



Friday, October 12, 2007

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Being First To The Table Can Sometimes Cost

By John T. Reurink, *MIRS* Publisher

**“Weekly
Centerpiece”**

In politics sometimes doing the right thing comes with a price.

During the past several weeks, that's something that House Minority Floor Leader Chris Ward (R-Brighton) learned the hard way. As everyone in Michigan knows, for the Legislature the month of September was "do or die" time for solving a \$1.75 billion budget deficit.

In the days leading up to the deadline, House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) was working feverishly to find Republicans who wanted to help secure the votes for an income tax hike.

For nearly a week, Ward was the only publicly willing GOP participant.

For days Ward and Dillon worked on developing a mix of reforms and embellishments that would help clinch a deal and bring over three to six GOP votes. Ward was essentially working at cross-purposes to House Minority Leader Craig DeRoche (R- Novi), who had aligned himself on the "no GOP tax" stance that was being pushed by Republican Party Chair Saul Anuzis.

In a heated caucus meeting with his fellow GOP colleagues on Wednesday, Sept. 19, Ward either offered to or was forced to temporarily step down from his role as House Minority Floor Leader while he proceeded in talks with Dillon and Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Despite an all-night session on Thursday, September 20, talks broke off at 7:30 a.m. with Dillon and DeRoche pointing fingers at one another. Ward continued throughout the following days to work with the Democrats towards a solution to avoid a shut down.

The heat Ward was getting from his GOP colleagues was fanned the following week when on Thursday, September 27, Gov. Jennifer Granholm praised him in a statewide television address for his willingness to vote for a tax hike.

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The following day, Ward sent a communiqué to his constituents, explaining the situation.

"There are no decisions to be made with our current budget situation that will make everyone happy," Ward said to his constituents. "Realizing this, it became important to me to actively seek a solution."

When cornered about the unsolicited statewide praise, Ward confessed that the governor's attention didn't help him with his colleagues. He admitted that there were "lots of looks and jabs" but he added if it helped avoid a shutdown, he was "fine with that."

Ultimately, Ward wasn't the only GOP member to vote for one of two tax hike bills that helped the state avoid a government shutdown — there were others. However, Ward likely paid the biggest price for being the first GOP member to publicly move towards a solution. He has lost a measure of standing within his caucus and is among the first batch of lawmakers facing a recall over the budget agreement.

GCSEye on the Capitol

That Presidential Thing

Tuesday of this week brought a rash of news about the state's role, or lack thereof, in the 2008 presidential selection process.

The good news for the state was a robust and well-covered debate among the GOP presidential candidates in Dearborn. The debate's entire focus was the economy — an issue of particular concern in the state that leads the nation in unemployment.

That same day, four of the Democratic presidential candidates informed Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land that they wanted out of the Jan. 15 joint-party, presidential primary. The news served as a big blow to Democrats pushing Michigan to challenge the presidential primary/caucus domination of Iowa and New Hampshire.

So far, both Gov. Jennifer Granholm and GOP Party Chair Saul Anuzis say they're sticking with the January 15th date.

Tax Hike Rhetoric Continues

Both the Republican and Democratic parties were on the air this week with ads attempting to spin the issue of the Oct. 1 income tax hike and sales tax extension to services that lawmakers passed in their efforts to avert a state government shutdown.

The GOP ad is literally a "we hate to say we told you so, but we told you so" ad. The spot asserts that when Democrats are in power, taxes go up. The Democratic State Central Committee aired its own ad that contends the governor worked with Republicans and Democrats alike for solution, and for pennies a day per person, the state budget is balanced.

On top of the airwave battle over the tax hike, Leon Drolet, chair of the Michigan Taxpayers Alliance, who has been threatening recalls of lawmakers who voted for the tax hikes, announced he has 10 lawmakers in his sights.

That list includes:

- Rep. Steve Bieda (D-Warren)
- Rep. Marc Corriveau (D-Northville)
- Rep. Robert Dean (D-Grand Rapids)
- House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.)
- Rep. Ed Gaffney (R-Grosse Pointe Farms)
- Sen. Valde Garcia (R-Howell)
- Sen. Wayne Kuipers (R-Holland)
- Rep. Mary Valentine (D-Muskegon)
- Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom (R-Muskegon)
- Rep. Chris Ward (R-Brighton)

It should be noted that the last time there was a successful recall was in 1983 following an income tax hike. Of the 17 recalls that were attempted, only two succeeded.

Enviros Push State To Regulate CO2

Ten environmental and conservation groups submitted a petition on Wednesday to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) urging them to begin regulating the emission of carbon dioxide (CO2).

The groups submitted their petition in light of an April 2007 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that held the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could regulate CO2 because it was a pollutant contributing to global warming.

Business groups argue that if Michigan took a "go-it-alone" stance on regulating CO2 it could be a disaster for an already limping automotive sector and would drive up the cost of the state's electric energy.

Week Ahead

The Clock Is Ticking . . .

We're now roughly halfway through the enacted 30-day budget extension lawmakers gave themselves on Oct. 1 when they raised taxes to resolve a \$1.75 billion deficit. Expect the heat to start turning up by the end of week three to pass a balanced budget.

Negotiators this week were reportedly still meeting over targets. While all the budget bills are in conference committees – meaning a solution could be implemented quickly – the question is whether agreements can be reached on the 18 individual budget bills.

Ripples Will Continue

Now that a "target list" has been released by the Michigan Taxpayers Alliance for recall efforts against lawmakers that were "yeas" on one of the two tax hikes, expect news and speculation about recalls to continue to swirl.

Michigan Factoid:

Detroiters were the first in the nation to have assigned telephone numbers.

—Source: *michiganisamazing.com*

The big question will be how much Gov. Jennifer Granholm and company stand by their claims to defend all lawmakers, regardless of party, who voted for tax increases.

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