



SCHOOL EQUITY CAUCUS

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Dear Colleagues:

The election of 2022 will likely be remembered for a long time in Michigan as the results will usher in a redrawing of the balance of power not seen in decades. Here's a recap of the election as well as some thoughts regarding the impact moving forward:

1. Legislature Flips to Democratic Control

Along with the anticipated re-election of Governor Whitmer, Attorney General Nessel, and Secretary of State Benson, the Michigan Democratic Party also took control of both houses of the Michigan Legislature in the November election. This marks the first time that the Democrats have controlled the three major elements of Michigan's legislative process (House, Senate, and Governor) at the same time since 1984 – truly a landmark result. More than half of all representatives will be new to the legislature.

The House flipped to Democratic control for the first time since 2008, while the Senate changed hands for the first time since 1984. In addition to various issues, a major factor in these outcomes was almost certainly attributable to the redrawn district maps as a result of the 2020 Census and the work of the Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission.

On the House side, the Democrats will have a narrow 56-54 margin. The new Speaker of the House will be Rep. Joe Tate of Detroit. Democrats will also have a slender 20-18 margin in the Senate, where the new Majority Leader will be Sen. Winnie Brinks of Grand Rapids.

The potential impact of this change in control will be discussed further below. **However, it is very important for Caucus members to begin building relationships with their new senators and representatives now!** Once the new legislative session begins in January, legislators may feel as if they are in a whirlwind between learning their new roles, as well as addressing the many pieces of legislation that are expected to be introduced early on.

2. Other Key Statewide Results

The Democratic Party successes did not stop with the legislature. The party also maintained its 5-2 majority on the state board of education (one vacant seat is expected

to be filled by gubernatorial appointment), as well as sweeping all contested seats on university boards.

Both incumbents won reelection to the Michigan Supreme Court (Democrat Richard Bernstein and Republican Jeffrey Zahra), maintaining the Court's current 4-3 Democratic-nominated majority. Justice Elizabeth Clement has been unanimously selected as the Chief Justice of the Court, replacing retiring Justice Bridget McCormack. Justice Clement was originally appointed by Republican Governor Rick Snyder in 2017, but has also voted with the Democratic majority in a number of high-profile cases.

All three ballot proposals were passed by Michigan voters. While Proposal 3 (focused on abortion rights) garnered the lion's share of pre-election attention, the other two proposals could also have significant impacts on Michigan for years to come.

Proposal 1 (term limits/financial disclosures) will now require the disclosure of certain financial information by legislators (Michigan was previously one of only two states without any such laws). It will also slightly reduce the overall number of years (from 14 to 12) a legislator may serve, but in an important change, all 12 years will be able to be served in the same chamber. For members who choose to spend their entire career in the House of Representatives, this potentially doubles their amount of time in that chamber.

From a policy standpoint, longer service in one chamber will hopefully lead to legislators who are better informed and more experienced on particular issues. With the constant legislative churn (particularly in the House), it has been somewhat challenging to bring legislators up to speed on nuances in legislation and to help them understand larger priorities. For this reason, the Caucus has included lengthening term limits as one of its goals for the past few years. We are looking forward to working in this new environment!

Proposal 2 (election changes) will now introduce early in-person voting in Michigan elections, along with making a slew of other modifications to election law in the state. Advocates of the proposal indicated that their desire was to increase voting access for citizens across the state. While the full political impact of these changes remains to be seen, it is thought that there will be additional costs associated with the implementation of these changes, including added staffing required at polling places, mandatory postage paid return mailing for absentee ballots, and the required placing of ballot drop boxes across the state.

3. Lame Duck Expected to be Particularly Lame

Given the change in legislative control on the horizon, it would appear that this year's lame duck session could be relatively uneventful, potentially even wrapping up in a couple of weeks. Governor Whitmer has little incentive to cut deals with the outgoing Republican legislature, and there currently are just a handful of session days scheduled in the House and Senate. There seems to be a distinct lack of desire to move anything that could be controversial, although there are a handful of bills that both sides may still like to pursue in the waning days of the current session.

We will remain on top of anything that happens in the remaining days of this legislative session, and will send out updates as events warrant.

4. Looking Ahead to the New Legislative Session

While lame duck might not be as momentous as in the past, the new legislative session is expected to be particularly busy. With full Democratic control for the first time in decades, a variety of interest groups are already hard at work preparing their legislative agendas. Beyond that, House and Senate Democrats are facing the momentous task of re-learning how to run the legislature after being the opposition party for so many years. This means new folks in leadership, new committee chairs, new demands on staff, and more. It will be a very busy time!

Among the many issues expected to get attention in the new legislative session will potentially be a number of issues related to education that may now either be on the table (or off of it) for the first time in years! Included among these could possibly be significant changes to funding formulas, charter schools, third grade retention, evaluation, teacher recruitment and retention, labor law (including right-to-work), and more. With so much potentially on their plate, it will be interesting to see how the Democratic leadership will prioritize the issues receiving attention first.

Another major task that will almost immediately be on the legislative docket will be preparations for the FY 2023-24 budget. The State Budget Office is already at work on the budget that Governor Whitmer will propose in early February. Prior to that, the next Consensus Revenue Estimating Conference (CREC) will be held in January to provide an update on state revenue in the context of the latest economic news. This budget process will be particularly interesting given the amount of funding potentially available, and the different funding priorities that may be promoted through a Democratic-controlled process. A supplemental budget for the current budget year may also see attention.

It will certainly be a very interesting time legislatively, and all Caucus members should be prepared to be highly engaged in the process.

That's all for this update. Once again, we will keep you apprised of any unexpected developments during lame duck.

As always, please be in touch with questions or concerns. And here's wishing you and yours a blessed holiday season!



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