Seven ways Tuesday's election changes the political course of Michigan

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With Gov. Rick Snyder's reelection and a Legislature even more heavily dominated by Republicans, the state's political course is becoming clearer, and right-er, if that's a word. Here are seven takeaways from Tuesday's election:

THE NERD SEES A MANDATE TO CONTINUE 'REINVENTION': In his victory speech last night, Gov. Rick Snyder proclaimed he'd taken on Michigan's toughest problems and made the toughest decisions – and implied voters returned him to office in reward for action. For most of his first term, Snyder's big moves – business tax reform, introduction of a pension tax, signing off on right to work – met with vocal opposition from Democrats, and, supposedly, some moderates. Snyder's margin Tuesday night wasn't as high as his 57.5 percentage point landslide win in 2010. Still, Tuesday's four-point win is convincing. He won 70 of 83 counties, including large margins in the key suburban swing counties of Oakland and Macomb. It all adds up to majority support in Michigan for more "relentless positive action."

SNYDER WILL SEE A MANDATE FOR MORE DETROIT REINVENTION, TOO: The Snyder camp argued he's done more for Detroit than any governor since William Milliken. Surely, it's been four years of enormous change in Detroit: municipal bankruptcy – and the 'grand bargain' financial deal to help spur the emergence from bankruptcy, downtown growth, pursuit of a second bridge to Canada, and the Education Achievement Authority. Again, there was loud opposition from Democratic ranks – but, in the end, no increased opposition from Detroit voters. Indeed, nearly 94 percent voted against Snyder in 2010, and "only" 92 percent voted against the governor Tuesday. In both elections, 31 percent of Detroit voters cast their ballots, putting the lie to predictions that city voters would punish Snyder even more in the voting booth. True-blue Dems in Detroit and the rest of southeast Michigan had the power this year to turn out in droves and unseat Snyder. They didn't. So Snyder's policies will continue to take hold in the Motor City. And remaining opposition is muted by Tuesday's modest turnout and results.

GOP CONSOLIDATES POWER IN LANSING: Business tax reform… The pension tax… Right to work… Statewide voters can be seen as essentially endorsing all those GOP moves. The GOP now has a whopping 63-47 majority in the Michigan House of Representatives after picking up four more seats. And Republicans added one more seat in the Senate to enter 2015 with a 27-11 margin (a close-to-bulletproof Senate majority due to the GOP's redrawn districts). Democratic opposition to the GOP legislative agenda might be loud

– but it's anemic, according to Tuesday's results.

DEMOCRATS ARE EVEN MORE MARGINALIZED IN LANSING: Democrats are on a monumental losing streak at the state level. Every four years there are three executive-level seats at the top of the ballot: governor, attorney general, and secretary of state. Jennifer Granholm is the only Democrat to win any of those seats in the past 20 years. The GOP is 6-0 in those races in the past two election cycles. The GOP is 10-2 in those races since 2002. The GOP is 15-6 in those races since 1990 (back when Dem lions Frank Kelley and Richard Austin still commanded the attorney general and secretary of state seats). The Dems remain heavily dependent on labor money. But fewer than one in five Michigan adults belong to a union, and the anti-right-to-work rallying call resulted in very little if any backlash Tuesday. Moreover, four Dem-led, labor-friendly ballot issues have been rejected by statewide voters in the past dozen years. Now, the even larger legislative majorities in place for the GOP in the state House and Senate leave Democratic policymakers further marginalized in state budget negotiations and other policy matters. The dwindling Dems in the House and Senate can loudly protest GOP actions – as they've been doing – but unless and until they win over more statewide voters there's no bite behind the bark.

NO DEM DELIVERY: For more than a year, Michigan Democratic Party chief Lon Johnson touted voter turnout spreadsheets to anyone who would listen. "We vote, we win," became the Democrats' slogan, and in the final weeks of this campaign Johnson confidently grinned and said his strategy was working. His confidence, along with tightening poll trends, led the media and campaign strategists to rethink their gubernatorial election assumptions. In the end, Johnson's confident assurances were hard to reconcile with the facts.

A ROAD DEAL IN LAME DUCK – OR VOTERS WILL HAVE TO DO IT: Michigan residents want the roads fixed – and they're willing to pay more to get it done. That's a clear conclusion from the Center for Michigan's "Michigan Speaks" public engagement report released last spring. Snyder wants it done in the lame duck legislative session before the end of the year. So does outgoing House Speaker Jase Bolger. New GOP legislative leaders – who will be elected by their caucuses today – won't want to deal with road tax votes

on their watch. Look for serious discussions on a road deal before the holidays. Otherwise, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, fed up with years of gridlock on the issue, promises to take the road question out of legislators' hands and ask the voters to decide it.

TOUGH TO BEAT SOMETHING WITH NOTHING: That's an oldie but goodie, and it proved true in this election. Snyder implemented some controversial issues in his first term: taxing some pension income, big business tax cut/shift, right to work. But he got something done. And for an electorate sick and tired of gridlock, the essence of governing lies in actually getting things done. The largest hole in Schauer's campaign was explaining just how he was going to pay for his wishlist: middle class tax cuts, ending the pension tax, boosting education funding with no clear outline of how much or to what end. Perhaps the largest challenge facing an amplified Republican majority in Lansing will be to develop a new, robust, but broadly acceptable policy agenda. Tilt too far to the right, they'll risk Democratic backlash if the Dems can ever find their mojo. Tilt too far left, they'll face a grumpy right wing. One theory: Now with an even larger GOP majority in the legislature, Snyder & Co. may find a way to marginalize Tea Party influence, even with some more Tea Party adherents in the room. We'll soon see.

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