



Wednesday, November 21, 2007

MANAGEMENT

Nell Kuhnmuench

Michael D. Hawks

Stephen E. Young

Kirk A. Profit

Kenneth Cole

Donald Van Singel

Brett Henderson

William Zaagman

Erik Hingst

Patrick Laughlin

Gary M. Owen

Viventi - 'This Is The Job'

“Centerpiece”

If you love the law, business and the political process (less the politics) than you'll understand why Carol Morey-Viventi feels she's got 'the job.'

"I like the management aspect of it," Secretary of the Senate Viventi said recently in her office. "I manage the finance office, which is the payroll and employment side of it. I like the session side of it because I see the Senators, I study the rules, I still read cases, so there's still a legal aspect to it."

As Secretary of the Senate, Viventi literally oversees all non-policy aspects of running the Michigan Senate. From the personnel department to computer operations and purchasing, from building maintenance to creating the Senate Journals and framing resolutions — from her perch, she gets involved in it all.

The story of how Viventi came to the job she loves is intertwined with much of Michigan's political history going back to the 1970s.

Viventi first began her Capitol career in 1971 after Jerry Roe, executive director of the Michigan Republican Party, who was her landlord, asked if she'd like to talk about going to work for newly elected members of the Republican minority.

Of all the freshman lawmakers Viventi could have worked for, she wound up working for a very young John Engler.

After seven years with Engler, Viventi joined the staff of Sen. Jack Wellborn so she could avoid the two-year election cycle in the House and focus on attending Cooley Law School at night. Interestingly, when Engler found out Viventi was attending law school, he opted to do so, as well. The two wound up being classmates and study partners.

After law school and a brief stint in the private sector, Viventi wound up back in the Legislature working as legal counsel for the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules.

A Service of GCSI ... Voted Michigan's #1 Lobby Firm

Once her classmate, Engler, was elected Governor in 1990, Viventi joined the Engler administration as Cabinet Counsel on Policy — a position she held for four years. After four years, then Senate Majority Leader Dick Posthumus asked her to return to the Senate as Secretary of the Senate to replace Bill Snow, who was retiring.

While she's worked for powerful politicians like John Engler and Dick Posthumus, Viventi is also quick to tell you one of the best things about 'the job' is that being Secretary of the Senate means she's barred from campaigning and politics in general, which is fine with her.

"I don't get involved in the political fights; I don't get involved even in the policy," said Viventi. "I can give advice to anybody that asks me including lobbyists, the senators, anybody who calls asking 'how would you get this done if you were trying to get this done?'"

Viventi has never been a supporter of the concept of term limits. Unlike the reaction of many outside of the institution, she's quick to note that she's not terribly surprised by recent legislative struggles over budgets and taxes.

"In eight years, you've barely established your credentials for how to get something done," Viventi adds. "I think term limits have hurt the institution. People are astounded that it took them so long to do the budget, but when you don't understand all the policies and the programs the departments operate, is it any wonder it took that long?"

GCSEye on the Capitol

The saga over the presidential primary and the state's now-maligned services tax continued for the past two weeks largely unabated.

After that sound and fury, there is still only resolution on one of the issues.

Presidential Primary

On the presidential primary, the clock had nearly run its course, as the Michigan Association of County Clerks will let you know. This Wednesday before Thanksgiving, the Michigan Supreme Court, however, put what should be the final touches on the issue by overturning two lower court rulings that had called PA 52 of 2007 unconstitutional.

Late last week, the Court of Appeals rejected the state's arguments that running a publicly funded presidential primary and turning over the resulting voter list to a private entity serves the "public good." On Monday, the state promptly asked the Supreme Court for a ruling on the matter before noon Wednesday.

In an opinion released just after noon, the Supreme Court reversed the Court of Appeals and held that there is indeed a public good that will come from giving the two public parties the voter lists.

"This is indisputably a 'public purpose' and such purpose appears central to the legislative judgment," wrote the four Justice majority. "Indeed, it is hard to comprehend what alternative purpose the Legislature might have contemplated in enacting [the law]."

Services Tax

If the old adage is true that "politics is the art of compromise" then lawmakers still have a lack of art appreciation when it comes to solving the puzzle of repealing the service tax.

The House passed its version. The Senate passed its version, and in a rare Tuesday before Thanksgiving session the Senate passed a third version of a services tax repeal (call it a twist on the House plan).

Some have problems with this latest version because:

- It's not revenue neutral - a nonstarter for Gov. Jennifer Granholm; and

- According to Senate Democrats, it blows a \$400 million hole in the budget

Michigan Factoid:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics announced this week with an unemployment rate of 7.7 percent, Michigan leads all 50 states with the highest jobless rate. The next two closest states, Alaska and Mississippi, come in at 6.1 percent.

—Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Look Ahead

This coming week should bring resolution to the service tax debate. It will be a positive repeal and replacement with a business tax if the Michigan Manufacturers Association and the Detroit Regional Chamber can convince the state's leaders to sit down at a table and hash out their differences — always a challenging thing these days.

A Service of GCSI ... Voted Michigan's #1 Lobby Firm

Disclaimer

This newsletter is a client service provided by GCSI. The news and views contained in this newsletter are based on the research and reporting of Michigan Information & Research Service, Inc (MIRS, www.mirsnews.com) and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions or strategic advice of GCSI. This newsletter is presented to you as one more resource for inside information and insights into state government happenings. For specific questions about politics, personalities, legislation, policy and strategies please always contact your GCSI lobbyist.