
April 23, 2010

BISHOP WARNS GRANHOLM, DEMS PULL A SURPRISE

On Wednesday, Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop (R-Rochester) sent Gov. Jennifer Granholm a letter objecting to her recent 14 appointments to university boards for terms beginning on Jan. 1, 2011 and stating the Republican-controlled Senate would reject any appointments she makes after Sept. 3.

On Thursday, Democratic Senators pulled a surprise. With Lt. Gov. John Cherry in the chair, Democrats moved for adjournment which Cherry fast-tracked approval, leaving Senate Republicans in disarray as some GOPers were apparently having second thoughts about voting to reject.

The move came as Republicans were positioning to reject the 14 university board appointments.

TEXTING BAN: KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE ROAD

Legislation (HB 4394) that would make texting while driving a primary offense with offenders being forced to pay a \$100 fine is on its way to Governor Jennifer Granholm who has indicated she will sign the measure into law.

A companion bill (HB 4370), also headed for the Governor's desk, absolves drivers caught texting and driving from having any points put on their driving record.

A third bill (SB0468) has been returned from the House to the Senate with an amendment that puts the fee revenue into the same fund as the driver responsibility or bad driver fees. Democrats want to repeal the bad driver fees and see the texting and driving fines as a replacement.

All three bills must be signed into law for any of them to take effect.

HOUSE SWEETENS EMPLOYEE RETIREMENT PACKAGE

The House plans to vote next Tuesday on its version of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's state employee/teacher retirement package.

The proposed House version expands and adds more carrot to plan by allowing all state employees with at least 30 years of service and school employees with a combined age and years of service of 80 to retire with up to a 1.7 multiplier.

Those who retire between May and July 1 would get the 1.7 multiplier. Those opting to retire between July 2 and October 2 would get a 1.6 multiplier. The Senate-passed version holds the multiplier at the current 1.5.

The Granholm plan limits state employees and school employees to those with 30 years of service and puts the multiplier at 1.6.

STEM CELL RESEARCH: MORE POLITICS THAN POLICY?

The Republican-controlled Senate this week, in a move seen more for political gain than policy accomplishment, passed legislation that puts restrictions on embryonic stem cell research.

While seen as a victory in the Upper Chamber after months of delay, the likelihood of the measure seeing any action in the House is slim-to-none.

House Speaker Andy Dillon (D-Redford Twp.) has criticized the Senate action and a spokesperson for Gov. Jennifer Granholm calls the bills "dead on arrival."

Some Republicans said the six-bill package clarifies but does not undo Proposal 2 passed by the voters in 2008.

RTTT – ROUND TWO

Preparation of the application for round two of the federal "Race To The Top" funding that is due in Washington on June 1 is moving at a fast pace.

The application will be presented to the State Board of Education for its approval when the board meets on May 11.

Local school districts will have until May 20 to sign new memoranda of understanding (MOU) with many school districts also requiring local school board approval.

Failing to secure MOUs from school districts and the Michigan Education Association (MEA) not getting on board were major factors in Michigan losing out in the first round of RTTT money.

MEGA ADOPTS INVESTIGATIVE POLICY

Hoping to avoid any more RASCO fiascos, the Michigan Economic Growth Authority (MEGA) has adopted a business integrity verification program that requires criminal and civil background checks on every applicant company and in some cases individuals with company applying for a state tax credit against the Michigan Business Tax (MBT).

There are some exemptions: if a company has been located in Michigan for five years and has 20 employees, or are publicly traded companies or are companies that are subsidiaries of publicly traded companies.

Earlier this year, MEGA awarded a state tax credit valued at \$6.1 million to RASCO, an alternative energy startup company, operated by a convicted felon out of his mobile home.

PA 72 UNDER REVIEW

With increasing unrest among parents of Detroit Public School (DPS) children over Emergency Financial Manager (EFM) Robert Bobb's decision to close more than 40 schools, there is a move afoot to make some changes to PA 72 to the law that allows for appointment of EFMs for local governments and school districts.

The Department of Treasury as well as Gov. Jennifer Granholm's legal staff is reviewing the law. In addition, the State Board of Education is requesting changes in the law.

This week, a judge issued a restraining order blocking for now the closing of those schools.

NEW HEALTH OFFICE CREATED

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has issued an Executive Order establishing the office of Health Services Inspector General whose job it will be to comb through Medicaid and other programs for fraud, waste, and abuse beginning Oct. 1. The office will have a newly appointed Health Services Inspector general and four staff persons.

POLITICS: DEMS PICK LEYTON AND BENSON

In what has been described as "an experiment" by Michigan Democratic Party Chairman Mark Brewer, state Democrats last weekend gave early endorsements to Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton for Attorney General in a close contest over attorney Richard Bernstein.

Jocelyn Benson, a Wayne State University election law professor easily outpaced Wayne County Clerk Janice Winfrey for the Secretary of State spot.

The endorsements all but assure Leyton and Benson of winning the party's nomination for the two posts at the MDP's convention this fall.

POLITICS: STUPAK OUT, SEVERAL IN

With Democratic U.S. Congressman Bart Stupak's surprising announcement that he will not seek election to a 10-term representing the 1st Congressional District, there has not been a shortage of persons seeking to replace him.

On the Democratic side: Former Charlevoix County Commissioner Connie Saltonstall and Rep. Joel Sheltrow of West Branch are definitely in. Other candidates are Rep. Gary McDowell of Rudyard and former Rep. Matt Gillard. Liquor Control Commissioner and former House Majority Leader Pat Gagliardi is also reported to be warming up to the idea.

Sen. Jason Allen of Traverse City and Dr. Dan Benishek are in on the Republican side. Rep. Mike Lahti of Rudyard is seriously looking at it. So are former Rep. Ken Bradstreet of Gaylord, Linda Goldethorpe and Tom Stallings.

STATEWIDE SMOKING BAN TO TAKE EFFECT

This is a reminder: Next week is your last chance to light up while dining out in Michigan.

A new law that bans smoking in restaurants -- with the exception of the Detroit casinos, cigar bars and home offices -- takes effect May 1.