

Election year contests hot locally, too

By Steve Gunn

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Muskegon County got a preview of election year excitement in mid-January, with the earlier-than-usual presidential primary and a visit by U.S. Sen. John McCain the evening before the election.

But the early presidential hoopla was just a sampler. The new year promises to bring one of the most interesting local political seasons in memory.

On tap is the highly anticipated matchup for 91st district state representative between incumbent Democrat Mary Valentine and Republican National Committee woman Holly Hughes.

There also will be a rare congressional primary election in August with several Democrats battling for the right to challenge longtime U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra; an organized effort by a group of county employees to unseat all 11 Muskegon County commissioners; and a suddenly interesting race for the formerly low-profile position of Muskegon County drain commissioner.

Both parties will battle for the positions of county clerk and county treasurer because those posts likely will determine the balance of power on the county reapportionment board, which will redraw county board district lines in 2011.

And while it's far from certain, county voters could face a ballot proposal, possibly in August, seeking one mill of new property taxes to build a new county jail and juvenile detention facility.

Of course the political playing field is far from set because candidates for most offices have until May 13 to file. But here's an early look at how things might shape up on the ballot this year.

State representative race

Most of the drama will be reserved for the anticipated 91st State House showdown between Valentine and Hughes. And it ought to be a doozy.

The 91st has been considered a crucial swing district for years, and both state parties have spent big



Valentine: Running for a second term.



Hughes: GOP challenger.

About this series

First part of three-day series looking at key political races involving local people.

Today: State representative and U.S. Congress.

Friday: Drain commissioner and other Muskegon County races.

Saturday: Muskegon County board of commissioners.

Please see **POLITICS 4A** ►

