



The Insider

www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski

Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10

January 23, 2009

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

Mickey's Blog

A Scottish Funeral

Death came suddenly to Janet Heaney. She had lived in Glasgow, Scotland for 90 years before passing quietly in an infirmary bed. Her daughter Catherine and son-in-law Brian and grandchildren Christopher, Monica and Rosalind kept vigil.

Her youngest daughter, my wife Roma, took the call the night before. Jenny had been given the last rites, my brother-in-law Brian told her. She might not last the night, or she could hold on for a week. But Death was near. Roma, our son Liam, my sister-in-law Helena, and I packed hurriedly and caught the next flight out of Detroit for Glasgow. Jenny died while we were in the air.

Janet McPhee was born in 1918, the 2nd of 6 children. She grew up in the rough and tumble of shipbuilding Glasgow, then the greatest city in the world. She worked in a Gentlemen's Outfitters store in the Gorbals, the toughest part of Glasgow, a job she loved and a community she cherished for the rest of her days.

She met her late husband Harry after a blind date was arranged over the phone. She hid in the house and instructed a friend to send him away if he had red hair or if he was not tall enough. For his part, Harry gave her a false name until they had dated several times. They married during the war, and went on to have five children, including Gerald, a teacher and professional soccer player, Helena, the best constituent aide in Lansing, Robert, a surveyor, Catherine, a teacher, and Roma, a university administrator and Unchallenged Master of 31412 Gay Street.

These children and her 12 grandchildren were the focus of her life. Harry was a distinguished public official, working as a Rutherglen Town Councilor, Rent Officer, and Justice of the Peace. While he lived to serve others, Jenny lived to serve her family. With Harry away at meetings, Jenny cooked and cleaned and tried her best to control 5 rambunctious kids.

“I never got my highers,” Jenny would always say, referring to her limited formal education, but she was nobody’s fool. She was the hardest working person I have ever seen. When she’d come to America to visit, she used to clean the house all day, till late at night, every day. Well into her 80s, she would clean our house spotless, and then take on major projects, like organizing all the canned goods in the pantry, or meticulously folding and arranging the linen closet.

No job was too big. It took the Good Lord 6 days to tame Leviathan and bring order to Chaos. But Jenny organized my basement and cleared out my garage in 2 days each, and with all due respect to the Almighty, her task was tougher, and she did a better job of it.

People used to try to lure her away from me, but neither I nor Liam would ever permit it. In her eyes, we could do no wrong. When I would come home from golfing, she would chastise Roma, saying “Michael, go lie down on the couch. You must be exhausted. Roma, get that poor boy a cup of tea.” Jenny became a big high school basketball fan, thrilling to the spectacle of the halftime dance teams and cheerleader acrobatics. She loved the stores in America. And she loved being with her grandson and took great pride in all his achievements on and off the soccer field.

One time she came into Liam’s room and sat contentedly watching him play his FIFA video soccer game for a good 10 minutes. The game is like Madden Football, complete with announcers and crowd noises and instant replays, and Liam was playing the big Glasgow Derby, Celtic against Rangers, Catholics against Protestants, which is a national event in Scotland.

Finally Jenny, thinking the game was real, said to Liam, “Why didn’t you tell me the game was on?”

She got the chance to meet Governor Granholm a few years ago at a bill signing ceremony in Lansing. “You are much more beautiful in person,” she told the Governor. “and you are so much nicer than Mrs. Thatcher.” For a moment Granholm forgot the pressures of being Governor, threw her head back and laughed like she hadn’t in years.

Janet Heaney was the most genuine, guileless person imaginable. How could you not love her?

Jenny had been in declining health her last year. She began to suffer from dementia and fell and broke her hip. She was recuperating in a nursing home, but Brian and Catherine and their kids got her out and brought her to their house on Christmas Day. After initially protesting, she came along and was like the Jenny of old. She was sharp and conversant, and they had a fantastic day together before taking her back that evening.

During the night, Jenny fell ill, probably from an obstruction in her bowel. Too weak to survive an operation, her powerful heart finally gave out and she returned to the Lord on December 29th.

By coincidence, Harry’s brother Terry had passed without warning two days before Christmas, so we were able to attend his funeral also upon our arrival in Scotland. Jenny’s funeral followed a few days later.

Brian did a great job organizing the funeral in the traditional Scottish Catholic way. Jenny’s grandsons Neil and Christopher McKenna, Christopher Heaney, and Liam, and her sons Gerald and Robert joined with her sons-in-law and nephews in bringing Jenny to her final resting place. We brought her body back to Brian and Catherine’s house, and family and friends came to pay their respects and enjoy a cup of tea. We prayed the rosary there two nights, and then we carried her coffin, a plain wooden box, out of the house and took it to the church, leaving it in front of the altar overnight.

In the morning we celebrated the funeral Mass, and Gerald and Brian gave fine eulogies to Jenny. We physically carried the coffin out again on our shoulders and then lowered it into the ground with ropes, in the same lair where Harry was buried 12 years ago. We each took handfuls of dirt and threw it on the casket. I will remember that image for the rest of my days.

Jenny and Harry's dust will mingle together in the ground, and those left behind will remember both of them fondly. We concluded our affairs and prepared to return to Michigan. My brother Matthew called the night before our flight home with some welcome news. He and his wife are expecting their 3rd child this September. The sadness of Jenny's death was replaced with joy for the coming of a new child.

The news would have pleased Jenny most of all.

May she rest in peace.

Mickey's Ends and Notes

2008 LEGISLATIVE RECAP

Battery Production Subsidies

Last month, the Michigan Legislature voted to pass House Bill 6611 which will offer up to \$335 million in investment incentives for the development and manufacture of lithium-ion and other high-tech batteries used to power hybrid and electric vehicles. By instituting these incentives, Michigan will have the tools to retain its status as car capital of the world. This effort will also help jumpstart our economy, bringing in millions of dollars of investment and creating hundreds of jobs.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed the legislation Wednesday at the North American International Auto Show. Also, earlier this week General Motors Corp. said it would assemble batteries to power the Chevy Volt in Michigan. Engineers have said the Volt - which would be able to travel 40 miles using electric charge - is on track to be released in 2010.

Renewable Energy Package

One of the biggest legislative accomplishments in 2008 was the passage of the renewable energy package, a bipartisan effort that will stimulate job growth, promote use of renewable energy resources, and save ratepayers \$4.3 billion in future energy costs. This legislation will help encourage new investment in our state, which will in turn create thousands of new jobs in renewable energy fields.

Great Lakes Compact

This legislation is the most comprehensive set of water protections in the Great Lakes region and includes enacting the Great Lakes Water Resources Compact. It also establishes regulatory standards for large water withdrawals and bans significant diversions from Michigan water. The Great Lakes are extremely valuable to our economy and people, and the passage of this legislation truly marks a historical moment for Michigan.

Film Tax Credits

Early in 2008, the Senate passed a 16-bill package of incentives designed to attract the film industry to Michigan. The bicameral, bipartisan package includes credits of up to 42 percent for hiring Michigan residents. Since the passage of these investment incentives, 25 films have been produced in Michigan, creating over \$100 million in revenue. One of them is in theaters now - Clint Eastwood's "Gran Torino," which was filmed in Detroit. State film officials recently announced that they are on the verge of sealing an \$80 million development deal that would create three film and television production studios in southeast Michigan.

PRIORITIES FOR THE 95th LEGISLATURE

There are still many issues that need to be addressed this year by the Michigan Legislature, with the most important being job creation. With unemployment rates up and our economy suffering, we need to pass legislation that focuses on job creation, increases investment and attracts businesses to our state. As a state, we must continue to work together in efforts to rebuild Michigan's economy one step at a time. Turning the economy around by creating job growth will also help address the foreclosure issue that has hit many of our neighbors, which is an issue that I have followed closely and written about previously (<http://www.senate.mi.gov/dem/Newsletters/10/Nov-7-2008.pdf>)

There has been discussion of property tax reform and a repeal of a business tax surcharge enacted in 2007. Another issue that is expected to be taken up this term is the creation of smoke-free workplaces. As you may know, the legislature debated smoke-free legislation throughout 2008 but was unable to reach a compromise, necessitating the bills to be reintroduced this year for reconsideration. The Senate version of the bill called for all workplaces to be smoke-free while the House version allowed for smoking in Detroit casinos and in businesses geared towards smoking such as cigar bars. The current law won't change unless both chambers agree on the same version of legislation.

Pharmaceutical immunity is another issue expected to come up in 2009. The legislature needs to take action and repeal Michigan's 1995 drug immunity law shielding pharmaceutical makers from product liability lawsuits. Legislation has been repeatedly introduced that would do just that by helping those who have been hurt by defective prescription drugs like Vioxx, which caused heart attacks in up to 139,000 Americans. Michigan is the only place where drug companies are not held to the same consumer-protection standards that other businesses are and it's important that we change this and hold companies accountable for dangerous drugs.

DTE ENERGY AND CONSUMERS ENERGY OFFER UTILITY BILL ASSISTANCE

With winter upon us, it's important that we prepare ourselves and our houses for the colder weather. DTE Energy and Consumers Energy offer a number of programs to help customers with their energy bills.

Payment assistance programs offered to customers include:

- Medical emergencies program to postpone shutoffs in the event of a medical issue;
- Shutoff protection plan to spread future bills out over the year and to include equal monthly payments on an unpaid balance in order to avoid a shutoff.

Some consumers and all senior citizens regardless of their income also qualify for DTE Energy's Winter Protection Plan. This program protects seniors and low-income customers from shutoff between November 1 and March 31. During this period, customers must pay a portion of their estimated annual bill plus regular payments on any past-due bills. After March 31, the required bill payments will increase to cover winter bills.

Many assistance programs are available by calling 2-1-1 at United Way. Programs that are available include:

- Low-income weatherization that includes caulking, weather stripping, and insulation;
- THAW, the Heat and Warmth Fund, which helps people facing a shutoff and who have exhausted all federal and state funding programs. Visit: <http://www.thawfund.org/>.

You may also wish to take steps this season to reduce the amount of energy that your household uses in order to offset the usual increase in utility bills that comes with colder weather. The U.S. Department of Energy has developed a useful guide with suggestions on how to reduce your energy consumption that they have made available online at: <http://www.energysavers.gov/>.

There is also the State Emergency Relief Program to help with paying energy bills. This program can be accessed through your local Department of Human Services office or the Energy Assistance Hotline at 800-292-5650. Additional information about this program can be found at: <http://www.michigan.gov/heatingassistance/0,1607,7-215-33211-105989--,00.html>.

JANUARY IS MICHIGAN MENTORING MONTH

Governor Granholm recently designated January as Michigan Mentoring Month, a designation that coincides with the national celebration of mentoring month, which calls on volunteers across the state to mentor in 2009. Mentoring is simple and can make a huge difference in a person's life. There are many children and young adults waiting to be matched with a caring adult in Michigan. For more information on mentoring, call 2-1-1 or visit <http://www.mentormichigan.com>.

OFIR RECOVERS RECORD \$17 MILLION FOR MICHIGAN CONSUMERS IN 2008

Michigan was the first state to coordinate regulation of financial institutions, insurance, and securities industries under the federal Financial Services Modernization Act of 1999. The Office of Financial and Insurance Regulation (OFIR) is charged with this mission in its capacity as a component of the Department of Energy, Labor, & Economic Growth. This month, Commissioner Ken Ross announced that OFIR has recovered \$17,487,531 on behalf of Michigan consumers in 2008. The recoveries are the result of 7,113 complaints resolved by the agency during the year. OFIR staff answered nearly 110,000 consumer calls in 2008 and has answered more than 1 million calls since the agency's inception. Michigan consumers can call OFIR toll-free at (877) 999-6442.

GRANHOLM SIGNS LIGHT RAIL LEGISLATION INTO LAW

Recently, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm signed a legislative package into law that will help pave the way for development of a light rail transit system along Woodward Avenue in Detroit. This new legislation sets the stage for continued development of mass transit systems across the state and will help boost Michigan's economy and create new jobs.

START OFF THE NEW YEAR BY TESTING YOUR HOME FOR RADON

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is reminding all homeowners to start the New Year off right by testing their home for radon. Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas found in almost any kind of soil or rock and is believed to be the second leading cause of lung cancer and the leading cause among nonsmokers. It is tasteless, odorless, and colorless. Nearly one in eight Michigan homes could have a radon problem, and the only way to know if your home has such a problem is to have it tested.

The DEQ is partnering with local health departments to make sure these test kits are affordable and available in every county this year. Most local health departments offer the kits for \$15 or less, and many will be selling them at discounted prices during the month of January. Radon tests should be done in the lowest livable level of the home during the cooler months of the year, when windows and doors are normally kept closed. If the test indicates an elevated radon level, more testing should be done to confirm the problem and appropriate actions taken to reduce the levels when needed.

To find out more about radon, visit the DEQ website www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3310_4105_4196---,00.html or call the DEQ Radon Program at 1-800-RADON-GAS (1-800-723-6642) for a free packet of information.

Coffee Hours

*In response to requests from constituents, I have added coffee hours in Roseville and during the daytime. Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

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| <p>January 26, 2009 1:30-2:30 p.m.</p> <p>Location: Bigby Coffee (26740 Gratiot, south of I-696) Roseville</p> | <p>February 23, 2009 7-8 p.m.</p> <p>Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library (35891 Gratiot) Clinton Township</p> |
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Mickey's TV Insider Show

Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

Sterling Heights

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Clinton Township

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Utica

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

Roseville

Various Times-check local listings
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

Contact My Office

Website: <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski>

Email: senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov

*Please note that the district office phone lines have not been installed yet but are expected to be up and running by the middle of next week. The phone and fax numbers were provided by the phone company.

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