

Baldwin, Michigan  
November 9, 1996

The Honorable John Engler  
Governor of Michigan  
State Capitol  
Lansing, Michigan 48913

Dear Governor Engler:

I am writing to you as both a concerned citizen and as a life long Republican who is concerned about the Republican party in Lake County. The election November 5 was the worst disaster for the GOP in Lake County history and the demise occurred because of the arrogant, underhanded way in which the county's Republican officials kept the citizens in the dark about the proposed punk prison here in the county. The citizens of this county are adamantly opposed to a prison here in Lake County. They still remember that in the late 1970's or early 1980's, during the tenure of Sheriff Robert Blevins, a boarded State of Michigan prisoner (also kept from the knowledge of the citizens at the time) escaped from the jail and raped and killed three people in a neighboring community and any assurances from these local officials that such escapes will not happen is moot, indeed. Recently four dangerous prisoners escaped from a privatized prison in Arizona and two are still at large. Voters read the newspapers and watch the news on television and they know.

The only reason for this Republican disaster in Lake County is its woefully inadequate leadership and the proposed prison forced upon us. I've talked with a two-time former Chair of the Lake County Republicans whose active participation dates to the election of 1944, who says there has not been such an upset in those 52 years. Offices that never were held by a Democrat in anyone's memory are now lost to the GOP. The spillover from the antiprison vote even spilled over to candidates whose positions were not even related to the prison. Even Republican candidates with no opposition were effected by the slaughter because they received less than 50 percent of the vote; ergo, they would have lost if they had had ballot competition. This debacle will not be healed quickly because the people's distrust of government is too deep. If you and the Republican party of Michigan really want to be the party of the people and reduce government's control of the people as well as restore the Republican party of Lake County, the cancellation of the construction of the punk prison here should be the first consideration. If you continue to force the prison upon the people of Lake County against their will, it is doubtful that the Republican party of Lake County will ever recover. Additionally, you will demonstrate that the GOP is no different than the Democrats because you will be sending the message to this county that the government knows what's best for the people, instead of the people knowing what's best for themselves, just like Bill Clinton and his cohorts.



The Honorable John Engler-page 2

As further evidence of same, please refer to the attached editorial from the September 18, 1996, issue of the Grand Rapids Press in which such withdrawal of the prison decision for Lake County is advocated. The Republican debacle was only possible because so many life long Republicans voted Democratic to send our county officials a serious message.

It is now up to you to help us restore the GOP here in Lake County by demonstrating your concern for the party and the people and making this difficult choice to move the prison elsewhere. Anything less will doom the GOP here for years to come. Please make the correct decision.

Respectfully,



Bernard Betka  
Route 2 - Box 2320  
Baldwin, Michigan 49304  
616-745-4277  
cc: Michigan Republican Party Chair