have limited resources, but we're continuing to raise money. Regardless of what people think of me or Levin, four percent have no opinion of me and 20 percent don't know who I am. I think they would definitely like me.

I don't have \$5 million like Carl Levin does, but we're raising money and trying to get the message out there. That's why it's important to have a debate. Levin doesn't want to debate me on TV. I suppose it's because he thinks he might be embarrassed. He hasn't done a debate on TV for 12 years. He does the Detroit Economic Club, but that's not on TV so not many people see it. I'm going to challenge him to a debate in September or October.

I have not formally sent him a letter asking for a debate. I've just said it in interviews and so forth. I intend to do that. He said that he would not start campaigning until after Labor Day, so I will send the letter after Labor Day.

He says he's not campaigning, but oddly he has a keen interest in small-town newspapers around the state. He's been doing editorial meetings. He says he's not campaigning and I'm just echoing that, but that's what incumbency does for you. He has the right to do that. In my mind he's already in campaign mode.

Q. What makes you think you can beat a popular incumbent?

A. Because, for one, I think 30 years is long enough. I think there's a real mood for change in the states, especially Michigan. There's a very strong anti-incumbency feeling. Congress has a nine percent approval rating. I think people will look at Levin and say he's been there long enough. When they look at his record on taxes, immigration, national defense, life and marriage, healthcare, social security — there's so many issues he's on the wrong side of. He's on the other side of voters on the major issues. We just need to get that message out. I'm not someone who has a lot of rhetoric. I have a six-year track record. I'm not just making it up. I will do in Washington the same thing I've done in Lansing — keeping taxes low, reducing expenditures, making sure individuals enjoy their own personal liberties. That's something I don't believe that he's done.

Q. Will you run for the state senate in two years if you don't beat Levin?

A. There are any number of things that have been offered to me or made available to me. Running for the state Senate is certainly one of those. I've often said I'm not a chess player. I don't think of things six months down the road. I think of the task that's before me and that's winning the (U.S.) Senate seat. If I don't win, I'll evaluate and think, "Where do we go from here?"

GCSEye On The Capitol

Dems Decide On Hathaway For Supreme Court

The Michigan Democratic Party (MDP) has finally agreed on a candidate to challenge incumbent Supreme Court Chief Justice Cliff Taylor. The MDP will put Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Diane M. Hathaway before voters this fall.

Hathaway was a trial prosecutor before being elected to the bench in 1992. She also served as a law clerk for the former Detroit Recorders Court and the circuit court. In 2006, she made an unsuccessful run for the State Appeals Court.

The MDP was having a difficult time finding a consensus candidate to challenge Taylor in large part because labor was dissatisfied with suggested candidates, including the 2004 nominee, Wayne County Judge Deborah Thomas.

Court Axes RMGN Proposal

In a 21-page opinion issued this week, the state Court of Appeals unanimously axed the Reform Michigan Government Now (RMGN) constitutional amendment from the November ballot.

"The RMGN initiative petition is overarching, of a reach and expanse never before seen of any constitutional initiative in Michigan's long history," the ruling said. "It proposes fundamentally to redesign the very framework of the Michigan Constitution of 1963, which emerged after an historic convention and subsequent voter approval."

Michigan Factoid:

In 1831, Stevens Thompson Mason was named the acting Governor of the Territory of Michigan. At the time, he was 19 years old.

The judges opined that the amendment went well beyond simply amending the Constitution and instead represented a "general revision" of the document.

RMGN Spokeswoman Dianne Byrum said the RMGN crew will appeal the decision to the state Supreme Court. The court is expected to deny the appeal.

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