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## **The Principles of True Republicanism versus the Politics of Expediency of a Selfserving and Selfperpetuating Political/Governing Class**

**Stephen P. Dresch**

When, after the appearance of what I have characterized as my ‘anticipatory obituary’ in *The Daily Mining Gazette* (11 April 2006), Paul Nelson and Frank Murphy invited me to appear here this evening, my first reaction was a resounding “no” (heard not, perhaps, around the world but certainly around the block). A public appearance which would be an unnecessary strain for me would also be difficult emotionally for the many friends I would see here. After the appearance of an obituary one, perhaps, attends a funeral or memorial service, but one is not expected to exchange handshakes and embraces with the subject on the occasion of an otherwise enjoyable social event.

Fortunately, although I am heavily reliant on e-mail, I am not fully contemporary, and I still treat e-mail as if it were just a different form of quill-and-parchment correspondence. Thus, before I gave a definitively negative response, I realized that I really should take advantage of this opportunity to again express my appreciation to the small but dedicated group of tireless supporters without whose efforts I would not have been elected in 1990 as the first Republican to represent any part of the 110<sup>th</sup> district in the Michigan House of Representatives in almost 50 years, a title which I still, unfortunately, hold.

Further consideration led me to realize that a review of the 1990 election might well provide insights which would be of value to those participating in the just-commencing 2006 campaign for the Michigan House.

Finally, consideration of those insights led to the realization that current circumstances permit me to say some important things which would be misrepresented and dismissed under other circumstances (e.g., if it could be argued that I intended to become a candidate again).

At the outset I should note that, although my remarks will focus on the contrast between a politics grounded in “the principles of true Republicanism” versus the expediency of conventional party politics as pursued by our political/governing classes, Democrats should take no pleasure in these remarks, since several of my erstwhile Democratic House colleagues could make similar remarks about Democratic Party politics.

### **A Brief History of the 1990 110<sup>th</sup> District Election**

#### **Origins of an Unlikely Candidate**

When I arrived from Austria as the newly appointed dean of Michigan Technological University’s School of Business and Engineering Administration in early 1985, the flag of Michigan Tech Ventures, later transformed into the Ventures Group, was proudly flown by the University’s administration as it marched in a parade led, as MTU President Dale Stein often noted, by then Governor James Blanchard and his Republican predecessor, William Milliken. Ventures was the means by which MTU would meet the Milliken-Blanchard imperative,

“bringing technology to the market” (including the financial markets) and resuscitating a woefully and chronically depressed regional economy.

Within months I developed serious concerns for the effectiveness and integrity of the Ventures operation. Concerns and evidence, however, are not equivalent, and thus, with a faculty colleague, Kenneth Janson, I commenced what became five years of intensive investigation of the Ventures’ multi-headed hydra.

After three years we had sufficient evidence to commence efforts to secure corrective action. However, our efforts to secure consideration of this evidence by, inter alia, the president of MTU, the chairwoman of the University’s gubernatorially-appointed board, the state Attorney General, the chairman of the state Senate’s higher education committee, the FBI and the IRS were met only by indifference or hostility.

Then, in the fall of 1989, John Engler, Republican majority leader of the state Senate, commenced his campaign for governor with visits to each of the state’s 83 counties. Because Senator Engler had emphasized his opposition to Governor Blanchard’s economic-development initiatives, as reflected, especially, in the Michigan Strategic Fund, which purported to invest, directly and indirectly, in new ventures and technologies, Janson and I arranged to meet privately with him when he visited Houghton and Keweenaw Counties. At the conclusion of a three-hour dinner in Calumet, during which he filled numerous place mats with notes, Senator Engler assured us that he would delegate an attorney on his staff to work with us to secure necessary corrective action.

While Engler’s attorney contacted us, little appeared to happen. However, the 1990 election campaign had commenced in earnest, and the Blanchard-Engler confrontation promised to be extremely acrimonious and hard-fought. My colleague and I bided our time.

Meanwhile, in January 1990 Bridget Goold, president of the MTU Undergraduate Student Government, and Kris Lipman, chairman of a USG committee established to investigate Ventures, confronted the University board with serious questions concerning Ventures’ stewardship of University assets. In response, the University administration and board launched what can only be described as a vicious assault on Goold, Lipman and USG generally.

In reaction to the University’s profoundly inappropriate response to its students, I quickly authored what I later called my “Opening Salvo in the ‘Ventures War’: J’Accuse!” *The Daily Mining Gazette*, which had previously been a lead Ventures’ cheerleader, happened to have recently appointed a courageous new editor, Jacqueline Tomchak, and my opening salvo (entitled “MTU-ESI -Ventures vs. USG: Who Should Report to Whom?”) occupied most of the editorial page of the paper on February 9, 1990. Thus commenced three months of open, forced-march, very public warfare between me and the University administration.

While the administration exhibited remarkable cowardice and inability to act, by May it was evident that it would take advantage of the summer exodus of students to eliminate a troublesome dean.

On the Friday in May before the Tuesday filing deadline for the August primary, a student teaching assistant asked if I had considered using my newly-acquired notoriety to seek public office, suggesting that I become a candidate for the state Senate. Although taken aback, my favorable impression of Senator Engler led me to consider this suggestion; I wouldn’t expect to win, but I could use a legislative candidacy to secure a platform from which to support John Engler’s gubernatorial candidacy. Over the course of the weekend I contacted then Houghton

County Republican chairman Rudy Stefancik and was informed by the late Pat Carpio, representative of the state party, that there were already two senate candidates but that I was welcome to run for state representative. I resigned as dean, took a long-term unpaid leave as professor, and, the following Tuesday afternoon, filed as a candidate.

### **The Doomed, Ridiculed and Ignored Candidate**

Concerned that my MTU Ventures notoriety would result in the labeling of me as a “single-issue” (anti-MTU) candidate, I immediately launched a campaign to demonstrate my serious interest in the range of important issues confronting the state, I commenced a series of paid (and very expensive) quarter-page columns in newspapers; entitled “Here I Stand,” the first installment defended Christian Science parents who were being charged by the state with criminal medical neglect of their children. Every Monday morning, on a number of radio stations, I broadcast a live extemporaneous series, “Dresch on the Issues,” which paralleled my newspaper columns and, I discovered, developed a dedicated audience among dairy farmers.

While there was some evidence that the “common man” found something of interest in my candidacy, the indifference of the “political classes,” local and state and of both parties, was notable. At first I thought that this was simply the reaction to a “doomed” candidate, challenging an entrenched incumbent in a one-party (Democratic) district.

But, I slowly realized that I had a more fundamental problem. The political classes found my “long-winded” commentaries, published and broadcast, silly. They couldn’t understand my refusal to make the usual vacuous promises (“I will bring you full employment,” “I will lower your auto-insurance rates,” “I will guarantee a chicken in every pot”). Ultimately, they couldn’t comprehend a “politics of principle,” a politics which would even lead a candidate to dare to take ostensibly “unpopular” but principled positions (as I did in the case of proposed constitutional amendments to criminalize flag burning).

Fortunately, however, the political classes did view my candidacy as doomed, and, Democrat and Republican, they just ignored me, as they had ignored another politician of principle, Tom Banse, who had challenged the incumbent in the Democratic primary and then immediately endorsed my candidacy. And I won, by 748 votes out of in excess of 30,000 cast.

### **The Politics of Expediency of the Political/Governing Classes**

What I then discovered was the active hostility of the political/governing classes to any politics of principle. For them politics was primarily a means by which to secure and retain power and to obtain the material rewards of that power.

Even “party” was not what it appeared to be. In a two-party system, the parties, Democrat and Republican, became duopolists whose profit maximization required cooperation, albeit covert. As a result, partisan elections became little more than bread-and-circuses for the masses. Each party knew that, while it might win this election, it might lose the next, dictating that it make reasonable accommodation for the losing party.

Thus, for example, on the electoral stump Governor Blanchard and Senator Engler might appear to detest each other (and perhaps did), but, practically, they had to work together. Thus, the governor would award no-bid contracts at outrageously inflated prices to a firm providing substantial services to the state Republican party, while critical components of the Democratic

machine were sustained by line items in the state budget supported by the Senate majority leader. At the local level, “prominent” Republicans reached accommodations (including provision for financial support) with the dominant Democratic politicians which permitted them to secure their aliquot share of state grants and contracts.

A particularly telling local case involved the star-athlete son of prominent Republican parents. As a “reward” for the parents’ Republican “activism,” Governor Milliken appointed the son as the first student member of the MTU board. Graduating from MTU, the son attended law school in Lansing and was also rewarded with a position on the staff of Democratic House appropriations chairman Dominic Jacobetti. Largely on the basis of his relationship with Jacobetti he became a quite successful Lansing lobbyist, deeply enmeshed in the corruption of the MTU Ventures Group and other illegalities which led to his criminal conviction, disbarment and disgrace.

Even apparently strong principles of the political/governing classes are, I discovered, expendable. For example, I believe that, in the fall of 1989, Senator Engler genuinely opposed the economic development policies of Governor Blanchard. However, as governor he magnified those policies by many powers, establishing the Michigan Economic Growth Authority, the malignancy of which has vastly exceed that of Blanchard’s Michigan Strategic Fund which it superseded. Why? Because of the financial largess which he was able to distribute to the favored in exchange for political/financial support of the governing/political class.

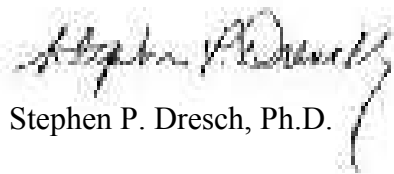
### **The Politics of Expediency Trump The Politics of Principle (Usually)**

In general, the politics of expediency do trump the politics of principle. The political/governing classes, using financial support purchased by the public treasury, are able to overwhelm the politics of principle with the vacuous slogans of the politics of expediency.

The only hope which I can see for the politics of principle is to be found in backwaters such as the 110<sup>th</sup> Michigan House district, in which a “doomed” candidate of principle, flying below the radar, may be able to defeat a complacent and over-confident representative of the political/governing class.

The preeminent example of the backwater as nurturing ground for a politician of principle is to be found several hundred miles to our south, in central Illinois, where the name-sake of this dinner, Abraham Lincoln, despite numerous electoral defeats, emerged a century and one-half ago to bring forth not only the birth of the Republican Party but, vastly more importantly, a “new birth of freedom” for the nation.

For a candidate of principle in such a backwater, beware when the political/governing class suddenly decides to adopt you. Either you are being offered up as a sacrificial lamb, or the decision has been made that you must (and can) be corrupted into membership in that dominant political/governing class.



Stephen P. Dresch, Ph.D.