

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF October 31, 2016

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HOT HOUSE RACES

Will they stay or will they go? Who knows, but a couple of races in the House of Representative are still tight only a few days before the election.

Republicans and Democrats have spent tens of thousands in the final weeks in an effort to win a key battleground seat in Muskegon County. Incumbent State Rep. Holly Hughes, R-White River Township, is being challenged by former state Rep. Collene Lamonte, D-Montague Township, and longtime local political candidate Max Riekse, a Libertarian from Fruitport Township.

This will be the third consecutive time Hughes and Lamonte have been on the ballot against each other, with Hughes winning the 2014 race by only 53 votes over Lamonte.

Historically, the district has a relatively even split of Democrats and Republicans. The addition of right-leaning libertarian candidate Max Reiske could split the Republican vote, giving the Democrats room to gather the votes they need to take the seat.

In the 61st District, first-term Rep. Brandt Iden (R-Oshtemo Twp.) is also in a tight race with Democratic candidate John Fisher, who also ran for the seat in 2014, and newcomer Libertarian candidate Ryan Winfield.

Iden, who reportedly did not spend much time on the campaign trail in his own district over the past two years, could lose the seat to Fisher, a local pastor who has been given a lot of time and money by

Democrats. Michigan's 61st District includes the city of Portage, as well as Oshtemo, Prairie Ronde, Schoolcraft and Texas townships.

POLL SAYS VOTERS ARE AGAINST CLOSING FAILING SCHOOLS

A poll conducted by Public Opinion Strategies in early October found that 82 percent of voters “oppose closing a school based solely on standardized test scores.” The poll was released last week by the Michigan chapter of Public School Options as the discussion continues over whether the state’s School Reform Office could close schools in Detroit by the end of the year.

Controversy over whether or not the state will close any schools erupted after reports that School Reform Officer Natasha Baker mentioned this option over the summer to some districts.

The Attorney General issued an opinion on the Detroit schools reform legislation that says Detroit schools that have been low performing for the past three school year are subject to closure by the state by the year's end.

But School Reform Office spokesperson Caleb Buhs has said that even if the state were to close schools, it would be based on more than test scores. "There are a number of factors that include, but are not limited to, graduation rates, student attendance, history of performance, a viable alternative option for students,” he said.

The survey was completed from Oct. 6-9 of 600 likely voters in Michigan, with a margin of error of 4 percent.

SENATE PLANS ENERGY VOTE

Sponsors of the Senate's energy plan have distributed a substitute they believe has the support needed for its passage when they return in November.

Sens. Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek) and John Proos (R-St. Joseph), said that Senate members now have a final draft and amendments of the legislation and will vote on the final 7th Senate substitute.

If passed in the Senate, this will leave the House of Representatives the remainder of the Lame Duck session to try and reach a compromise. The House spent much of the last two years working on Energy, and tried and failed to pass an energy plan of their own last year. If it is not passed, then new lawmakers will be faced with a complicated topic and little institutional knowledge on the policy.

MM&A BRIEFS

WEATHER UNLIKELY TO AFFECT THIS YEAR’S ELECTION

With the Weather Channel reporting dry weather, above average temperatures, and no major storms predicted, it looks like the weather will be an unlikely player to detract people from coming out to the polls next Tuesday.

The national weather forecasting firm AccuWeather said that the calm weather could help boost voter turnout. "Weather was found to be, on average, nearly 20 percent of the change in voter turnout based on our analysis," said Tim Loftus, AccuWeather Business Intelligence Manager and Meteorologist.

VETERANS CARE REPORTING BILL SIGNED INTO LAW

Legislation signed into law last week by Gov. Rick Snyder ensures lawmakers will receive quarterly updates on state veteran's home staffing levels, patient complaints, the distribution of drugs, and deaths.

The legislation comes after an Auditor General report in February of this year showed questionable treatment of residents at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans.

HB 5639 requires the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans and the D.J. Jacobetti Home for Veterans in Michigan to present these numbers to the Legislature as part of the "checks and balances" of government, said bill sponsor Rep. Holly HUGHES (R-Montague).

HOUSE CHANGES START TIME TO 10 AM FOR DECEMBER SESSION

House Majority Floor Leader Aric Nesbitt announced that House sessions will begin at 10 a.m. during the last two weeks of session beginning Tuesday, Dec. 6 and Tuesday, Dec. 13.

CALENDAR OF IMPORANT EVENTS

- Nov. 8 General Election

- Nov. 11 MPHS and MPLP Election Wrap Up
 (Sponsored by Michigan Political History Society)
 Location: 3 p.m., East Lansing Marriott

- Nov. 12 Rep. Sheldon Neeley - Evening Reception
 Location: 7 p.m., Signature Chop House Grand Ballroom, Flushing

- Nov. 18 32nd Silver Bells in the City (Sponsored by Downtown Lansing, Inc.)
 Location: 5 p.m., Capitol Building, Lansing