



Forget the Election, Focus on Outcomes

By Joseph G. Lehman

(The following is an edited version of a commentary that appeared at www.mackinac.org.)

Summary

It's not enough to believe what politicians promise to do; you have to monitor them and hold them accountable. The Mackinac Center provides the tools necessary to accomplish that task.

Main Text Word Count: 671

Well, the Republicans did it. One of their strongest election showings was in Michigan, where they decisively recaptured the governorship, the Supreme Court and the state House by large margins. They increased their Senate majority to a supermajority. They picked up two seats in Congress. They maintained control of the Secretary of State and Attorney General offices. It was a sweeping political victory, but it says nothing yet about policy change.

That's because political victories do not guarantee policy victories. We need only remember how Republicans behaved after their historic congressional victories of 1994 to know that shrinking government is different from promising to shrink government. Likewise, when Republicans controlled Michigan's executive and legislative branches in the 1990s, they grew state spending at a pace far exceeding inflation and population growth combined.

At least Michigan's deepening economic crisis helps clarify what "policy victory" must look like. Balance the budget. Stop overpaying for things like gold-plated public-employee benefits. Wrestle down tax burdens for all businesses so we don't have to bribe them with ridiculous subsidies and gimmicky tax deals. Stop driving employers crazy with labyrinthine, nonsense regulations. Limit government to necessary, core functions.

And when interest groups like unions try to block these reforms, eliminate the lucrative sweetheart deals they've cleverly baked into the law for themselves over the last five decades.

But I must warn you. Don't expect Republicans, who now control everything, to just start sending Gov. Rick Snyder bills to accomplish these things come January. The reasons for this are many, but let me illustrate the situation with a statement made in a radio interview by the Randy Richardville, R-Monroe, the new Senate majority leader.

When asked about a right-to-work law, which would prohibit employers from firing workers who do not support a union, he said he did not "see it as being a top priority" this year. He added that a right-to-work

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Don't listen to what elected officials say they're going to do; use these resources to find out what they actually do.

law "... seems to me to be more disruptive with little positive results," and that it "... could possibly reduce the strength of our workforce."

Those were just words, and we have to judge a lawmaker more on what he does than what he says. But I bet a lot of voters who elected the new Senate Republican supermajority will be unhappy to learn that the man who decides which bills come to the floor for a vote has already effectively nixed a labor reform adopted by 22 other states, all of which are outperforming Michigan.

It's also possible that putting right-to-work legislation on hold is a political tactic to allow lawmakers to immediately address even more urgent fiscal matters, such as saving some \$5.7 billion annually by bringing public-sector employee benefits in line with the private sector.

The point is that voters should not take for granted that any lawmaker, once elected, will automatically do what he or she was elected to do. Watch what they do, not what they say, and don't stop watching them after the election.

The Mackinac Center is crucial to this part of the process. Only the Mackinac Center posts online the complete voting record of every lawmaker on every bill and every amendment. Only the Mackinac Center describes every bill in plain English. And only the Mackinac Center provides free, daily news coverage of the Legislature to tens of thousands of engaged citizens.

Armed with what you'll find at Michiganvotes.org, Michigan Capitol Confidential and among our two decades of policy research and commentary, you can keep your lawmakers accountable to the principles and policies you want them to support.

The Mackinac Center is dedicated first and foremost to the free-market perspective, independent of any pressure group, political party or personality. Since no one is paying us to do their bidding, we've made it a practice to ask those who already believe in free enterprise and limited government to support our work.

Paraphrasing what Milton Friedman said, it's not enough to elect the right people, because the right people will do the wrong thing if we don't change the incentives.

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