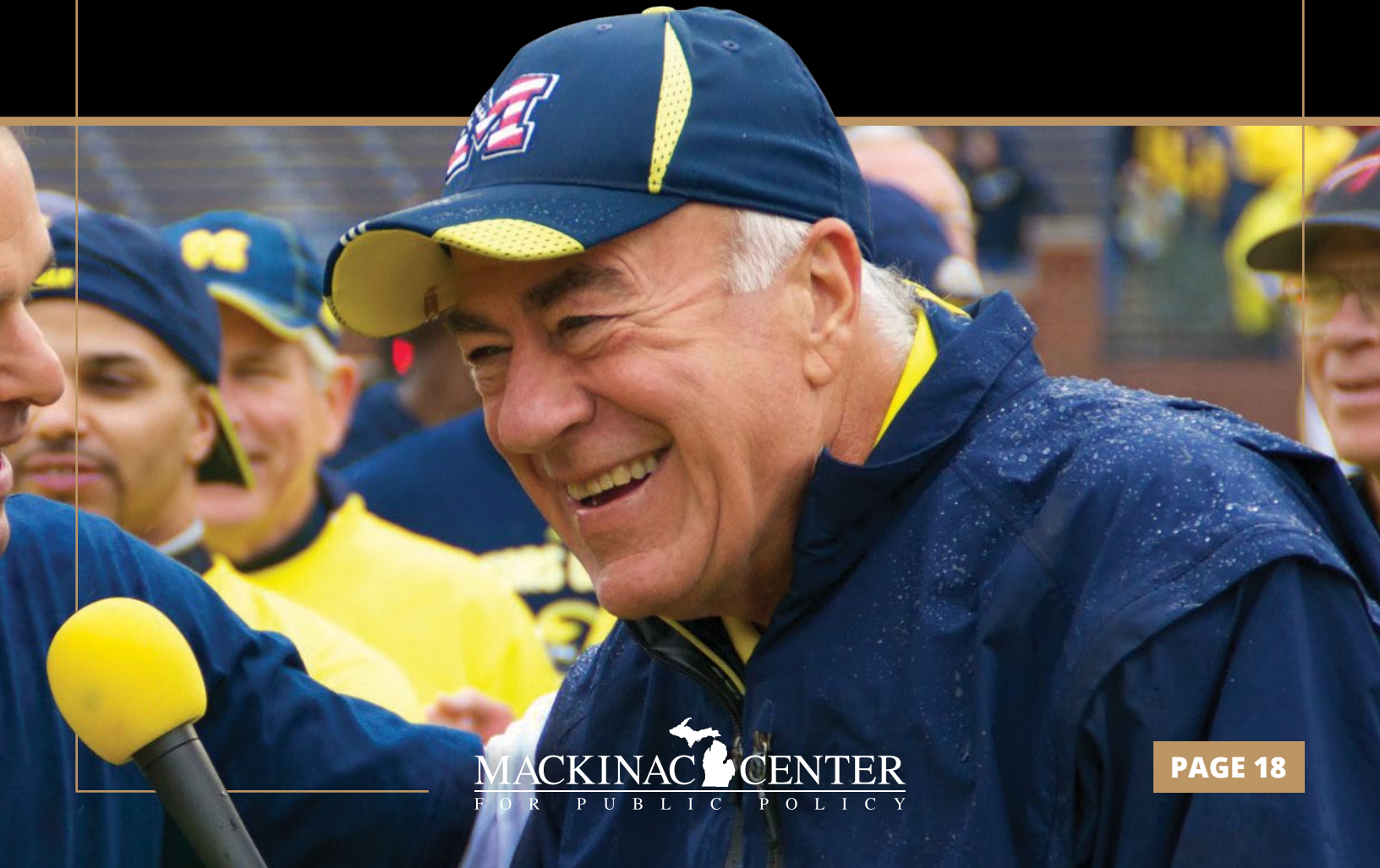


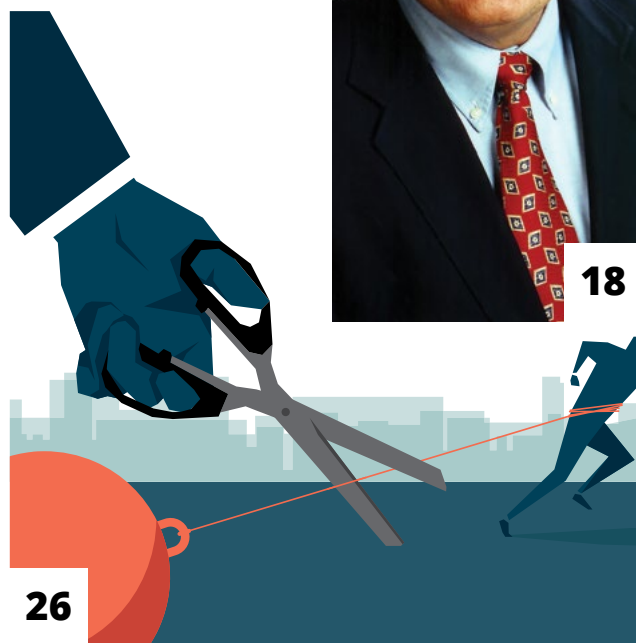
MARCH / APRIL 2022

# IMPACT

Honoring the Legacy of Radio Giant  
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**MACKINAC  
IN THE  
MEDIA**



**My twin boys spent kindergarten on Zoom. I watched their love of learning wither away.**

“After the horrible challenges of the past two years, and with more difficulties on the horizon, my boys need school choice. And we need it now.”

*Jessie Bagos, Mackinac Center Legal Foundation client*



**Opinion | Use federal COVID cash to fix Michigan roads, cut taxes and debt**

“When Michigan is awash in extra funds and other compromises are tough to find, lowering tax burdens is something that ought to be attractive to people on both sides of the aisle.”

*James Hohman, director of fiscal policy*



**Families Should be Able to Choose the Best Educational Fit for Their Kids**

“We want our children to excel in the environment that is best for them individually. If we want our students to succeed, we must be innovative and creative. One size does not fit all.”

*Samantha Jacokes, Mackinac Center Legal Foundation client*



**Commentary: GM gets its big bucks for EV plants. How much is enough?**

“Instead of pumping more taxpayer cash to the largest companies in the state, lawmakers should focus on fixing the policy fundamentals. Provide tax cuts to all instead of a favored few, repair roads faster than they fall apart, address the state’s high utility costs and even just save for the next rainy day.”

*Michael LaFaive, senior director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative*



**Michigan health care needs competition, not consolidation**

“If lawmakers and regulators want to help Michigan residents get better and more affordable medical care, they should aim to create more competition — not more consolidation.”

*Lindsay Killen, vice president for strategy and communications*



**Why Lockdowns Are Dead**

“Especially in times of crises, leaders need to stand firm and strike the appropriate balance between protecting public health and preserving our constitutional rights. For the sake of our liberty, let’s hope lockdowns remain unpopular for a long time to come.”

*Michael Van Beek, director of research*



# Believe in People

Two years ago, I used this column to talk about trust in government. I encouraged political leaders to “govern in a way that recognizes that political power comes from the people.” One way for leaders to do this is to stop obstructing or ignoring laws that limit government power.

Trust in government remains low, but handwringing, including mine, over whether people trust government accomplishes little.

Trust is a two-way street, so perhaps we’re measuring the wrong thing. Perhaps, instead of asking whether people trust government, we should ask, “Does the government trust the people?”

What would that look like?

**Pushing governing authority to the most local unit of government possible.** I won’t romanticize local government; it is just as capable of error as Congress. But people are more inclined to trust a process they can participate in. It is easier to influence local leaders you may see at church or in the pizza shop than state or national government.

**Recognizing the rights of people to make personal choices.** What’s better than pushing power to local government? Leaving it in the hands of individuals and families. The best way — right now — for Michigan leaders to do this

# “Trust is a two-way street, so perhaps we’re measuring the wrong thing.”

would be to expand options for K-12 education. Yet Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has vetoed Student Opportunity Scholarships as well as a program that would provide \$1,000 reading scholarships. Another idea for state officials: Put money back into family budgets with a tax cut rather than announce big, splashy spending programs.

**Governing in a transparent fashion.** Michigan leaders have a poor track record here. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer campaigned on a promise to unilaterally open her office to the Freedom of Information Act. She has been in office over 1,150 days (as of March 1) and has not fulfilled this promise. The Michigan Legislature is also slow to act. Since 2016 the Senate has ignored a bill to make gubernatorial and legislative records open to the public. And sometimes even records that must be disclosed under law must be pried out of government’s hands; the Mackinac Center has resorted to litigation nine times in the last two years.

**Relying on leadership before mandates.** The pandemic exposed the government’s preference for mandates. Shelter-in-place orders, mask mandates, forced business closures, distancing requirements, vaccine mandates, you name it. Yes, government is in the business of creating laws, so there’s little surprise when it does so. But mandates are blunt instruments. Leadership — true leadership — is a different thing. It

persuades. Builds trust. Inspires. Poor leaders, by contrast, must resort to ordering people about.

**Admitting errors, mistakes and miscalculations.** Have you been the recipient of a heartfelt apology? I’ll wager it increased trust between you and the person apologizing. Yet the act of admitting mistakes in politics is considered a liability. Consider one innocuous example: Early in the pandemic, the governor mandated one-way signage for aisles in grocery stores. At some point, the requirement disappeared. The state never explained its reversal.

The officeholder who has the most power is the one who commands trust — which must be earned. ■



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael J. Reitz".

**By Michael J. Reitz**

*Executive vice president  
of the Mackinac Center*

# MICHIGAN UNDERCOUNTED DEATHS IN NURSING HOMES BY 42%



By Steve Delie  
*Director of labor policy*



Whitmer admin significantly undercounted Michigan nursing home COVID deaths, state auditor finds

# STATE HEALTH DEPARTMENT'S ATTEMPT TO DISMISS THE PROBLEM DOESN'T HOLD WATER

The Mackinac Center worked with Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Charlie LeDuff last year to investigate how well the state tracked COVID-19 deaths in nursing homes. Our initial findings suggested that as many as 40% of all Michigan COVID-19 deaths could be tied to a long-term care facility. Seeing our investigation, the House Oversight Committee called on the Office of the Auditor General to review the state's data. The resulting report shows that the Whitmer administration miscounted deaths among Michigan's vulnerable and elderly population.

The office concluded that deaths associated with COVID-19 in long-term care facilities were 42% higher than officially reported. As of July 2, 2021, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reported a total of 5,675 deaths in long-term care facilities. The auditor found that the actual death toll was 8,061, meaning that 37% of all COVID-19 deaths in Michigan can be traced to these facilities.

The Whitmer administration knew this report was forthcoming and tried to rebut it before it was even published. After it was released, the health department's director, Elizabeth Hertel, doubled down by arguing with the report's methodology. She claimed that the Auditor General's office tracked deaths at facilities that were never required to report them, adding that

the office used a health department database not meant for tracking deaths.

Neither claim holds water. This is easy to see from the Auditor General's review, which identifies the additional deaths that should have been included in the tally. In just the long-term facilities required to report, the Auditor General found a total of 7,010 deaths, significantly higher than

the state's official count of 5,675. Put another way, the state missed almost one in every four deaths it claimed to be tracking. Another 1,051 deaths could be traced to smaller facilities not required to report deaths to the state.

Director Hertel's claims that the Auditor General used an unreliable database is odd:

It's the same one her department uses for contact and outbreak tracing. The state uses the Michigan Disease Surveillance System, as this database is called, to report new cases. The Auditor General drew on this database to construct its report. If there's a problem with using it, then a host of the state's official COVID-19 statistics suffer from the same shortcomings as well.

Regardless of director Hertel's objections to the report, Michigan residents now have a more accurate understanding of how COVID-19 affected people in long-term care facilities. But this episode raises an important question: If the state did not properly categorize or fully account

**“THE WHITMER ADMINISTRATION KNEW THIS REPORT WAS FORTHCOMING AND TRIED TO REBUT IT BEFORE IT WAS EVEN PUBLISHED.”**

for all COVID-19 deaths, was its data reliable enough to guide the governor’s life-altering policy decisions?

The state knew its data was incomplete. In June 2020, the health department performed a mini-audit of its numbers, using a method similar to that of the Auditor General’s. That mini-audit found 44% of deaths identified by death certificates could be traced to long-term care facilities. This should have triggered changes in how the state tracked deaths that could be tied to long-term care facilities. But it appears that nothing happened.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel decided last March not to investigate Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s nursing homes policies, citing a lack of evidence. The U.S. Department of Justice announced last year that it was dropping a similar investigation. Both should reconsider their decision in light of these most recent findings. And even if no legal action is called for, the health department should revise its policies to ensure it has better and more accurate data when making policy decisions.

The Auditor General’s report documents the state’s failure to accurately track data. But it also calls into question the Whitmer administration’s pandemic response. Thanks to undercounting deaths related to nursing homes, COVID-19 was made to appear more benign to residents of these facilities — and deadlier to the general population. Policy decisions, like locking down the state and shuttering businesses, may have been based in part on inaccurate data like this. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services failed the people of Michigan on this front, and it should be held accountable. ■



**Above:** Charlie LeDuff joins 'Tucker Carlson Tonight'



**Above:** Charlie LeDuff, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist





UPCOMING  
MACKINAC  
EVENTS

**MACKINAC CENTER**  
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy Board of Directors and President Joseph G. Lehman cordially invite you to join us for dinner and keynote speaker, Kimberley A. Strassel, at *An Evening with the Mackinac Center*.

**Kimberley Strassel** is a member of the editorial board for *The Wall Street Journal*. She writes editorials, as well as the weekly *Potomac Watch* political column. Ms. Strassel joined Dow Jones & Co. in 1994, working in the news department of *The Wall Street Journal Europe* in Brussels, and then in London. She moved to New York in 1999 and soon thereafter joined The Journal's editorial page, working as a features editor, and then as an editorial writer. She assumed her current position in 2005.

For more information or to inquire about sponsorship opportunities, please contact Sandra Darland at [events@mackinac.org](mailto:events@mackinac.org) or 989-698-1905.

# An Evening with the Mackinac Center

## WHEN

Wednesday, May 4, 2022

5:30 pm: Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres

6:15 pm: Dinner and program

## WHERE

JW Marriott

235 Louis Street NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

**Kimberley  
A. Strassel**

*Wall Street Journal  
columnist and  
bestselling author*



# Mackinac Center Recommends a Sustainable Michigan Budget

Even though Michigan has 200,000 fewer jobs than it did before the pandemic and its economic recovery is the 9th-worst among the states, our state government is awash in cash. Federal money has been pouring in. But state revenue has continued to grow, too, so it's important that the Legislature and the governor practice some restraint. That's why we've recommended an idea we call the Sustainable Michigan Budget. Our proposal would limit growth in state spending to the percentage growth of the state population and inflation.

State governments are not like the federal government and most, Michigan included, are required by their constitution to balance their budget each year. Even so, there's always pressure to spend more, especially when revenue soars.

The danger facing Michigan is that large fund balances today will be used in ways that ratchet up the long-term costs of government without providing commensurate improvements in services. Seeing this possibility, we thought it was time to give lawmakers a target to shoot for, which would provide some restraint.

Adopting the Sustainable Michigan Budget would reduce state spending increases, and lawmakers could use the savings to lower taxes, making Michigan more competitive and improving its

economic recovery. Lawmakers could pay down old debts and save taxpayers billions in interest costs. And the proposal encourages them to find ways to give residents better — and not simply more — government.

Can we get elected officials to agree with us? It doesn't seem that the governor will. Her executive budget recommends spending \$2.7 billion more than our Sustainable Michigan Budget. But if legislators adopted it instead of the governor's proposal, they would save so much money they could lower the income tax rate from 4.25% to 3.37%.

The governor only suggests spending. It's up to legislators to approve budgets, and Republicans in the Legislature seem more likely to agree with us. Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey recently commented to the Gongwer News Service, "Even though we have lots of idle cash sitting on the balance sheet right now, I advocate that we discipline ourselves to be very prudent and not grow the budget any more than our inflation and population." Other legislative leaders have also publicly expressed an interest in having more restraint in next year's budget.

That's great to hear. And we look forward to further encouraging lawmakers to save money by passing a Sustainable Michigan Budget. ■



**By James M. Hohman**

*Director of fiscal policy*

“Our proposal would limit growth in state spending to the percentage growth of the state population and inflation.”



MACKINAC  
STAFF  
PROFILE

# *The Voice & Face of the Mackinac Center*

## A profile of JoAnne Kelley, our front desk administrative assistant

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If you've called the Mackinac Center in the last two years, you've almost certainly heard the voice of JoAnne Kelley. She's the first voice heard by thousands of people who call and the first face seen by hundreds when they walk in the front door.

She's the connection people all over the state have to Michigan's largest think tank when they need someone to answer a question or discuss a potential legal case. Her primary job is getting them to the right person for help.

"It's very rewarding to be in a job helping people," Kelley said. "And I get to do it at a place which really cares about people and their employees — more than anywhere else I've worked."

She grew up in Saginaw Township before moving all over the country. She moved to Memphis, then

Dallas, then Toledo, and after nearly two decades, she came back to "God's Country" in Michigan.

"All of my jobs have been in office administrator positions," she said. "I love seeing people and being around people, so it fits."

Kelley moved back in 2011 to take care of her mom, who had lung cancer. In time, she married her high school sweetheart, Thom Kelley. Moving back also allowed her to be closer to the family cottage in Alpena, where visits have been a tradition for more than 50 years.

**“It’s very rewarding to be in a job helping people. And I get to do it at a place which really cares about people and their employees — more than anywhere else I’ve worked.”**

She worked a few jobs in Midland before finding the Mackinac Center. Before applying for a job, Kelley spent time reading up on public policy and the free-market positions the Mackinac Center believes in. She admits she isn't as much of a policy nerd as some of

her colleagues, but she wholeheartedly agrees with the principles that her employer stands for.

Outside of work, she's a music lover, especially the band Journey. She attended the Country Music Association awards in 2022 in Las Vegas and has been to other concerts across the country. Kelley is also a huge animal lover; she has a black lab named Hank and two cats, Luna and Gus.

"I just love to laugh and enjoy life," she said.

Kelley lives in Midland with her husband Thom, who works down the street at Ace Hardware. She has two stepsons, who are married, and two grandkids. ■



# Mackinac Center Legal Expertise Gets High-Profile Recognition



**By Steve Delie**  
*Director of labor policy*



**By Vinnie Vernuccio**  
*Senior fellow*

MICHIGAN HALL

For over 11 years, the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation has been litigating cases to promote human flourishing and protect legal rights. The Foundation has helped discover and end the dues skim that afflicted home health care and child care providers. We've fought attempts to force graduate student researchers at the University of Michigan to pay union dues, and filed lawsuits on behalf of teachers trapped into paying a union even after Michigan adopted right-to-work.

Perhaps because of our lawsuits, the state's highest court has recognized our expertise in other situations. Twice in the last 12 months, the Michigan Supreme Court asked us to submit an amicus brief, or friend-of-the-court brief, in cases brought by others. Courts use amicus briefs as they examine specific issues; not only do they discuss the legal merits of a case, they tell the court what impact the case will have on society.

When a court receives an amicus brief, it's usually an unsolicited one. Sometimes, though, a court will ask an organization to submit one if it believes it has particular expertise. We are proud to announce that in the case *Sole v. MEDC*, the Michigan Supreme Court asked us for a brief on the issue of transparency in economic development programs.

In another case, *TPOAM v. Renner*, justices asked us to address whether a union's duty of fair representation requires it to represent, at no charge, a worker facing a grievance proceeding if the worker is governed by its contract but is not a member.

We also have provided counsel to key government officials outside Michigan. The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation, together with the Institute for the American Worker, helped on an amicus brief for 30 members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The congressmen included the chairman of the Republican Study Committee; the ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions; and the ranking member of the Education and Labor Committee. The brief addressed the proper standard for determining whether a worker is an independent contractor, and it may be a key part of the National Labor Relations Board's forthcoming decision in the case *Atlanta Opera*.

We will never stop fighting to protect worker freedom and prevent the undoing of sound policy through unsound court decisions. And we will continue to offer our expertise in Michigan and throughout the country, to ensure prosperity for all. ■

**“We will never stop fighting to protect worker freedom and prevent the undoing of sound policy through unsound court decisions.”**





Ellie and Edward L. Fox

# BLESSED TO GIVE BACK





Playing bridge in Islamabad, Bogota and Moscow. Dancing with a North Korean army general in a city park. Ellie Fox's travels have taken her to every country in the world, to every continent, to all 50 states, and she has her ninth passport.

"I'm blessed in so many ways" said the Fort Myers, Florida, resident and Mackinac Center donor.

Ellie is a member of the Travelers Century Club, an organization for people who have visited at least 100 countries. Of the club's list of 330 countries and territories in the world, she has visited 320. The ones remaining are mostly islands, she says.

Her travels began as a child when her father's military service took the family to Austria and then Germany, where Ellie graduated third in her class at Heidelberg American High School in 1955.

She earned her Associate of Arts degree at City College of San Francisco and her Bachelor of Business Administration degree at the University of Oklahoma, where she met her husband, Edward L. Fox, on a blind date.

Ed and Ellie were married in September 1960 and welcomed their son, Edward L. Fox, Jr., in May 1962.

Ellie's husband, a mechanical engineer, founded Fox Electronics in 1979 and it became the largest



privately owned electronics manufacturing company in the world. The company manufactured crystals and oscillators, which are timing products used in computers, cell phones, GPS-equipped devices, radio transmitters and receivers, video cameras, digital systems, medical equipment and spacecraft.

Ellie launched her own real estate company in 1980 and was voted Realtor of the Year in 1984.

Ellie is an avid duplicate bridge player — and a Ruby Life Master — and has played bridge in 13 countries outside the US.

Sadly, in March 1990 Ed was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and died 26 years and 2 months later on May 14, 2016.

Ellie donates to 61 charities and organizations every month, including the Mackinac Center. She is grateful to be able to make a difference for the causes she cares about, such as the Dubin Alzheimer's Resource Center, Florida Repertory Theatre, Habitat for Humanity, ASPCA, the Southwest Florida Symphony, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Harry Chapin Food Bank, Feed the Children, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Tunnels 2 Towers Foundation and many more.

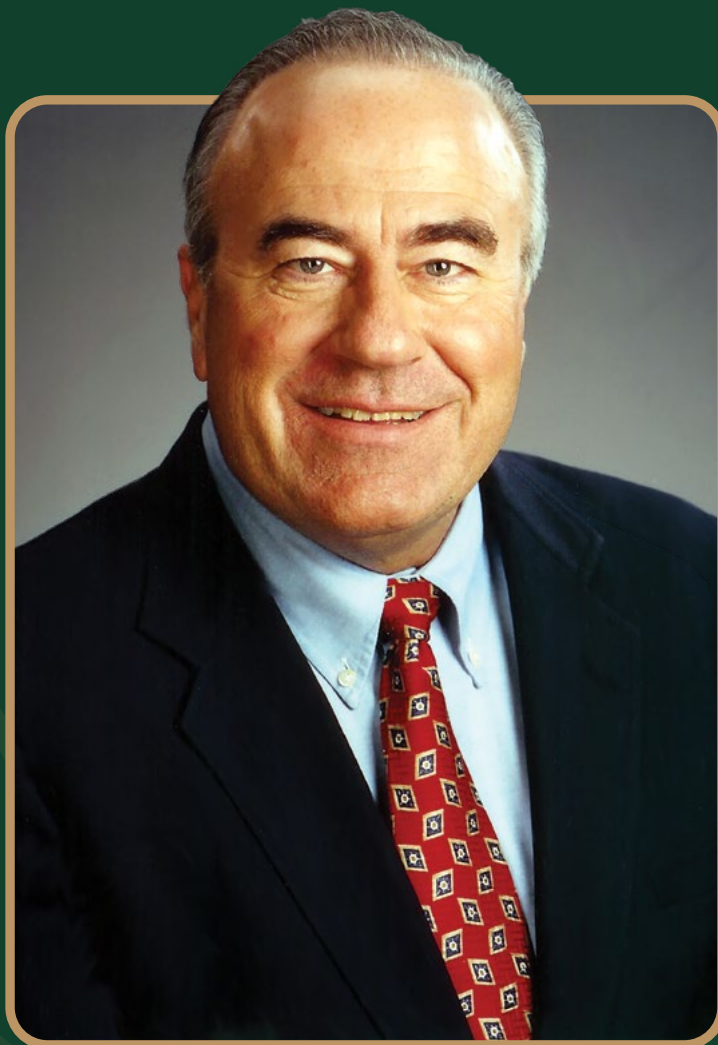
"I am so blessed," she repeated, "because I can give back." ■

**"I'm blessed in so many ways."**



# FRANK BECKMANN

CENTER FOR JOURNALISM



# Honoring the Legacy of Radio Giant Frank Beckmann

## Mackinac Center Establishes Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism

In 2021, donors approached the Mackinac Center about finding a way to honor Frank Beckmann, who had just completed a career of over 50 years in broadcast journalism. He spent the last 17 of those years hosting “The Frank Beckmann Show” on Newstalk 760 WJR, where Mackinac Center staff appeared regularly. These donors wanted to honor his legacy, and we were thrilled to have the opportunity to figure out how to do it.

From that came the idea of launching the Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism, housed at the Mackinac Center. When we mentioned the idea to Frank, he was enthusiastic: “You know I love you guys — I’ll do anything you need.”

It was with immense sadness that we learned shortly afterward that Frank was suffering from vascular dementia. The disease ultimately took his life in February 2022. But we’re honored to launch the Frank Beckmann Center in his memory and pleased to know that he was aware of it.

Frank had a fascinating and outstanding life, which began in 1949 in Germany. In his last meeting with me, Frank talked about his parents’ life under the Nazi regime. Their experience gave him a thirst for free markets and freedom. He never forgot it.

The Beckmann family moved to Detroit shortly after he was born. He attended Osbourne High School, but the family moved again, to Warren, so he could attend Cousino High School and work at its student radio station. He then spent two years at a community college and began his professional career in 1969 at the age of 20.

In 1973, he went to the newsroom of WJR, where he would spend his career. He started out as the company’s youngest-ever news reporter. Frank quickly moved into sports reporting and had the honor of broadcasting for all four major Michigan sports teams — the Lions, Tigers, Red Wings and Pistons. He is perhaps most well-known, though,

for his 33 years as the play-by-play announcer for the University of Michigan football team.

His most significant impact, however, may have come through his charitable work. Frank used his microphone, his name and his love of golf and fishing to help raise millions of dollars for charities. His

annual March of Dimes celebrity golf outing was especially important.

Frank was always interested in politics and public policy, which led him to launch a morning

“His passing has saddened us all, but we are also glad to honor his legacy by launching the Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism.”

show that ran from 2004 to 2021. He shared the Mackinac Center's passion for making Michigan a freer and more prosperous state and used his talents and voice toward that end.

His passing has saddened us all, but we are also glad to honor his legacy by launching the Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism. We could do this only with his support and that of his wife Karen.

The Beckmann Center launched officially this month and has multiple components that focus on reporting, journalism and media. This includes the "Mackinac on Michigan" radio show, a monthly broadcast on WJR. It encompasses our Michigan Capitol Confidential news website, with its focus on investigating and reporting on activities that affect individual liberty and economic freedom. We are also launching new programs to train the next generation of free-market journalists. Lastly, the new Center will renew our emphasis on government transparency through public records requests and databases.

There has never been a greater need for high-quality, independent journalism that supports the

principles of free people working together in a free society. Because of the generosity of Frank, his family and others, all donations to the Beckmann Center will be matched dollar for dollar. If you're interested in this opportunity, then please make a generous gift today at [www.mackinac.org/frank](http://www.mackinac.org/frank) or, if you have your phone at hand, you can also text key word "Frank" to 50155.

In this life, all good things must come to an end, and in his last broadcast, Frank said, "It's been a wonderful run. I've enjoyed every second of it, I really have. ... I'm not perfect, but it's like I've always said, 'Only a mediocre man is always at his best.'"

Frank was far from mediocre, and we're honored to be able to continue the legacy of a great man with the Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism. ■



**By Jarrett Skorup**

*Director of the Beckmann Center  
Senior director of marketing  
and communications*



## BY THE NUMBERS

# 14

Number of organizations represented at the WFO Summit.

# 37

Attendees of the Inaugural WFO Summit.

# 2,000,000

The number of public sector workers covered by union contracts in attendee's states.



### **Mackinac.org/blog**

Keep up-to-date on the latest policy stories from Mackinac Center analysts.



### **MichCapCon.com**

Michigan Capitol Confidential is the news site of the Mackinac Center that provides unique news coverage.



### **Mackinac.org/MCLF**

Our public interest law firm advances individual freedom and the rule of law in Michigan.



### **WorkersForOpportunity.org**

Advancing the liberty of employees across the country, ensuring full choice and the protection of their First Amendment rights.



### **MiPace.org**

Parent Advocates for Choice in Education.



### **OpportunityMichigan.org**

Do you want to get more engaged with public policy in Michigan? Opportunity Michigan is right for you.

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“The Mackinac Center filed a lawsuit, and the judge sided with us.”

# FOIA Lawsuit Uncovers Favoritism in U-M Recommendations on COVID Policy



**By Derk Wilcox**  
*Senior attorney*

When Gov. Gretchen Whitmer released her plan for loosening COVID-based restrictions on May 7, 2020, after the near-complete lockdown, she assured the public that her decisions were based on science and facts. She added, “The most important thing right now is to listen to the experts and follow the medical science.” And, “Our Safe Start Plan has been guided by the state’s top public health and university experts. ...”

Seeking to better understand how the governor created her plan, the Mackinac Center submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the University of Michigan, asking for emails between university experts and key state officials. In response, the university withheld much of the requested information, saying it was part

of official deliberations and thus exempt from FOIA requirements. The public's right to know, it said, was secondary to public officials' need to be able to collaborate in relative secrecy. The Mackinac Center filed a lawsuit, and the judge sided with us. "[The Mackinac Center]," the judge wrote, "has convincingly argued that the public release of information that may have influenced actions taken by government employees and officials during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic is a matter of potentially significant public interest."

The judge ordered U-M to release the documents, which revealed that the experts' advice was often guided more by political calculations than by science and facts. How many children could a child care facility serve, for example? The answer took into account the economics of child care. Could facilities effectively operate with smaller

groups of children? Could they survive new state-mandated expenses such as touchless trash cans? It is reasonable to consider such questions, but the experts acknowledged that they did not give similar consideration to other businesses. In short, certain businesses were given favorable treatment, and it appears that political lobbying played into this. One expert noted that further restrictions on restaurants might not "see the light of day" because "(i) we already have rules out and (ii) restaurants don't like them."

Furthermore, the communications showed other examples of experts simply making educated guesses. Given that these discussions took place early on in the pandemic, this might have been expected. But state officials often acted as if questioning the policies was an impermissible questioning of science. And it is now clear that the science was lacking or often did not exist. ■

**The Mackinac Center's work, including this magazine, is made possible by the Mackinac Center Board of Directors:**

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*The previous issue of Impact erroneously listed Michael J. Reitz as a member of the Mackinac Center Board of Directors. We regret the error.*

# **MACKINAC BRINGS HEALTH CARE REFORMS TO THE LEGISLATURE**





# The measures would make health care cheaper and more accessible.

As Michigan moves out of the pandemic, the Mackinac Center's Healthcare Policy Initiative is working to improve access to health care professionals and make state-regulated services more transparent.

We want the state to eliminate its certificate-of-need, or CON laws, which require health care facilities and professionals to get official permission before they start or expand their services. CON laws make health care scarcer and more expensive and it's unlikely that the state will eliminate those laws soon. We are, however, working to bring more accountability to the commission that enforces them. The Michigan House has passed a series of transparency bills we advocate, and they are in the Senate now. The bills would increase public access to the commission's meetings and commit the Legislature to oversee it through annual reviews.

Another state program that needs more oversight is Medicaid. During the pandemic, the state suspended its regular reviews of the program, which it had used to verify if people enrolled in it were eligible for benefits. Partly as a result, enrollment soared by 25%, going from 1.76 million residents in February 2020 to 2.19 million in February 2022, according to the state health department.

We've called on the Legislature to ensure the state resumes these reviews once federal officials drop their ban on them. Making sure that only eligible people are enrolled will improve the

fiscal sustainability of the program for Michigan's most vulnerable individuals: the aged, elderly and disabled. The federal government has given the state extra funds during the declared COVID emergency, and those funds will soon stop flowing. This increases the importance of conducting the reviews. The Michigan House has started to consider legislation to enhance procedures to review the list of eligible people, and we support this bill.

Finally, the Healthcare Policy Initiative has called on lawmakers to recognize the licenses that health professionals hold in good standing from other states. The state licensing department took this step during the pandemic, but it expired on Jan. 11. The governor recently signed into law a bill to allow this practice during an epidemic if the director of the state health department determines it is necessary. That's a good first step.

Thousands of licensed health professionals from other states worked here during the pandemic. The education, training, scope-of-practice, and licensing requirements for health professionals across the country are largely standardized, and state lawmakers should recognize licenses from other states, not just during epidemics. ■



**By Greg George**

*Director of legislative affairs*

# LEGISLATURE APPROVES LARGE TAX CUT



By James M. Hohman

*Director of fiscal policy*

State lawmakers passed what was called a temporary tax hike in 2007, and it hasn't been temporary. Thankfully, legislators passed a bill to bring the rate back down. It's a good policy that will promote job growth, encourage small business and improve state competitiveness. It's unfortunate that the governor will veto it.

We criticized the tax hikes when they happened and have continued to call for lawmakers to bring rates down. We've made the public aware of how much the state budget has grown and promoted

## “Michigan residents deserve this tax cut.”

the reasons why lawmakers should reduce taxes. We also offered some novel reasons why policymakers ought to cut taxes now, testified in support of the proposal in committee, and sent out statements to the media praising lawmakers when they moved bills to cut the tax.

The bill legislators passed reduces the income tax rate from 4.25% to 3.9%. It also creates a new child tax credit and boosts exemptions for seniors. The Senate passed the bill with Republican support and the House passed it with some Democratic legislators joining mostly Republican support.

One reason why lawmakers think it's a good time to cut taxes is because the state has a lot of money on hand and the cost of living is going up. Economic growth gave the state more tax revenue, and the federal government has showered lawmakers with so much cash they haven't figured out yet how to spend all of it.

Yet the governor claimed that the tax cut is “unsustainable.” That's a tough argument to make when the policymakers have billions in extra money at their disposal and can anticipate even more revenue growth.

Besides, lawmakers ought to be worried about whether the growth of the state budget can be sustained. The governor proposed \$72.9 billion in spending, a \$14.6 billion

increase from what the state spent before the pandemic. If policymakers cannot slice \$2.5 billion from the \$14.6 billion increase — which is how much less the state would collect under the tax cut — then they have a severe spending problem.

Michigan is not the only state that is trying to lighten its tax burdens. There are 14 other states that have cut taxes in the past year, and more states are coming. Michigan already taxes income at higher rates than everyone in the region, save Illinois.

Michigan residents deserve this tax cut. It's good for the economy and affordable to the state budget. It's excellent to see that legislators agreed and cut taxes even in the face of the governor's opposition. ■



# We Asked. You Shared. We Listened.

Thomas Jefferson said, “The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.” He certainly could have been talking about our times. In recent years, the national and Michigan landscape changed dramatically when it came to government overreach and spending and media spin. One consequence was the lack of education for our children, as union leaders kept government schools closed and some parents were told they had no voice in what children were being taught.

The Mackinac Center’s leaders viewed these shifts as an opportunity to change the way we thought about fundraising priorities. One result was a market research study to make a concentrated effort to listen to the policy priorities of our philanthropic supporters. We asked many leaders in the fight for freedom to identify the policy changes that are most necessary to make Michigan the most free and prosperous state in the nation. And then we listened.

Free-market advocates told us that we must fix education, and now in 2022, we are championing a legal and legislative effort to break up the education monopoly and give parents more control and choice over their children’s schooling. We call it Let Kids Learn. Other friends of freedom told us that government transparency was important and finding reliable sources of information was a major challenge. So, we launched The Frank Beckmann Center for Journalism. The Beckmann Center will shine daylight on government overreach and provide Michigan residents with reliable and accurate media sources.

We know that listening to philanthropists can inform our mission, so we are committing this year to market research interviews and listening. If you are concerned about our state and would like to participate, let us know. We’d welcome an opportunity to speak with you. ■



**By Steve Virgadamo**

*Senior fellow for advocacy  
and strategic counsel*