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Drolet Takes Fight To The Locals

Don't look for any huge recall campaigns out of Leon Drolet's Michigan Taxpayers Alliance (MTA) any time soon.

The former lawmaker saw his 15-month campaign to bounce a lawmaker for supporting higher taxes go down in flames when his lone ballot target, House Speaker Andy **DILLON** (D-Redford Twp.), fought off the Drolet-led recall 64 to 36 percent.

Drolet said he recognizes that taxes are not the biggest political worry on the mind of the average voter right now, but that doesn't mean he's not going to stop questioning tax hikes, in particular future local millage hikes, which he sees as popping up in record number in 2009.

He projects that local school districts and governments held off on millage increase requests until '09 because they didn't want their issue to be put on the 2008 ballot when more people would be voting.

Remember, Drolet rattled Lansing in the summer and fall of 2007 with his recall threats when the House and Senate contemplated raising taxes in order to balance an upcoming budget that was a projected \$1.8 billion in deficit. An income tax increase passed, as did a short-lived sales tax expansion to certain services, which was replaced by a surcharge to the Michigan Business Tax.

MTA attempted to gin up local recall elections in the districts of several sitting lawmakers, but all of the local fires were extinguished through a lack of local interest or judicial action, except that of Dillon. The Dillon recall made the November election, but only because of a U.S. District Court judge ruling.

The following is a brief interview *MIRS* conducted with Drolet:

Q. Did last month's election results tell you voters had long forgotten about the income tax and sales tax expansion votes of '07 when they went to the polls?

A. I think they did and they were helped by the inability of the Republican candidates to keep the issue front and center. The automotive industry meltdown, the financial sector meltdown and the national political scene pushed those issues back into people's memories and they weren't brought forward by any of the campaigns I saw.

Q. Does the "tax cut" message still resonate with the general public or is it a relic of a different period in time?

A. That's a good question. A Democratic colleague of mine on the Macomb County Commission just chided me about that the other day. He told how the Democrats were elected in bigger numbers across the county and at the state level. Voters had

voted for the zoo mileage. They voted for veterans' mileage and that people are OK with higher taxes.

My members are the type of people who are not OK with that. Is the general public ready to pay more? That's a great question. We lost the recall effort against the Speaker of the House by a considerable margin, but at the same time the citizens' income has dropped precipitously since 2002 and I don't know how much more people are willing to continue to hold government harmless.

It's an open question. I'm not going to say that citizens are mad and they're not going to take it anymore. We'll find out a lot more in 2009 because I suspect we'll see mileage requests at a higher level than we've seen in years.

If there's not a citizen uprising against increased taxes in 2009 and 2010, it may just be that the spirit to fight among the citizens is gone.

Q. If you were Governor, what would you propose to help turn around the state's economy?

A. The best policy decisions I've seen are those brought forward by the Mackinac Center. The budget cuts they've brought forward are legitimate. The No. 1 thing is to right-size state government. The next priority would be Right to Work. I'd stare the southern states right in the eye and say, "We've become a Right to Work state and we can take you on at every level -- an education workforce, technology, etc."

We could smack the southern states around. As it is, we are dismissed by anyone looking to place a new plant because of our forced union status.

Q. Do you agree with President George W. BUSH's decision to tap into the \$700 billion financial bailout money for a bridge loan to the Big Three automakers?

A. I don't agree with the \$700 billion bailout of the financial industry, first off, so if we're going to squander \$700 billion, it's fine that Michigan gets some slice of that, but that's not the solution. I'd rather the money be wasted here than in other places, but once we've burned through the \$15 billion and we're left staring at the same problems, that money will not have ended up being part of the solution.

Q. What is the future of Michigan Taxpayers Alliance?

That's entirely dependent on the activism level of its members. This year is not an election year, but it will be a pivotal year because of the millage requests in what may be the year of the millage. Will Michigan citizens shrug their shoulders and give up or will they fight back?