Snyder defeats Schauer in election for governor

Paul Egan, Detroit Free Press Lansing Bureau *4:08 p.m. EST November 5, 2014*



(Photo: Ryan Garza, Detroit Free Press)

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Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder pulled out a hard-fought victory Tuesday in an election that was largely a referendum on his last four years.

Snyder defeated Democratic challenger Mark Schauer, who had vowed to undo several of the measures Snyder pushed through during his first four-year term.

With 99% of precincts reporting, Snyder led with 51% of the vote compared to 47% for Schauer. The Free Press projected a Snyder victory soon after the polls closed based on

analysis of a sample of 80 key precincts across the state of Michigan directed by Tim Kiska, a University of Michigan-Dearborn professor.

"When we come together we can do anything," Snyder, who made "relentless positive action" the motto of his first term, told supporters at the Renaissance Center Marriott in Detroit at about 11:30 p.m.

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"I want to say thank you to all of Michigan."

Snyder said during the campaign Michigan was "on the road to recovery," and a second term was essential to continue progress on improving Michigan's economic climate.



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Though many in Michigan still aren't feeling the economic recovery, Snyder received high marks for his handling of the Detroit financial crisis and the city is poised to emerge from Chapter 9 bankruptcy this month on a much more sound fiscal footing.

Sandy Baruah, president and CEO of the Detroit Regional Chamber, said Snyder's victory is great news for Michigan.

"I think we will see continued progress in making Michigan more competitive and we're expecting progress on a road fix as well," Baruah told the Free Press Tuesday night.

"Continued progress in the city of Detroit we are also very excited about," he said.

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Solid victory for Snyder, but legacy still in question

"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."

Schauer conceded at about 11:30 p.m.

"It's been a long campaign, 17 months, 83 counties, and tens of thousands of miles on bumpy roads," Schauer said.

"We fought hard, we left it all on the field. We made this race about our kids, about seniors, about our middle class, about working people and despite the onslaught of attacks from his billionaire buddies, we went the distance with Rick Snyder."

Detroit Free Press columnist Brian Dickerson, staff writer Jim Schaefer, staff writer Kathleen Gray and Editorial Page Editor Stephen Henderson offer their takeaway from Tuesday's elections and what it means for Michigan going forward.

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. But the result 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 were touting high-tech voter identification systems they said boosted 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 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're never more polarized than they were about Snyder and Schauer and this election.

Union supporters in particular were eager to vote Snyder out and optimistic they could achieve their goal.

"I think there's a chance of knocking him out," Detroit resident Edward Jordan, a retired city maintenance worker and union representative, said of Snyder. "It's going to be a close race."

Jordan, 75, said he's unhappy about right-to-work legislation that Snyder signed and planned cuts to his pension as a result of the Detroit bankruptcy and he would be voting Democrat up and down the ballot, as he always does.



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Schuette projected as winner in AG's race

Eric Robinson of Lincoln Park, a disabled veteran from the first Gulf War, said he backed Snyder as "the best man for the job right now" because of the way he's handled issues such as the state budget and the Detroit financial crisis.

"Mark Schauer is part of the original problem as far as what's wrong with this state," said Robinson, 56, who is trained as a paramedic. "He's too close to organized labor and too much tax and spend."

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.



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Incumbent Ruth Johnson to win secretary of state race

That drew scathing criticism from the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and other business groups and Republican leaders who said the Schauer campaign was built around a lie.

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 Gov. 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.



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Gary Peters wins U.S. Senate race

Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville, R-Monroe, said Snyder deserved to be re-elected because "his resume is among the best of any governor in any state around the country."

He significantly improved the state's economic ranking and "he took on the biggest bankruptcy in the history of the U.S.," Richardville said.

But Karla Swift, president of the Michigan AFL-CIO, said Snyder fooled voters in 2010 into thinking he was a moderate Republican. She said she was disappointed with Tuesday's outcome.

"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 had 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 lacking in 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, has not spelled out many new plans for a second four-year term, which would be his last term as governor under constitutional term limits. Mostly he's 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 teacher union.

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