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# Striking Kenndyesque pose, Bernero announces for mayor

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## Striking Kenndyesque pose, Bernero announces for mayor

State Sen. Virg Bernero's decision to run for mayor of Lansing took even close associates by surprise. His legislative aide, Joe McDonald, said he learned about it on television like everyone else.

Indeed, Bernero said he decided to run on May 5, the day state Rep. Michael Murphy announced he was not running for mayor.

At a press conference on his front lawn Monday, Bernero said one focus of his campaign will be neighborhoods.

"We really want to send a message that it begins with neighborhoods," Bernero, 39, who has two children, said. "In order to move Lansing forward, we've got to be a destination point for young families."

Downtown is important, too, he added. "For a long time people have argued downtown vs. neighborhood. The downtown affects the rest of the city. We've got to do both."

Why is he willing to give up the relatively safe Senate seat that he just won last fall? He explained in terms that indicate he is as willing in this election to exploit the perceived weaknesses of his opponent as he was in the rough-and-tumble primary election for Senate against former state Rep. Lingg Brewer.

"We can't be put on hold for two years and then look for the future for Lansing. We've got to have a vision for the next five or 10 years today," he said.

He called his main opponent, Mayor Tony Benavides, a "great guy. I've supported him. I count him as a friend. This is going to be a campaign about vision, about the future of Lansing, about who can lead the city."

"Mayor (David) Hollister made historic progress for Lansing. Now we've got to continue this progress. When GM goes into the New Year, they don't go with last year's models."

He brushed off a question about his lack of executive experience compared to Benavides, who was president of City Council five times and the executive director of Cristo Rey Community Center, a multi-million-dollar agency. "I think I've demonstrated a lot of leadership that is the kind of leadership that is required," "It is about attracting the best and brightest."

What are his goals for the city? "Over the course of the campaign I will be outline exactly where I think we need to go. It's not going to be something that I impose on the city, but something that we develop together. We have a lot of blue ribbon reports, and white papers, already sitting on the shelf. We need to dust those off and see what works and what doesn't. Downtown revitalization, absolutely. Use of our riverfront, absolutely. We need to do more than simply (build) office complexes along our riverfront.

As for the credibility of his running for mayor after less than six months in the Senate, he said: "We'll certainly be tackling that issue. I'm sure that voters will understand. None of us would have known that Mayor Hollister was going to be chosen by the governor to run a department. Just as Mayor Hollister planned to serve out his time, I planned to serve at least four years in the Senate. It would be far more convenient for me to stay in the Senate. I feel the calling to run for mayor that I know the City of Lansing needs.

(This story was reported by Daniel Sturm and written by Berl Schwartz.)

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