

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Republican Justice Betty Weaver Continues Uphill Term Limits Battle

There will be no quiet fade for maverick Republican Justice Betty Weaver, who postponed indefinitely her announced 2005 resignation from the

Michigan Supreme Court in order to press her uphill fight for term limits and other major changes affecting the court.

The self-described "common

sense, independent and self-disciplined judicial thinker" outlined her revised ideas last week – just after having yet another dust-up with the other four Republicans on the seven-member court.

In revealing draft language Friday for a constitutional amendment providing that a justice could not be appointed or elected to more than one eight-year term, she said: "It should be limited to eight years across the board – for justices, governors, senators, and representatives."

Under an amendment approved overwhelmingly (and regretfully, in my view) by voters in 1992, a governor, secretary of state, attorney general, or senator is limited to two four-year terms. House members get only three two-year terms, which is as limiting as it gets in any of the 15 states with term limits.

The Michigan Chamber of Commerce leads a commendable effort to extend the limits on representatives to eight years. But reality is that there's no public clamor for change, and it would be tough to get any term limit proposal on the November 5 ballot – whether by the Legislature or by public petition.

Still, Weaver is correct that the current system of selecting justices needs improving; there's far too much money involved in the process, and having justices running on the non-partisan ballot with a designation as "incumbent" gives an advantage that amounts to a "fixed" election.

I would add that the current system of partisan conventions nominating candidates for the nonpartisan ballot is a mockery.

Weaver, while out of sync with other Republicans on the court (they ousted her as chief justice in 2001 and she was the lone vote against current Chief Justice Cliff Taylor), is not the first Republican justice to call for change. The late Chief Justice Jim Brickley and ex-Justice Bob Griffin, both of Traverse City, were among them.

Under Weaver's proposal, there would continue to be an election for Supreme Court positions every two years. In filling vacancies, a governor

"would be required to consider nonbinding recommendations from a judicial qualifications commission" that would be established by statute.

Weaver, a former Leelanau County probate judge and ex-Court of Appeals judge whose sprawling district included all of the Upper Peninsula, has been working with Senator Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau) on getting the Supreme Court language slotted into whatever term-limits deliberations the Senate may take up.

While Weaver originally talked of a 14-year limit for justices, McManus said Friday Weaver's latest idea "is something I'd look at. She's on the right track."

However, McManus wisely emphasized the key is to get others to sign on – "You can't be a Lone Ranger running up the hill."

Weaver was a Lone Republican Ranger last week when Chief Justice Taylor and Justice Stephan Markman refused to disqualify themselves from a case involving a plaintiff with a case against the State of Michigan – whose lawyer, Attorney General Mike Cox, has hired the wives of Taylor and Markman for matters unrelated to the case.

Weaver's spats with the other Republicans usually simmer out of public view, but in this case the court issued statements from

all justices. On the issue of appearance of conflict, Weaver said Taylor and Markman "make a misleading and disingenuous suggestion that public opinion regarding when a justice should participate where his or her spouse works for a legal representative of a party is to be found in the electoral process."

As the *Lansing State Journal* noted, Weaver properly argues the court lacks clear procedures upon which the court should determine when a justice should step aside.

When I asked her when she'd really retire before her term expires in 2011, (as she originally said last October) she said: "I will leave when I feel I have done what I can."

Leaving this year would give Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm a high court appointment – a prod for the GOP-ruled Legislature to at least listen to Battling Betty and extend the dialogue for possible change.

Up North Lawmakers

It's no surprise that Northern Michigan's congressmen split on reaction to President Bush's State of the Union Address last week. Democrat Bart Stupak of Menominee groused; applauding were Pete Hoekstra of Holland and Dave Camp of Midland, whose idea on an

**Please turn to page 23*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Breakwall Would Be 'Gross Visual Intrusion'

To the Editor:

The article in December 1, 2005 *The St. Ignace News* regarding the proposed building of a 950-foot long third breakwall in the Mackinac Island harbor was distressing. I realize this step is only a feasibility study, but I want everyone to keep in mind the potential devastating effects this project could bring to those who love Mackinac.

As past harbormaster of the Mackinac Island marina, I have a firsthand working knowledge of the perils a southeasterly wind can present to boaters. A third breakwall may certainly ease these troubles. But as a lover of Mackinac, the thought of the breakwall saddens me. One only has to visit Presque Isle harbor to see why. The breakwall they are requesting on Mackinac would have to be a massive structure to be effective – a gross visual intrusion. Envision sitting in Marquette Park and only being able to see the tops of the trees on Round Island.

I encourage those involved to go down and stand on the shore of the Presque Isle marina to see what effect such a project might have on the aesthetics of the harbor and the Island. I empathize with the boaters facing a good southeasterly, but looking at the larger picture, retaining the beauty of Mackinac for the generations to come is much more important for the city council to consider.

Lauren Seebom Petoskey

around to one of these teachers, call us at school. They are willing to work for an employer that can provide reasonable year-around housing. Can you help??

Thank you.

Barbara D. Fisher

Get Involved in Island's Future

To the Editor:

Year-around residents of Mackinac Island, please take a minute over the next few weeks to tell a member of the Master Plan Committee how you feel about the future of Mackinac. Many tell me they feel it is hopeless, but if we work hard together it will NOT be hopeless. I am a believer in having a good, strong master plan that, beyond all the statistics and Island facts, can have goals that are often reviewed and updated. In my mind, Mackinac Island is confined in space and very limited in wastewater capacity, therefore, we must prepare to limit our growth and expansion. We must protect our Island and our green space. They are much more important than the mighty dollar. If we are not careful, we will lose part of our uniqueness by not preparing for the future.

Contact a member of the committee and tell them how you feel. Committee members are Lorna Straus, Bob Brown, Mike Hart, Mary Dufina, Dan Wightman, Phil Porter, Kay Hoppenrath, Margaret Doud, Smi Horn, and myself, Barbara Fisher.

The City Council and Planning Commission need to update the Master Plan, correct the zoning ordinance, and fight to keep our Island a year-around community.

Barbara D. Fisher

Two Teachers Need Housing

To the Editor:

We have two new teachers at our school with families that are facing the age old problem on Mackinac of affordable housing. These teachers and their children are important to our school and to our community and this summer they have no place to live. As all of us know, moving on and off the Island by the season is not a fun thing to do, especially with a family. I know most businesses feel that employee housing is a problem, but it makes me very sad when I see how many houses on Mackinac are filled up with single non-related employees instead of a family who is here to be part of the community.

Please, if anyone has a home that they can rent year-



Town Crier

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Telephone: (906) 847-3788

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For business and subscription matters, phone (906) 643-9150

Volume 53, Number 1

February 11, 2006 to April 14, 2006

Published 22 times a year, weekly from May through September, once in October, December, February, and April.

Subscription: 22 issues a year Mail: \$22 Web: \$20

Periodical postage paid at Mackinac Island, Michigan.

Additional postage paid at St. Ignace, MI and Gaylord, MI

USPS Periodical Publication Number - 324-060

Postmaster: Send address change notices to Mackinac Island Town Crier, P.O. Box 532, Mackinac Island, MI 49757

Publisher Emeritus - Wesley H. Maurer (1897-1995)

Publisher and Editor Wesley Maurer, Jr.

Associate Publisher/Business Manager Mary Maurer

Associate Editor Karen Gould

Advertising Marty Wolski

Subscriptions Wendy Colegrove

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