Snyder defeats Schauer in election for Mich. governor

Paul Egan, Detroit Free Press *10:40 p.m. EST November 4, 2014*



(Photo: Carlos Osorio, AP)

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DETROIT — Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder coasted to victory Tuesday in an election to decide whether the Republican had earned a second and final term or Democratic challenger Mark Schauer would get a chance to undo much of what Snyder did in the past four years.

With 12% of precincts reporting, Snyder led with 56% of the vote, compared with 42% for Schauer. The *Detroit Free Press* projected a Snyder victory based on analysis of key precincts.

The state has seen costlier gubernatorial elections and nastier ones, but it's been 40 years since the outcome was this much in doubt as voters went to the polls. The outcome, however, proved to be not nearly as close as the polls suggested.

Most recent polls showed Snyder and Schauer within a couple of percentage points of each other and both the Republicans and Democrats touted high-tech voter identification systems they said would boost their absentee numbers and would help make sure as many of their supporters as possible cast ballots.

But Snyder supporters were optimistic soon after the polls closed as they gathered at the Renaissance Center Marriott in downtown Detroit.

"Republicans are kicking butt right now," Michigan Republican Party Chairman Bobby Schostak told the crowd. "We are very, very optimistic."

Business and labor often disagree, but they were never more polarized than they have been about Snyder and Schauer and this election.

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Snyder is a businessman who emerged from relative obscurity in 2010 to win a five-way Republican primary and then easily defeat Democratic candidate Virg Bernero, the mayor of Lansing. Snyder ran on his record, which includes a $1.8 billion business tax cut and reduced regulations for corporations.

Schauer, a former state lawmaker and one-term congressman from Battle Creek, attacked Snyder over increased taxes on pension income, removal of tax credits for low- and middle-income families, right-to-work legislation, and inadequate funding for public schools. Schauer's claim that Snyder cut $1 billion from public education was repeatedly discredited by impartial fact-checkers who said Snyder actually increased school funding by a similar amount, but Schauer doubled down on the claim and repeated it in TV ads through Election Day.

Though Snyder enraged the left by supporting right-to-work legislation late in 2012 after saying the item was not on his agenda, he also alienated Republicans on the far right of the party with his support for measures such as Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act and higher gasoline taxes to fix the roads.

The last time an incumbent governor was defeated at the polls was in 1990, when Republican John Engler defeated Democratic Gov. James Blanchard by a single percentage point.

But that election was a shocker, with the polls generally showing Blanchard well ahead. One has to go back to two elections featuring former Republican governor William Milliken, in 1970 and 1974, when the gubernatorial vote was seen as such a cliff-hanger on Election Day, said William Ballenger, associate editor of the Lansing newsletter *Inside Michigan Politics*.

Milliken, who was the incumbent both times, beat Democrat Sander Levin by 44,000 votes in 1970, when "it was considered very close all the way along," and by a somewhat wider margin in 1974, Ballenger said.

Sandy Baruah, president and CEO of the Detroit Regional Chamber, said electing Schauer governor would be "a huge step backwards for Michigan."

"We're on a path that we haven't been on for literally decades — growing in population, job growth, becoming more competitive," Baruah said.

"What's happening in Detroit has been difficult and it's taken tremendous leadership that we've never seen before in this state, by any party, until this governor."

Karla Swift, president of the Michigan AFL-CIO, said Snyder fooled voters in 2010 into thinking he was a moderate Republican.

"People who voted for him didn't expect what they got, which was attacks on working families, attacks on low-income workers, attacks on kids in classrooms by cutting education, attacks on people on fixed incomes by taxing pensions," Swift said.

"He has a record now, and we would expect to see more of the same."

Schauer promised to work to repeal right-to-work and the pension tax, significantly increase funding for K-12 schools while reining in for-profit charter schools, and push through a middle-class tax cut. He was vague on how he would pay for the promises and similarly lacked details on his plan to fix and maintain the state's roads and bridges.

Snyder, who in 2010 campaigned on a platform that included repealing the Michigan Business Tax in favor of a 6% corporate tax, which he achieved, did not spell out many new plans for a second four-year term, which would be his last term as governor under constitutional term limits. Mostly he talked about placing increased emphasis on technical skills training and assuring a better match between graduates' skills and employers' needs.

Both Snyder and Schauer spent the last weekend before the election traveling the state and making last-ditch appeals to voters.

The more than $12 million Snyder was expected to spend on the campaign was roughly double what Schauer raised and spent. But millions more was spent by outside groups that included the Democratic Governors Association, the Republican Governors Association, the two state political parties, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Education Association teachers union.