

BISHOP LEAVES NO DOUBT THAT D.R.I.C. IS DEAD

Supporters of the Detroit River International Crossing blasted Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) on Thursday upon his final declaration that the Senate would not take up a bill to authorize construction of a new bridge between Detroit and Windsor.

Mr. Bishop (R-Rochester) had already essentially said twice the issue was dead in the Senate while leaving only the slightest amount of wiggle room. But Thursday, he ended all doubt.

"Here we are in the 11th hour and instead of jamming something that's not ready and something that really needs much more time, we've decided it's in everybody's interest to let the next administration move forward with it," he said. "We want to definitively say we're done with this issue and we're going to move it into the next legislative session."

That means a new bill will have to be introduced in 2011 and passed by a new cast of officials in the Capitol with Governor-elect [Rick Snyder](#), 29 new members of the Senate and 61 new members of the House. The House passed the legislation ([HB 4961](#) ■) in May, and the bill never made it out of the Transportation Committee despite considerable work on the issue by [Sen. Jud Gilbert](#) (R-Algonac), the committee chair.



Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) dumped the DRIC bill, and [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) is fuming.

[Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) has been a strong supporter of the DRIC proposal, and spokesperson Katie Carey slammed Mr. Bishop's decision.

"Mike Bishop has cemented his reputation as an obstructionist on behalf of special interests by turning his back on the one proposal before the Legislature that could put thousands of Michigan citizens to work, help boost economic development and provide a critical infrastructure improvement that Michigan job providers want and need," she said.

Mr. Bishop blamed the Department of Transportation for stalling in providing answers to questions asked by Republican senators, an accusation denied by department officials.

"We've been confronted on every level with bureaucracy and lack of action," he said.

Mr. Gilbert said running the legislation in the lame-duck session could lead to mistakes.

In May, after the House vote, Mr. Bishop promised, in comments to reporters and to Canadian officials, to hold an up-or-down vote on the legislation. But he backtracked from that commitment, saying MDOT had not followed through on its commitments.

"I've said all along that if we don't get answers to questions, we can't move forward," he said.

The owner of the Ambassador Bridge, Manuel "Matty" Moroun, has fiercely resisted the DRIC, saying it would put his privately owned span out of business when he's prepared to build a replacement for the Ambassador with more lanes with his own funds. His family has contributed nearly \$400,000 this year to political action committees and candidates, a significant portion of which either went to PACs controlled by Mr. Bishop, to PACs helping Senate Republicans or Mr. Bishop's unsuccessful attorney general campaign or directly to Senate Republican candidate committees.

But Mr. Bishop denied such donations played any role in his decision.

"I'll tell you what, if I saw members changing their position on this issue as a result of a contribution, I would be concerned about it," he said. "But the Senate has been very clear and has taken a very strong stand about this DRIC. We've been fighting the expenditures on this DRIC for as long as I've been here."

Mr. Bishop continued, "People accept contributions from several different sources. We vote on multiple issues. I've never, since I've been here, seen anybody in my caucus - I speak for my caucus - ever bought and sold on an issue. There's not enough money on this Earth for that to happen. You can track the contributions, but in the end, when it comes down to it, those contributions did not have an impact on the position that folks have taken on the issue itself."

But Sarah Hubbard of the Detroit Regional Chamber, a strong supporter of DRIC, said the Moroun family's efforts were key, between money, organizing protests in the Capitol and taking aggressive legal action.

"That's just the public money you found," she said of the disclosed political donations. "Outside of even the money, they've had significant influence on the process."

The Detroit International Bridge Company, which owns the Ambassador, did not respond to a request for comment on Mr. Bishop's announcement.

Ms. Hubbard voiced dismay at Mr. Bishop's decision.

"There are several senators on both sides of the aisle who are very supportive of moving this project forward, but there's always been concern on the part of Mike Bishop," she said. "It requires a legislator to really engage to understand this issue fully. You can't understand it at just the talking points level."

Ms. Hubbard credited Mr. Gilbert for taking such an in-depth approach. As for the future, Ms. Hubbard said the Detroit Chamber would continue its efforts.

"We believe if people take the time to understand the issues, they'll understand why it's so important," she said.

Attempts to reach Canadian officials were unsuccessful, but they were reportedly furious with Mr. Bishop's decision. Canada has pushed hard for DRIC, even committing to paying the state's share of the cost, an amount that would eventually be repaid through tolls.

"They thought they were very close to a piece of legislation that answered everybody's concerns," said Tom Shields, spokesperson for the pro-DRIC coalition.

WHITMER VOWS VIBRANT MINORITY CAUCUS

Senate Minority Leader-elect [Gretchen Whitmer](#) of East Lansing said Tuesday upon her unanimous election to lead the Senate Democratic caucus that Democrats are anxious to work with majority Republicans and Governor-elect [Rick Snyder](#) on the major issues facing the state, but also would fight for issues if the GOP blocks them.

Ms. Whitmer, beginning her second full term, was chosen by the 12 Democrats elected to the Senate for the 2011-14 term and will be the first woman to lead a Senate caucus. It will be a daunting challenge because Republicans have a 26-12 margin, a two-thirds supermajority that deprives Democrats of some procedural tools and the most lopsided Senate since the GOP had a 28-4 edge in the 1947-48 term.

"I do not plan on throwing bombs. I do not plan on capitulating either," Ms. Whitmer said after the vote. "I plan on being an active member of this body and leader of this caucus so that we can problem solve."



Senate Minority Leader-elect Gretchen Whitmer and Senate Minority Floor Leader-elect Tupac Hunter.

Senate Democrats also elected [Sen. Tupac Hunter](#) of Detroit as minority floor leader. Ms. Whitmer succeeds outgoing Senate [Minority Leader Mike Prusi](#) of Ishpeming, and Mr. Hunter replaces Senate [Minority Floor Leader Buzz Thomas](#) of Detroit, both of whom are leaving office in January because of term limits. [Sen. Glenn Anderson](#) of Westland had also been running for the top post, but bowed out and nominated Ms. Whitmer.

Other caucus leadership positions likely will be chosen next week.

Ms. Whitmer, who said she did not anticipate running for statewide office in 2014, said voters clearly want the political parties to work together and that is what she will seek with the new Senate majority leader and Mr. Snyder.

"We're eager to work with him and so long as the endgame is to put people to work and to ensure that we're educating our kids and making Michigan a better place to live, we've got a lot in common," she said.

Ms. Whitmer downplayed the loss of being able to withhold immediate effect on bills.

"Immediate effect was only ever held very rarely and frankly most of the stuff that comes out of here is unanimous," she said, adding, "The relevance will be in the fact that we've got some of the greatest minds in the chamber sitting on the Democratic side."

After growing up in East Lansing and Grand Rapids, Ms. Whitmer graduated from Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in communications. She then obtained her law degree from what was then called the Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University. She practiced law at the Dickinson Wright firm in Lansing.

In 2000, Ms. Whitmer won a hard-fought Democratic primary and then an equally heated general election contest for the state House. After winning re-election in 2002 and 2004 without difficulty, Ms. Whitmer won a special election for the 23rd Senate District in 2006, a full term later that year and then re-election on Tuesday.

Ms. Whitmer has a number of major tasks ahead.

She will have to work with the next Senate majority leader - Republican senators will pick either [Sen. Randy Richardville](#) of Monroe or Sen.-elect [John Proos](#) of St. Joseph on Tuesday - to try to preserve Democratic numbers on committees. Republicans may want to make the committee margins more lopsided to reflect their stronger majority.

The 12 Senate Democrats also are looking at a heavy load of committee assignments because of their reduced number. Most of the caucus will likely not only be on the Appropriations Committee and the minority vice chair of at least one Appropriations subcommittee, but also serving as minority vice chairs on policy committees.

Ms. Whitmer will have to plot a strategy to put Democrats in a position to end what, by 2014, will be a 31-year streak as the minority party in the Senate and seven consecutive election defeats. Taking majority in 2014 is almost impossible; Democrats would need to gain eight seats, and just four of the nine seats that will open that year with no incumbent running are competitive (three Republican, one Democrat). However, taking those three Republican seats would at least position Democrats to make a push for majority again in 2018.

She will have to address fundraising for the caucus, difficult enough in the minority, but especially difficult without a governor of the same party to serve as a fundraising generator. Senate Republicans raised more than twice what Senate Democrats did and that advantage was deployed to devastating effect in this year's elections.

"I think we'll start building," she said. "I don't know if it will happen overnight in one election."

Ms. Whitmer said the caucus's agenda would be similar, but, "Maybe it's how we talk about it and how we educate the public about what it means to them individually."

Of the historic nature of being the first woman to lead a Senate caucus - and in most of the 1970s, not a single woman served in the entire Senate - Ms. Whitmer noted the number of women in the Senate has dropped from a high of 12 to four next term.

"It's important to have representative government and having women in government, making decisions, is enormously important," she said. "I think we're going to pay a price in terms of the quality of the public policy."

BISHOP SAYS SENATE TO ADJOURN DEC. 2

There appear to be just five session days remaining for the Senate before adjourning for the remainder of the term.

Senate [Majority Leader Mike Bishop](#) (R-Rochester) said Thursday the Senate would hold its last voting session of the 96th Legislature on December 2. That would leave only the sine die adjournment session near the end of the month.

"Lame duck in my experience is the worst time to conduct public policy," he said

Mr. Bishop said the Senate would stick to budget implementation legislation and also would look at reviving the Sunday liquor sales bill that [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) vetoed because of other provisions in the legislation.

"There is a renewed discussion on that issue, and I expect that that will be something we'll take up," he said.

PUNDIT CONSENSUS: AN UNSTOPPABLE G.O.P. WAVE

Republicans were destined for a huge year in the 2010 elections because of the backlash toward President Barack Obama, the Democrat-controlled Congress and [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#), several analysts and officials said Thursday at the biennial "Pundit Summit" to assess the year's election.

The wave was exacerbated by the implosion of the Democratic gubernatorial field with the surprise withdrawal from the race of [Lt. Governor John Cherry Jr.](#), leaving the party scrambling for a replacement candidate with little time to set up a campaign and introduce himself to voters. Another major contributing factor was the financial juggernaut assembled by the Republican Party, combined with liberal billionaire Jon Stryker's reduced financial support for Democrats, that resulted in a lopsided GOP financial advantage.

"I don't think there is anything that any Democrat could have done regardless of who that Democrat is," said Bernie Porn, president of the Lansing polling firm EPIC/MRA.

The analysts also criticized poor messaging by the Democratic gubernatorial nominee, [Virg Bernero](#), and his labor allies. They spent their money tearing down House [Speaker Andy Dillon](#) in the party's primary and attempting to tear down Governor-elect [Rick Snyder](#) instead of introducing the unknown Mr. Bernero in a positive way.

Mr. Bernero's woes were obvious when he ran an ad appealing to voters supporting abortion rights, a traditional part of the Democratic base that he should have had locked up, said Tom Shields, president of the Republican consulting firm Marketing Resource Group.

"You knew at that point in time he was really in trouble," he said.

And Dianne Byrum, the former House Democratic leader who currently is at the Democratic political consulting firm Byrum Fisk, said the Democratic base was simply not motivated to vote.

Joan Fabiano, a leading tea party organizer, said the election represented a repudiation of liberal policies.

Of Mr. Snyder, the analysts said over and over that he had the perfect profile as an outsider, combined with personal wealth to fund his primary campaign and displayed remarkable message discipline.

There also was discussion of the competitive Republican primary and Mr. Rustem shared an interesting observation when the panelists were asked whether Right to Life of Michigan and the Michigan Chamber of Commerce erred in endorsing [Attorney General Mike Cox](#) when others in the field also met the group's endorsement criteria.

"I'm a regular contributor to the Chamber PAC," Mr. Rustem said. "My wife wouldn't let me contribute prior to the primary because they had made a decision she didn't like. I think that situation played out in more than just my family. I didn't think he was going to win. And he had a little baggage, particularly with women. My wife made it very clear to me that I was not to contribute until after the primary."

A number of political advertisements were shown during the event and probably the one that won the most praise was the "Kelly and Young/Young and Kelly" ad that the Republican Party aired heavily that appeared key to the victories of Supreme Court [Justice Robert Young Jr.](#) and Justice-elect [Mary Beth Kelly](#).

"Not a particularly stunning ad, but it really built name ID," said Robert LaBrant of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. "That was almost indispensable to their success in 2010."

Mr. LaBrant said the Republican financial juggernaut also was huge, crediting Republican Party Chair Ron Weiser and party finance chair Bob Schostak.

"Ron Weiser just wants to be on a cell phone and raise money," he said. "And raise money he did."

FILM EXECS WARN CASSIS CHANGING CREDIT KILLS INDUSTRY

Changes to Michigan's controversial film credit to make it any less generous means the growing film production industry will die, industry executives said at a hearing before the Senate Finance Committee on Thursday.

But committee chair [Sen. Nancy Cassis](#) (R-Novi), the most persistent legislative critic of the credit, said legislation she has introduced is not intended to "wreck this film incentive train. We're here to put it on the right course going in the right direction."

She also blasted the news media, saying it had been consistently biased and misleading in reporting on the issue.



[Sen. Nancy Cassis](#) continues to push curbs to the film credit.

Ms Cassis introduced on Thursday [SB 1571](#), [SB 1572](#) and [SB 1573](#), which would put a cap on the state's 42 percent film credit and eventually phase it out, put an additional credit on actual construction of studios and film offices, and make other changes to the credits.

Ms. Cassis said her proposal would be in keeping with Governor-elect [Rick Snyder](#) who has said he would like to see changes to the credit.

The hearing itself did not deal specifically with the bills, but was held largely because Ms. Cassis had promised executives from the film industry that she would hear them after holding an earlier hearing on a study completed by the Senate Fiscal Agency. That study said the credit had netted the state just a few million dollars in tax revenues and cost it more than \$100 million in credits.

But Jim Burnstein, vice chair of the Film Office Advisory Council as well as a screenwriter, was the first to testify and his testimony typified many of the comments from witnesses (many of whom were people in their 20s who testified that without the credit they would have left Michigan for either Los Angeles or New York).

Conducting a financial study of the credit when it had only been in place for two years does not allow the credit to make a good case for itself, Mr. Burnstein said. The state should allow the credits to operate for five years before conducting a financial study, just as Louisiana did.

He also disagreed with some of the characterizations in the SFA study. For example, the study said few full-time jobs were created in the industry, but Mr. Burnstein said that ignored the nature of the

industry, which typically pays very well for relatively short-term work. While he has been a screenwriter since 1989, under the SFA definition he would not be considered employed full-time, "and I would add Brad Pitt would be similarly underemployed."

The credit has brought Michigan publicity and interest far and away beyond what the Pure Michigan campaign has done, Mr. Burnstein said.

And, with the credit, the outward migration pattern of young film workers "stopped overnight," he said.

Changing the credit at this point, said Ken Droz, a film consultant who used to handle public affairs for the Michigan Film Office, would send a message to the industry that Michigan could not be trusted and hurt production projects in the state.

But Ms. Cassis said she is charged with ensuring the state had an "equitable, fair and balanced tax policy."

The credit is not really a credit, she said, but a subsidy and it is the largest subsidy for any industry in the state.

And while she said she was glad the credit had resulted in some jobs being created, she also said the jobs were not enough to make up for the thousands of jobs lost in the state over the past years.

She also challenged members of the industry, saying they had provided anecdotes only, not hard data that would prove the credit was actually helping the state.

Ms. Cassis said the committee would meet on the film credits at another time.

SNYDER STARTS TRANSITION WEBSITE

A new website with information on Governor-elect [Rick Snyder](#) and a spot to apply for a job on the transition team was unveiled on Thursday.

The website, www.governorelectricksnyder.com, was open for business several days earlier than anticipated. Mr. Snyder had said at a press conference on Wednesday that he thought it would be up next week.

On the site's homepage, Mr. Snyder says reviewing applications submitted at the site is one way he would select the team to help with the transition as he prepares to take office.

The site has spots for people to apply as Cabinet directors and agency heads as well as inner staff in the administration. In terms of inner staff, the site is looking for administrative personnel, communications staff, scheduling staff, legislative affairs and policy staff.

N.R.C. LOOKING TO MARKET PASSPORT

State officials will have to wait until next week to find out how many of the new Parks Passports have been sold and until January to determine what the actual reception to the idea, but officials were already working to expand the number of people paying the additional \$10 when they renew their license plates.

Officials told the State Parks Citizens Advisory Committee that the first monthly report on the passport sales was due next month, but said those sales would not represent true buy-in on the plan because license renewal forms including the passport option were not prepared until after some residents had already renewed their plates.

"The first couple of months of this are very skewed," said Ron Olson, chief of the Parks Division. "The month of December will be the first full month that we have gone through that will not be skewed."

But members of the commission and Parks Division staff discussed a number of plans for building support for the passports, particularly in urban areas. Officials noted that preliminary numbers showed, for instance, that Wayne County was behind the rest of the state in sales of the passports.

Much of the discussion surrounded making people aware of the passport option and what it provides. Several people said they had heard questions about what parks are covered by the passports.

Officials with the Department of State said the branch offices do have lists of parks available, but Grace Ueberroth with the department's Customer Service Administration said she did not know if their were sufficient supplies to provide copies of the lists to all visitors.

The departments are currently discussing providing not only lists of the parks, but a full welcome packet that would include brochures for parks near the branch office.

Officials said there were also indications that driving more license renewals to the Internet would also drive more sales of the passports. Officials said the preliminary figures showed twice as many people purchased a passport when they renewed on the website than when they renewed at a branch office or by mail.

Committee members also urged the departments to work together on training for branch office staff. One member indicated a person with whom he worked in purchasing his passport seemed annoyed that he was asking questions about it.

But committee members and staff also acknowledged that selling the passports was not a primary task for the branch office staff and the departments need to provide them as much support as possible.

OFFICIALS SAY NAVY CONTRACT COULD MEAN 3,000 JOBS

A new contract for construction of Navy combat ships in Marinette, Wisconsin, could result in as many as 3,000 Michigan residents getting jobs, [Governor Jennifer Granholm](#) and other officials said Thursday.

The U.S. Navy announced it had awarded Marinette Marine-Fincantieri a contract to build 10 littoral combat vessels. The ships are designed to navigate and fight in shallow waters, and are seen by some experts as added defense tool to fight terrorists and pirates in some locales.

Marinette is directly across the Menominee River from Menominee in the Upper Peninsula, and residents of the two cities patronize each other's businesses and amenities.

Ms. Granholm, along with [U.S. Sen. Carl Levin](#) (D-Detroit) and [U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak](#) (D-Menominee) said the project could mean as many as 3,000 Michigan residents would work on the construction of the vessels as well as other jobs. They also said as many as 50 Michigan companies could act as suppliers to the project.

STATE BANS ALCOHOLIC ENERGY DRINKS

All alcoholic energy drinks will now be banned from Michigan. The state's Liquor Control Commission on Thursday issued an order rescinding previous approval of the beverages.

Under the order, all manufacturers and retailers will have 30 days to remove all alcoholic-based energy drinks from store shelves and the state.

Because there is not enough research on the potential effects of the drinks, and since alcohol is now considered the most abused substance by young people, LCC Chair Nida Samona said until there is ample research showing the beverages are safe, they should be kept off Michigan shelves and away from consumers.

CAPITAL NOTEBOOK

CHRISTMAS TREE: The official state Christmas tree is set to arrive over the weekend. The 60-foot blue spruce, donated by Rudy and Ruth Maki of Iron Mountain, was cut Friday and is scheduled to be delivered in front of the Capitol at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday.

As has been recent tradition, the tree will be lit November 19 as part of Lansing's Silver Bells in the City celebration.

CONSUMERS REFUND: Consumers Energy will have to refund \$4.25 million, annualized, to its customers, the difference between its recently implemented rate increase and the \$145.7 million increase the Public Service Commission approved Thursday ([case No. U-16191](#)).

TOP FARMERS: Michigan farmers lead the nation in adoption of federal food safety guidelines, the Michigan Department of Agriculture announced this week. Some 300 audits were completed under the federal U.S. Department of Agriculture's Good Agricultural Practices program last fiscal year.

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENCY CALENDAR

Monday, November 8

Employment Relations Commission, Bureau of Employment Relations, 1375 S. Washington Ave., Lansing, 10 a.m. ([Agenda](#))

Tuesday, November 9

Board of Residential Builders and Maintenance and Alteration Contractors, Room 1, 2501 Woodlake Circle, Okemos, 9 a.m. ([Agenda](#))