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## **New iCaucus Head Eyes Gas Tax Repeal, Meekhof Recall**

The Michigan chapter of a conservative campaign group tied to the Tea Party movement, iCaucus, is starting to reorganize under the leadership of a former Grand Rapids-area House candidate.

Its first two targets: Repealing the gasoline tax increase and recalling Senate Majority Leader Arlan MEEKHOF (R-West Olive).

Tom NORTON said he was planning on staying out of politics after he returned from active military duty in Afghanistan, but the Legislature's recent passage of a 7.3 cent gasoline-tax increase spurred him into action.

But with 80 percent of Michigan voters rejecting a much larger statewide tax increase in May to pay for additional road improvements, Norton said the legislative action is "unacceptable."

"They told 80 percent of the voters to fuck themselves. Don't quote me on that, or you know what, you can quote me on that," said Norton, a 2014 legislative candidate. "They told voters, 'We don't care where you stand. We know better.' They treated them like children."

Norton said he's speaking with the state's trucking companies on their interest in putting money into ballot campaign to essentially repeal the gasoline tax and driver registration fee pieces of the road funding package Gov. Rick SNYDER signed last month.

The added fuel cost is directly hurting middle-class workers and Norton believes they would be willing to actively support an initiative to repeal the move. Two former state House members are helping him craft ballot language he hopes to submit to the state in January, he said.

Norton said he felt so strongly about stopping the fuel taxes, he spent \$3,000 of his own money to try to re-elect expelled Rep. Cindy GAMRAT. It's not that Norton is a huge Gamrat fan. It's that he felt Gamrat was the only Republican in the field who was both qualified and steadfastly committed to not raising taxes.

The group iCaucus is looking to go back to its 2010 operational model, when it acting as a place where dozens of conservative local groups sought advice, training and some funding as opposed to the iCaucus of 2012 and 2014, which operated more like a centralized entity.

However, Norton is making two exceptions, the gas tax repeal and a Meekhof recall, which Norton said he has so many e-mails and letters on, he hasn't had time to read them all. Norton is from Kent County and Meekhof represents Ottawa County next door.

Meekhof not only voted for the gas tax increase, but led the fight in the Senate to get it passed and needs to be removed for his role, Norton said.

iCaucus is also interested in providing guidance for Tom BACKERS and the other northern Michigan conservatives looking to recall Sen. Wayne SCHMIDT (R- Traverse City) (See "Recall Language Filed Against Schmidt," 12/3/15). A third Republican senator is also being targeted for recall, but Norton declined to identify that person at this time. Another source said that number could swell to six or seven.

"For us, this isn't about just winning, it's about ending their political futures," Norton said.

Meekhof spokesperson Amber McCANN said Norton "obviously feels very passionately" about the transportation package vote, but he may want to rethink his strategy.

"Any recall effort we would always take seriously," McCann said. "The recall law is there for the voters to voice their displeasure. It's a serious tool to be sure, but I have a hard time taking Mr. Norton seriously. I'm more worried about him vying for my job."

iCaucus is also interested in recruiting primary challenges to as many as 11 sitting state House members in 2016 and putting up candidates in 11 vacant House seats, said Kevin Rex HEINE, a former iCaucus state strategist, who is now working with Norton in a support role.

"Fully three-fourths of the new executive staff are veterans (and specifically veterans who've been deployed into combat zones)," Heine said. "We know the value of both a cohesive, overarching strategy and of delegating the heavy lifting to the local frontline organizations."

Norton finished fifth out of seven Republican candidates in the 73rd House District primary last August. This seat is currently represented by Rep. Chris AFENDOULIS (R-Grand Rapids Twp.). He also finished fifth out of nine candidates for the same seat in 2010. Heine finished third for Kentwood City Council this year and third in a 2011 bid for two Kentwood School Board seats.