

Horton's

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Making Omelets: *Observations on the Recent Lame-Duck Session & New Legislative Session*

By Steve Horton

“You can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs” is how the saying goes. Fair enough. But the question is: “Who is making the omelet and what recipe is used?”

Well, a few eggs were broken—so to speak—during the recent lame-duck session of the Michigan Legislature. And it was Republican lawmakers who were doing the cracking, creating dishes that served their interest—both personal and partisan. Also, many of them were getting their last chance to be in the kitchen due to their being term-limited.

In their final ‘who rah’ they stepped on a few Democratic toes and elbowed aside those who objected to their proposed legislation—those objections voiced due to the fact that a few of the bills seem to have been designed to hinder and hobble future initiatives and actions by the incoming governor, secretary of state, and attorney general (all of them Democrats).

For those leaving, the lame-duck was a last chance to put as much of a stamp as they



could on future policies and governmental direction. A final stab at creating some kind of legacy. Perhaps along the vein of telling their grandchildren some future date: “See that? I helped pass that law.”

Not least of their actions were the millions of dollars in supplemental income appropriated in the final days; money above what had been projected in the annual budget. This cash was earmarked for their preferred uses.

It was a mad rush of activity, for the three-to-four weeks leading up to Christmas; an orchestration accompanied by much controversy. Nearly 400 bills—a record number for a lame-duck session—were enacted by the two chambers—nearly all of them GOP inspired.

For the onlookers—media and interested citizens—the unfolding of events was hard to

keep track of. No lengthy debates. Little pause for feedback. The egg shells were flying.

GOV. RICK SNYDER, ALSO TERM-LIMITED, of course, had the final say. He ended up vetoing over 40 bills, tossing out those particular omelets for a variety of reasons. But, while that seems a respectable amount of due diligence, he still signed the vast majority of what came across his desk.

To his credit, the governor played no partisan favorites. He vetoed bills favored by the Right to Life and the Republican leadership, but he signed bills that school officials, campaign finance reform advocates and those wishing to preserve the current rules governing ballot initiatives had urged him to reject. He upset those who had gotten enough petition signatures to put Minimum Wage and Sick Leave proposals on the November Election ballot, only to see the Legislature adopt them with the intent of watering down both of the measures later on—which they did. His veto pen had been their last hope, albeit a futile one.

Snyder was not guiltless in pushing through last-minute legislation. In quick fashion, he reached an agreement with Enbridge Energy for that company to construct a tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac for its petroleum pipelines, then got the Legislature to approve a bill creating an authority to oversee the tunnel, and appointed three people to the commission. The concern for many folks is that, with this agreement, the 65-year-old twin pipes now resting on the bed of the Straits will remain in operation for the next few years until the tunnel is complete—increasing the possibility that a rupture might occur and an environmental nightmare will ensue.

WELL, ON NEW YEAR'S DAY the old went out and a different group took over—many returnees from both parties to be sure,

but a lot of new faces as well. And, of more consequence, for the first time in eight years Michigan has a divided government with the top four state executive offices held by Democrats and Republican majorities remaining in both the Senate and House.

I attended the inauguration of the new governor, Gretchen Whitmer, a ceremony that included the swearing in of Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, and Attorney General Dana Nessel.

This past Wednesday I was at the State Capitol to witness the 110 members of the House of Representatives take their oaths of office and heard the new Speaker of the House, Lee Chatfield, give his inaugural address.

Building bridges and inclusion were the overarching themes of the new administration, and a stated desire to work with the Legislature in reaching decisions and fashioning solutions

Those sentiments of seeking common ground and reaching across the aisle; of being bipartisan and willing to compromise were echoed by Mr. Chatfield and by the Senate Majority Leader, Dave Shirkey.

The Democratic administration is understandably eager to get in the kitchen and prepare their recipes of policy and governance. The Republicans leaders in the House and Senate have their own concoctions they plan to offer.

Let's hope those expressions of good will and a willingness to co-operate hold true and (unlike what took place in the recent lame-duck session) as few toes as possible get stepped on and sharp elbows are kept at a minimum. Let's hope the two sides will pool their talents to create dishes that nourish and sustain the citizens of Michigan.

What we don't need is a food fight—with broken eggs and lots of shells on the floor, and little else to show for it.

