

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

IMPACT

A photograph of a man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is shown in profile, facing right, and appears to be speaking at a podium. A microphone is visible in the foreground. The background is blurred, showing what looks like a large hall or auditorium with warm lighting.

2025 GRANO AWARD WINNER

PATRICK WRIGHT BECOMES FIRST PUBLIC
INTEREST LITIGATOR HONORED

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**MACKINAC
IN THE
MEDIA**

Lansing State Journal

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Redemption Requires Opportunity. How to Reform Michigan Licensing Laws

“If Michigan wants safer communities, stronger families and a fairer economy, lawmakers should finish what they started in 2020 — and give every willing worker a real second chance.”

*Jarrett Skorup, Vice President of Marketing
and Communications*

The Detroit News

Federalist Society Honors a Guardian of Liberty

“Wright and his team have litigated on behalf of residents whose taxes were used for illegal and wasteful government spending, lodge owners forced to pay for unwanted marketing services, a mother whose school district refused to share the school curriculum with her, and a medical center shuttered by Covid lockdowns.”

Michael J. Reitz, Executive Vice President

The Detroit News

Caregivers Pay SEIU Dues for No Real Union Benefits

“Home-based caregivers and their patients deserve better than to be exploited as pawns in a partisan money grab.”

Derk Wilcox, Senior Attorney



House Republicans Say it Should Be Easier to Get a Required License for Your Job in Michigan

Lessening licensing requirements “would allow more people to move into the state and begin working right away without going through these hoops.”

*Jarrett Skorup, Vice President of Marketing
and Communications*



Hope, Anger on Display at Town Hall as \$261M Megasite Forges Ahead Near Flint

Michigan shouldn’t assume that government incentives are an “effective use of taxpayer dollars or effective use of creating jobs.”

James M. Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy



Photo by-MCPC

A Good Year for Saying No

Politics rewards drama. Progress often looks like stalemate.

So it may surprise you to hear me say this: 2025 was one of the most productive years I've seen in Lansing.

Not because lawmakers passed a lot of legislation. They did not (and that's a poor measure of productivity anyway unless bigger government is the goal). Divided government — a Republican House and a Democratic Senate and governor — ensured lots of legislation went nowhere.

But when lawmakers did agree, they agreed on some big things — and remarkably, those things aligned pretty well with longstanding recommendations of Mackinac Center analysts.

I wouldn't have predicted progress a year ago, but it wasn't an accident, either.

Our policy experts study how government actually works, identifying where good intentions go wrong, and explaining — patiently, repeatedly, and backed by research — how better policy can expand liberty, prosperity, and opportunity without expanding government.

They brought to mind four examples of our research in action:

First, lawmakers averted a disaster for employers and workers alike.

A Michigan Supreme Court ruling meant that costly and unwieldy paid leave and minimum wage mandates would take effect in February. They would have especially harmed small businesses and nonprofits, reduced flexibility for workers, and worsened the affordability of everything we buy.

House Republicans offered better alternatives — exactly the kind of reforms we had recommended — and, crucially, secured Democrats' buy-in before the worst provisions took effect. The result wasn't perfect, but it was far better than letting the original mandates proceed on autopilot. The compromise was an incremental, realistic reform.

Second, Michigan adopted a road funding plan that reflects basic fiscal responsibility.

We've argued for years that Michiganders shouldn't have to pay higher taxes overall just to get decent roads. Lawmakers should better prioritize the money

they already collect. This year, they did.

They eliminated the Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve fund — a corporate subsidy slush fund — and redirected that money to fix the roads. A decade ago, I suggested that very idea from a stage on Mackinac Island before a few hundred business and political leaders. I could hear murmurs and exclamations of shock, but now it's policy.

Lawmakers also replaced the sales tax on road fuels, which was diverted to schools, with an excise tax that actually goes to fixing roads.

The political reality was that Democrats wanted a tax increase as the price of a deal. The compromise was an increase in marijuana taxes, not broad-based hikes on all families and workers. Is it ideal? Far from it. But roads will be repaired faster than they fall apart, largely without reaching deeper into taxpayers' pockets. And the Legislature prioritized roads over corporate welfare. That's progress.

Third, lawmakers took meaningful steps to rein in earmarks.

In each of the past three years, legislators authorized \$1 billion or more in earmarks (special tax-funded grants that typically target a few politically chosen recipients). This year, earmark spending dropped by two-thirds. Just as important, they followed the Michigan Constitution's requirement for a two-thirds vote and used a more transparent process that allows public scrutiny before projects are approved.

Most earmarks still fail to demonstrate broad public benefit. But transparency and constitutional compliance matter. And the fact that lawmakers plan to keep using this process going forward matters even more.

Finally — this would have seemed unthinkable not long ago — lawmakers eliminated the state's largest

corporate subsidy program and approved no new business subsidies at all.

The SOAR program allowed politicians to give enormous sums of taxpayer money to favored companies with little accountability. Since its creation, lawmakers authorized \$1.45 billion to supposedly create 14,800 jobs. So far, they've spent \$720 million and produced exactly zero jobs.

This year, they shut it down. And for the first time since we began tracking it in 2000, lawmakers went a year without authorizing any new corporate welfare. After averaging \$890 million a year in new subsidies for decades, that is no small thing.

There are still clear opportunities for bipartisan reform — on transparency, housing, occupational licensing, and more. And there is always the risk that old habits will return.

But perspective matters.

Lawmakers didn't agree on much in 2025, as often happens in divided government. But when they did agree, they agreed with us.

That's not just luck. It happens because good ideas, consistently advanced, eventually change the debate. It happens because policy analysts do the hard work of research and explanation. Our supporters make it possible for free-market ideas to stay in the fight long enough to win.

There are no permanent victories. But there are years when the inches gained add up. Thomas Jefferson said, "The ground of liberty is to be gained by inches." ■



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe".

By Joseph G. Lehman

President of the Mackinac Center



Photo by MCPP

CELEBRATING PATRICK WRIGHT

A CHAMPION OF LIBERTY HONORED WITH THE GRANO AWARD

The Mackinac Center team gathered in November to celebrate one of our own: Vice President of Legal Affairs Patrick Wright. At a ceremony in Detroit, the Federalist Society's Michigan Lawyers Chapter presented Patrick with the prestigious Joseph D. Grano Award, one of the highest honors in Michigan's legal community.

For 20 years, Patrick has been a driving force at the Mackinac Center. Sixteen years ago, he founded the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation and has led it ever since, securing landmark victories in state and federal law. He helped end the illegal dues skim that siphoned millions from home care givers; challenged unconstitutional executive overreach during the

COVID-19 pandemic; fought for government transparency; upheld parental rights; and defended free speech. He is still working to secure individual liberty for Michigan residents.

The Grano Award, named for the late professor Joseph D. Grano, recognizes individuals who embody a profound "respect for the rule of law, separation of powers, and the principle that ours is a government of laws, not of men." Past recipients include former Gov. John Engler and several Michigan Supreme Court chief justices, as well as federal judges. Patrick is the first public interest attorney to receive this award, a strong sign of how extensive his contributions to freedom have been for all Michigan residents.



Here's what some of the team has to say:

"Patrick Wright pursues justice for those harmed by poor governance. His courtroom wins restored rights to countless parents, business owners, and everyday taxpayers whose courage was inspired by knowing that Patrick would advocate for them,"

- Joseph Lehman, President

"Patrick brings a powerful combination of lawyerly precision, commitment to the constitution and compassion for people who have been steamrolled by government. The donors who supported the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation can be proud of the recognition its work has earned."

- Michael Reitz, Executive Vice President

"Creating the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation from scratch and litigating the cases he has brought has made an enormous impact on Michigan. Both on our state's public policy and its jurisprudence,"

- Derk Wilcox, Senior Attorney

"Patrick's leadership and legal expertise have shaped Michigan's public-interest landscape for the better. He has spent his career championing the constitutional principles that allow people to thrive. His dedication to defending individual liberty has delivered real-world victories for countless citizens, and we're proud to see his contributions honored with the Grano Award."

- Cami Pendell, Vice President for Government Affairs

Patrick's unwavering commitment to individual liberty has delivered lasting results and continues to set the standard for defending civil liberties in Michigan. ■



The Federalist Society



By AnnMarie Pariseau
Director of Communications

Photo by MCPP

School Board Workshop Educates ON LEADERSHIP AND FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

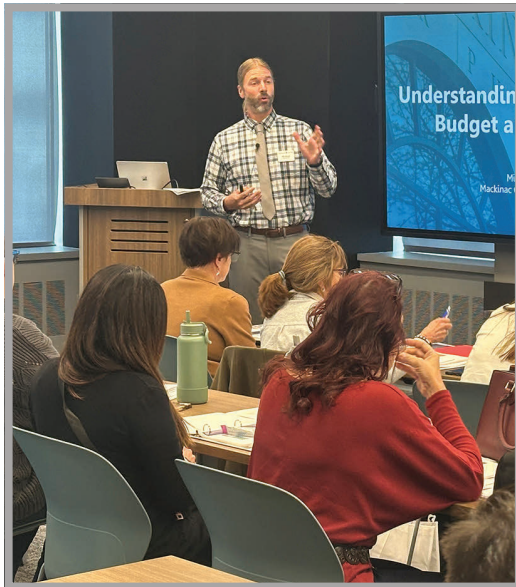


On October 11, school board members from across the state gathered in Lansing for a training workshop co-hosted by the Mackinac Center and partner organizations. The workshop gave school board members the opportunity to learn alternative perspectives to those generally espoused by the public school establishment.

The Mackinac Center partnered with Salt & Light Global and the Leadership Institute to deliver a full program covering a variety of topics that support effective board governance and leadership. Molly Macek, director of education policy, presented strategies for building a superintendent accountability system that improves student achievement. Mike Van Beek, director of research, gave tips to help board members understand district finances, budgets and collective bargaining.

The Leadership Institute covered topics such as effective governance and school board norms, constituent management and improving outcomes for special education students. SLG led sessions on government transparency, the Open Meetings Act, local control and district authority.

The workshop attendees had the opportunity to learn from experienced school board members and local legal experts, too. In a panel discussion, board members from Birmingham and Rochester shared their personal insights on cultivating board relations, navigating challenging situations and engaging with the public. In another panel, local attorneys and a member of the Michigan State Board of Education responded to questions about parental rights and district policy development.



Photos by MCP



The panel discussions and presentations sparked in-depth conversation among the attendees and gave them practical tools for improving board governance. The workshop also provided invaluable networking time for board members seeking support from like-minded peers.

School board members expressed immense gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the workshop. It deepened their understanding of board governance and offered them different perspectives on relevant issues from education, policy and legal experts. They valued the opportunity to connect with peers who face similar challenges in their districts and to learn from each other about overcoming these obstacles.

The Mackinac Center plans to work with its partner organizations to offer more events of this nature in

the future. It will also continue to collaborate with other local and national organizations, such as School Boards for Academic Excellence, to provide resources that address the needs of reform-minded school board members across the state.

Interested school members can learn more and access helpful resources on the Mackinac Center website: [Solutions for School Boards – Mackinac Center](#). ■



By Molly Macek
Director of Education Policy

Honoring a Legacy of Leadership at the Mackinac Center Board

Few families have shaped Michigan's economic and civic landscape as profoundly as the Haworths. For a quarter century, Dick Haworth has served on the Mackinac Center's Board of Directors with quiet strength, principled leadership and a deep belief in expanding opportunity for others. His steady hand guided the organization through important periods of growth, transition and increasing impact.

Dick's professional life reflects the same character he brought to the boardroom. Under his leadership, Haworth Inc. grew from a respected family enterprise into a global enterprise serving markets in more than 120 countries, with a network of 650 dealers and 7,500 employees. The company enriches spaces with award-

winning furniture, interior architecture and luxury lifestyle products while maintaining a strong commitment to craft, innovation, environmental stewardship and community support. Through every stage of its growth, the company has remained grounded in quality and guided by a belief in human potential.

Dick's vision for Michigan – a place where individuals are free to build, create, and pursue opportunity – has informed his philanthropy as well. He and his wife, Ethie, have supported institutions such as Helen DeVos Children's Hospital and the Make-A-Wish Foundation. In 2008, Dick became the first



Photo courtesy of the Haworths

major CEO in Michigan to publicly support a right-to-work law in the state, helping open the path to its historic passage in 2012.

His service at the Mackinac Center reflects the same spirit. He has championed emerging leaders, supported ambitious ideas and strengthened the organization's capacity to expand opportunity and nurture potential across the state.

"Dick believes deeply in the promise of this country – and that promise should extend to everyone," said Joseph G. Lehman. "His dedication to expanding opportunity and helping others flourish has strengthened communities across Michigan and will leave a lasting impact."

As we honor Dick's exceptional service, we are also proud to welcome Matthew Haworth to the Mackinac Center board. Since 2009, Matthew has guided Haworth Inc. through significant global growth while upholding the company's commitment to people and design excellence. He has also played an important leadership role at the West Michigan Policy Forum, where he has been a thoughtful voice on economic issues and a respected partner in strengthening the business community. Through his leadership, Matthew continues the family tradition of cultivating talent, fostering innovation and helping others realize their potential.

"Matthew brings a rare combination of insight, discipline, and civic purpose," Lehman said. "He understands the responsibilities of leadership and shares our dedication to building a stronger Michigan. We are fortunate to welcome him to the board."

We are deeply grateful for Dick's decades of service and proud to welcome Matthew to the Mackinac Center's board. ■



By Jim Walker

*Vice President for
Advancement*

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

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LEGAL FOUNDATION DEBUTS CONSTITUTIONAL RESOURCE

The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation has unveiled a landmark contribution to civic understanding in Michigan: the Michigan Constitutional Archive. The first comprehensive database of its kind, this new online resource brings nearly 190 years of Michigan's constitutional history together in one accessible, easy-to-navigate platform, freely available to every resident of our state.

The archive has already sparked excitement among litigators, lawmakers and educators alike. What once required combing through scattered libraries and obscure records can now be explored with a few clicks.

The project was spearheaded by Patrick J. Wright, the Mackinac Center's vice president for legal affairs,

and brought to life through the technical expertise of information technology developer Isaiah Bierbrauer. Together — with the assistance of various colleagues and interns — they assembled the full text of all 284 proposed amendments since 1835, complete with edits, primary sources and supporting documents.

The result is a tool that lets users watch Michigan's constitutional conversation unfold across generations.

A highlight of the archive is the

complete, digitized record of the 1961 Constitutional Convention. Transcripts of the constitutional debate offer an unusually personal look at the ideas and compromises that shaped the constitution we live under today. For anyone curious about how earlier Michiganders wrestled with questions of rights,

“Michigan's constitutional history is foundational to understanding how our state's laws, rights and government originated and remain relevant.”



Photo by Adobe Stock

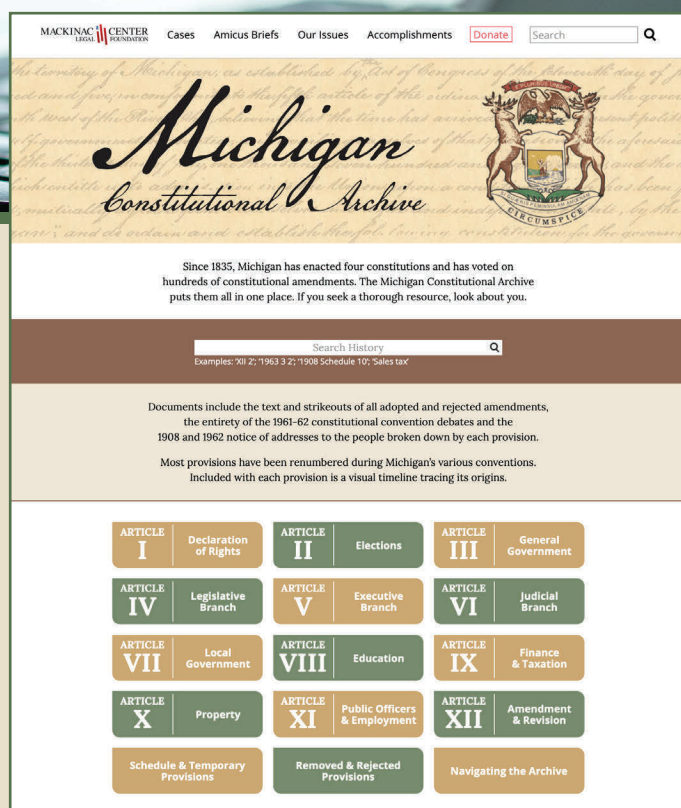
representation, or the balance of government power, the archive offers a depth and richness that was previously out of reach.

Bringing this public resource to life required patience, collaboration and a deep belief in transparency. The Mackinac Center litigation and technology teams spent years gathering documents, standardizing formats and building a platform that welcomes the everyday user, not just scholars.

“Michigan’s constitutional history is foundational to understanding how our state’s laws, rights and government originated and remain relevant,” said Wright. “The Michigan Constitutional Archive brings transparency and accessibility to that history in one place for the first time.”

We hope this archive invites every Michigander to explore the foundations of their rights and institutions with clarity and confidence.

You can visit it today at mackinac.org/constitution. ■



MACKINAC
LEGAL CENTER
FOUNDATION



By Jessica Wyeth
Marketing Content Manager

UNLOCK OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKERS WITH A CRIMINAL PAST



Photo by Adobe Stock

Shana Norgan struggled with drug addiction and got into trouble with the law. But she accepted her punishment, served her sentence of probation and went on to earn three degrees. Shana wants to become a licensed social worker and therapist to help people recover from what she dealt with.

Michael Grennan also abused drugs, cycling in and out of prison. Like Shana, he got sober, met his

probationary requirements and dedicated himself to helping others.

But both were stymied by state licensing laws. Our new study, “Unlock Opportunity: How Michigan’s Licensing Laws Block Second Chances,” shows how hundreds of laws in Michigan block people with criminal backgrounds from finding employment.

“Redemption requires opportunity, and work is one of the most powerful tools for rehabilitation.”

Some standards make sense. Employers should know about the criminal backgrounds of their job applicants. If the state requires a license for a given career, it should run a background check on license applicants and have the option to deny a license. But a denial should only happen if the crime was serious and directly related to the industry the applicant wants to go into, and if there is a genuine risk to the public from that person working in that line of work.

Policy Brief

MACKINAC CENTER
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Unlock Opportunity: How Michigan's Licensing Laws Block Second Chances

By Jarrett Skorup

November 4, 2025 | S2025-07 | ISBN: 978-1-942502-98-2

Introduction

Between two and three million Michigan residents have a criminal record, according to Safe and Just Michigan, a nonprofit focused on criminal justice research and reform.¹ Around 45,000 people in this state are convicted of some type of felony every year.² About 11,000 people are released from prison every year.³ While Michigan's recidivism rate — how often people return to prison — is at a historic low, one in five prisoners released from prison still end up back beyond bars after three years.⁴

Lawmakers often debate what activities should be criminal and what types of punishment the state should inflict for violating the law. These discussions should also consider the best ways to keep previously convicted people from committing new crimes and going back to prison.

Research shows that people released from prison who find work are significantly less likely to be convicted of additional crimes.⁵ Stable, long-term employment seems to be one of the best deterrents to recidivism.⁶

Creating better employment opportunities for individuals with criminal records is no easy task. A number of factors impact whether a former prisoner lands a stable job after serving his or her sentence. But policymakers can still make a difference.

The state should reform its occupational licensing laws to remove the barriers that prevent people with criminal records from obtaining a license to work. State policymakers recently took steps in this direction, and the results demonstrate that these reforms can improve public safety and reduce prison costs for taxpayers. Allowing more people with criminal backgrounds to obtain state licenses means more of them will find steady employment, reducing the chance they reoffend and end up back in prison.

Licensing laws in Michigan

Occupational licensing laws affect a significant portion of Michigan's workforce. The state requires about one in five workers to receive special permission before they can legally practice a trade.⁷

study highlights the importance — and early success — of Michigan's reform.

But Shana and other workers aren't as lucky as Mike. The 2020 changes don't apply to wide swaths of licensed professions. In health care, education, child care, elder care, law enforcement and other sectors, automatic bans still block opportunities even when employers are fully informed and willing to hire. Licensing boards can still consider decades-old, irrelevant convictions. And the state licensing department has not implemented transparency measures required under the 2020 law. It has published data on only a small fraction of licenses — masking how many people are denied honest work by policies that need reform.

Now lawmakers are weighing new legislation to finish the job. It would apply the 2020 standards across all licensed professions, limit consideration to job-related convictions, require timely preliminary determinations and enforce real data reporting on state offices.

Redemption requires opportunity, and work is one of the most powerful tools for rehabilitation. Michigan should act now. Smart licensing reform isn't just good policy. It's an issue of justice, safety and common sense. ■

The Mackinac Center's efforts have led to real change. Legislation we supported in 2020 opened dozens of fields to people with criminal backgrounds, including Michael Grennan. Mike and others now have a much easier time getting licensed. He runs his own company, supports his family and serves his community. His story is one reason why the Mackinac Center's new



By Jarrett Skorup
*Vice President for Marketing
and Communications*

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION:

THE END MAY BE IN SIGHT

Photo by MCPP

MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION:

THE END MAY BE IN SIGHT



MEDC
MICHIGAN ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

PURE MICHIGAN

Photo by MCPH

[illegible]

In my 30 years as a full-time employee with the Mackinac Center, I've seen Michigan's policy landscape change greatly, but one constant has been the state's corporate welfare apparatus. This includes the Michigan Economic Growth Authority, created in 1995, and the ever-present Michigan Economic Development Corporation, launched in 1999. Neither program should have been created, and both may — finally — be nearing their end, thanks in part to Mackinac Center efforts.

These entities are supposed to create jobs and wealth by approving special favors, including subsidies, tax credits, and abatements for politically favored businesses. The evidence indicates, however, that they may instead retard growth, especially when opportunity costs are considered. (An opportunity cost is the cost of not choosing the next best alternative.)

Lawmakers have recently made efforts to put both MEGA and the MEDC to rest. MEGA, shuttered in 2011, continues to pay out on old promises and will eventually sunset its payouts. The MEDC may end sooner, as a recent scandal has ignited renewed criticism from elected officials.

The MEDC came into being when Gov. John Engler created it out of the Michigan Jobs Commission. The new agency issued a vision statement promising that “well-paying jobs will be plentiful, and skilled and trained workers will be available to fill them.” It was not to be.

In the 2000s, the MEDC authorized billions of subsidies to select companies and industries during Michigan's one-state recession. While the economy improved slightly over the next decade, it did so only after a new governor reined in the MEDC's work. Maybe that's just a coincidence, but evidence suggests it is not.

The Mackinac Center tirelessly studied and catalogued the failures and scandals of the MEDC and its programs, publishing half a dozen full studies about them between 2005 and 2020.

This scholarship, plus op-eds, blog posts, social media advertising and legislative testimony, served as the Mackinac Center's bulwark against the MEDC and its counterproductive corporate handouts.

The MEDC hasn't helped its own reputation over

the years, enduring scandalous episodes of its own making. In 2010, for instance, it approved more than \$9 million in business tax credits for a fake company run by a convicted felon who was on parole for financial crimes. The felon even appeared onstage with Gov. Jennifer Granholm to celebrate the award.

In 2024 we published “Front-Page Failures,” arguably our most influential corporate welfare study to date. It examined 20 years of Detroit Free Press headlines that trumpeted economic development deals. James Hohman, the Center's director of fiscal policy, compared the job promises in those headlines with the number eventually credited to the companies by the state.

“The MEDC hasn't helped its own reputation over the years, enduring scandalous episodes of its own making.”



The result: just 9% of promised jobs came to fruition.

The study has been widely cited this year by media outlets and lawmakers. It helped block efforts to expand corporate welfare during the 2024 lame-duck session and continues to inform debate in Lansing.

Many House Republicans have cited the study. So have media outlets, including Michigan Public, CBS Marquette, WILX, WSJM and The Detroit News. Hohman has done more than 30 media interviews about corporate welfare issues in the last year, 11 of which were about the study itself. The Center's related videos and online content have earned 150,000 views on social media.

All this work has helped shift the Overton Window toward eliminating the agency and the programs it operates.

Sen. Thomas Albert, R-Lowell, introduced a 53-bill package that would eliminate the MEDC and some other corporate welfare programs. His legislation would also increase legislative oversight and transparency for what remains. A group of House lawmakers also introduced legislation to eliminate the MEDC. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has vowed to veto these efforts, but she should not. The MEDC

is demonstrably ineffective, as the Mackinac Center has repeatedly shown.

The legislative effort is aided by the MEDC's newest scandal. It is now under criminal investigation by the Michigan attorney general for a \$20 million grant awarded to a Whitmer donor and former MEDC executive committee member who then misused the funds. In August the attorney general herself stated on WDIV's "Flashpoint" that MEDC funding should be stopped until oversight is better.

For decades, the MEDC has flailed as Michigan's fortunes declined. It has embarrassed itself and the state through mismanagement and poor performance.

If lawmakers follow through on their efforts, the MEDC will become part of Michigan's past, not its future — and the Mackinac Center will have played a significant role in its demise. IMPACT! ■



By Michael LaFaive
*Senior Director of the Morey
Fiscal Policy Initiative*

MEDC BIGGEST FLOPS

\$9M

in business tax
credits for a fake
company (2010)

9%

of jobs promised
came to fruition
(2000-2020)

\$500M

in film subsidies to
bring short-term jobs
(2008-2015)

Penny & Paws

Dig Into Free Markets



“The Adventures of Penny & Paws” is a children’s book series developed by the Mackinac Center to bring the ideas of free markets, responsibility and innovation to life for young readers. Through fun, exciting stories following Penny and her wise canine friend Paws, along with a rotating cast of characters, these books take kids on playful adventures that explore important themes such as the entrepreneurial spirit, personal responsibility and the costs of overregulation.

With funny dialogue and even a “Paws’ Joke Kennel,” the series makes policy concepts accessible and entertaining. Parents and educators can order free print editions online, making these books a great resource for home libraries, classrooms and community groups.

“Penny & Paws” empowers children to discover how freedom fuels opportunity. The stories encourage young readers to think critically about how rules shape

the world around them, while also promoting positive character traits including respect, honesty and leadership.

Head to the Mackinac Center website to order your copy. Just search for “Penny & Paws.”

By supporting this series, you’re helping plant seeds of economic understanding and civic-mindedness in the next generation — one playful page at a time. ■

“I like how it’s funnily illustrated — there’s bits of funniness in it, and I think it’s a really good way for kids to learn about policy.”
— Emerald, age 10




SCAN THE CODE TO
VISIT THE WEBSITE



The Habit of Helping Shows Advocacy in Action



Photos by MCPP



A year ago, I became a serial blood donor.

My sisters cajoled me into donating with them at the annual Michigan vs. Ohio State Blood Battle held by the American Red Cross. I learned three things when I became a blood donor for the first time:

1. The U.S. faces a blood shortage.
2. My O- blood type makes me a universal donor.
3. Unlike my sisters, I have easy-to-find veins and don't pass out while donating.

Upon realizing how suited I am to give to others, I made a habit of it. I've since donated five more pints of blood, which could save as many as 18 lives.

The experience reminded me that it's not enough to advocate that others give back; I can be personally involved. This is the same philosophy we hold at the Mackinac Center: Private generosity is most effective when it becomes a habit, a culture and a choice freely made.

We believe philanthropy can lift communities in ways government programs — funded under compulsion by tax dollars that are frequently misallocated — cannot. But if we champion voluntary, people-driven charity, we must also model it. And I'm proud that our staff does exactly that.

Throughout the year, Mackinac Center employees volunteer at Midland's Open Door homeless shelter. Those hours spent serving meals and talking with guests put a face to the issues we research, reminding us that lasting solutions often come from neighbors helping neighbors.

This holiday season, our team continues that commitment through an Angel Tree project with

Adoption Option, coordinated by our intern, Hannah Golab. Adoption Option, originally founded to provide adoption services, also supports children in the foster care system, offers free information on adoption and foster care, conducts home studies for Michigan families, and provides foster care licensing and services.

Through the Angel Tree project, local foster families in need submit gift requests, each represented by an ornament on our staff tree. Team members select an ornament and provide gifts for the child or parent it represents. Before our staff Christmas party, we gathered the gifts wrapped for the 31 children and parents we supported this season.

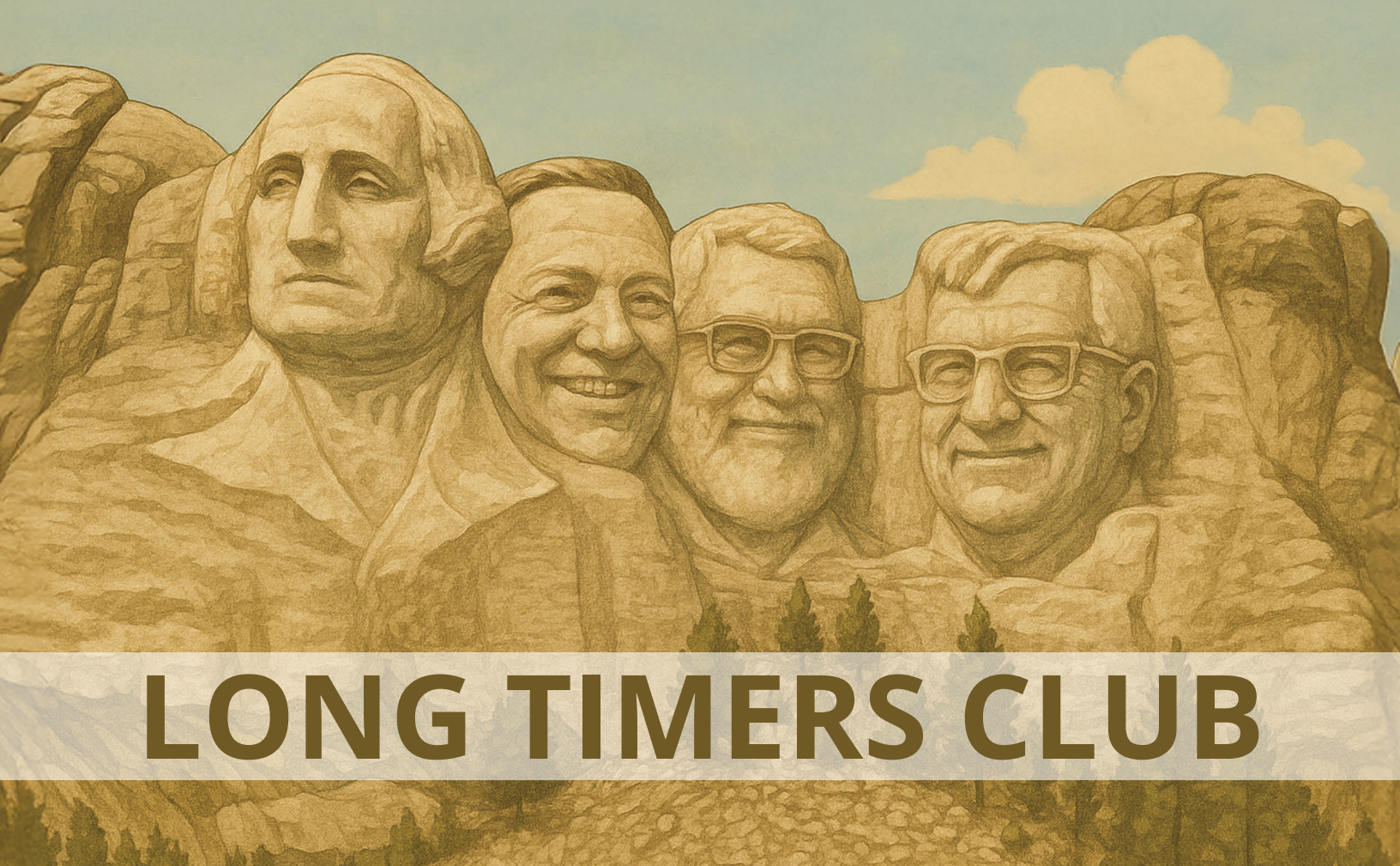
I drew a nine-year-old girl who asked for a stuffed animal; I'm giving her a stuffed elephant that resembles one I had when I was a girl. It's a small thing, but small things matter. Personal giving is meaningful; the sincerity of it defines a free and flourishing society.

Whether the gift is a pint of blood, an hour of service at a shelter, or a present chosen with care, philanthropy flourishes when individuals choose to act.

As donors to the Mackinac Center, you share this conviction. Your support allows us to champion policies that empower private giving and strengthen charitable institutions that hold communities together. In this season, we remain grateful — not just for what you give, but for the principles you help us live out every day. ■



By Jess Wyeth
Marketing Content Manager



LONG TIMERS CLUB

As we close out the fiscal year, we'd be remiss without paying special tribute to a select few Mackinac Center employees who have been fighting the good fight in Michigan for quite some time. In recognition of their service to Michigan, we've highlighted some of their greatest feats for freedom.

Michael LaFaive started at the Mackinac Center **30 years** ago and has been challenging unwise state spending ever since.

LaFaive began battling the state's corporate welfare apparatus even before joining the Mackinac Center. While working in the governor's office, he hand-delivered Mackinac Center materials on his own time, helping influence important legislative decisions. His critiques — including a landmark 2005 study — kept the Michigan Economic Growth Authority under scrutiny and helped shape the decision to eventually shut it down under Gov. Rick Snyder.

As lead author of the Mackinac

Center's largest cost-saving project, LaFaive identified 200 ways to save \$2 billion without touching Medicaid or the School Aid Fund. Policymakers adopted many of its ideas, from eliminating state fairs to ending subsidies for state-run ski hills. LaFaive is especially proud that the project brought then-Northwood student James Hohman onto the team: "Without the study we may not have hired this gem of a colleague who has accomplished much on our behalf."

Earlier in his career, LaFaive exposed the Michigan Education Association's outsourcing practices despite its public opposition to contracting. His reporting helped inform legislative debates and ultimately led him to direct the Mackinac Center's privatization efforts.





Steve Frick, manager of information technology, has produced some of the Mackinac Center's most effective public tools throughout his **25 years** here.

He transformed MichiganVotes.org into one of the Mackinac Center's most important transparency platforms. Launched in 2001, the site set a new standard for accessible legislative information and later inspired USA Votes, which expanded the approach to more than a dozen states. Frick also built the Business Subsidy Scorecard and developed VoteSpotter, a mobile app that puts real-time lawmaking in people's pockets.

In addition, Frick built the website and publishing system for Michigan Capitol Confidential, the Mackinac Center's news outlet. His work allows reporters to publish quickly, investigate deeply and reach a broad audience. He also created multiple labor policy sites that simplified complex information and strengthened the Mackinac Center's ability to inform the public.



Patrick Wright, vice president for legal affairs, has spent **20 years** defending the rights of everyday Michiganders on behalf of the Mackinac Center.

In 2009, Wright founded the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation with a case that halted a union and state officials from a joint effort to improperly unionize home-based care providers. His work freed 40,000 workers from a \$4 million dues skim.

Before starting the foundation, Wright helped draft the 2006 constitutional amendment strengthening private property rights, which passed by a margin of 2.2 million votes. The details of these changes are fully documented in the new Michigan Constitutional Archive, spearheaded and launched by Wright this year (page 13).

Most recently, Wright was awarded the 2025 Grano Award from The Federalist Society's Michigan Lawyers Chapter. You can read more about the award and Wright's legal victories on page 6. ■

We are deeply grateful for the decades of dedication, courage, and creativity these three colleagues have poured into advancing liberty in Michigan. Their work has protected individual rights, exposed waste and abuse, empowered citizens and strengthened government accountability in ways that will echo for years to come. To Mike, Steve, and Patrick: Thank you for everything you've done — and continue to do — to make Michigan a better place.

A stylized yellow map of Michigan serves as the background. A dashed line with three blue location pins connects three points across the state. The first pin is in the northwest with the text '\$73,000' below it. The second pin is in the northeast with the text '\$204,000' above it. The third pin is in the far northeast.

\$73,000

\$204,000

House Oversight Hearing Cites CapCon: Whitmer's \$1M Travel Budget

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer spent more than \$1 million on international travel in 2025 — an average of \$2,739 every day for the year, according to a document Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained through a records request.

CapCon filed dozens of records requests as it sought to track travel paid for by a slush fund that is split between the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the Michigan Economic Development Fund.

CapCon is one of a few news organizations that still practices investigative journalism and pays for record requests, which often take months or even years to obtain.

During a House Oversight hearing in October, Rep. Steve Carra, R-Three Rivers, questioned economic development officials. He wanted to know how Whitmer's travel group spent \$25,000 on meals while in Japan — a spending spree that only CapCon reported.

Officials from the economic development agency couldn't answer questions about the spending.

CapCon chronicled Whitmer's travel expenses, which included:

1. United Arab Emirates: \$175,000 in February 2025
2. United Kingdom: \$204,000 in April 2025
3. Australia: \$219,622 in June 2025
4. Germany, Japan, Singapore: \$470,000 in September 2025
5. Canada: \$73,000 in October 2025.

When the witnesses at the hearing couldn't remember the spending, Carra cited a CapCon story that detailed the \$216,000 of expenses in Japan.

"I do not have the document you're looking at in front of me, but I'm happy to look into that," the witness said.



\$175,000

\$470,000

\$219,622

CAPCON

Carra replied: “Was this a six-month trip? Or how did we get to \$25,000 again?”

The governor brought 26 others on the trip, CapCon reported.

The governor and her group spent \$85,000 on airfare; \$70,000 on ground transportation, including trains; \$30,000 on language guides and interpreters; \$25,000 on meals; and \$6,000 on a University of Michigan alumni event.

While the governor and friends travel worldwide, Michigan’s manufacturers have shed thousands of

jobs. More than 8,600 manufacturing jobs were lost in September 2025, according to state data.

Requests for records about the governor’s world travels were only some of the more than 260 records requests CapCon filed in 2025. ■



By Scott McClallen

Michigan Capitol Confidential Reporter



THE MACKINAC FREEDOM FELLOWSHIP

Cultivating the Next Generation of Liberty Leaders

The Mackinac Center is proud to celebrate the successful completion of its pilot Freedom Fellowship program, which is designed for emerging professionals in the early-to-middle stages of their careers. Over five biweekly dinner sessions, six fellows explored the principles of free markets and limited government while engaging in practical professional development.

Each session focused on a key theme, from principled leadership and network-building to advancing

freedom through public service. Mackinac Center experts and guest speakers guided participants through each topic. A session on civility and civil discourse incorporated tools such as the Ronald Reagan Center's Civility Compass, helping fellows develop both knowledge and practical skills to lead thoughtfully. Fellows also examined civil discourse, the rule of law and strategies for staying active in the liberty movement. Along the way, they built relationships with like-minded peers and plugged into the broader freedom community.



After each session, fellows submitted their top takeaways, which were compiled into a resource reflecting both individual insights and shared perspectives. Each participant received a completion certificate at the end of the program. When Cami Pendell, vice president for government affairs and coordinator of the fellowship, presented the compilation alongside the certificates, participants expressed deep appreciation. “We will never fully know or see the impact of the seeds you are planting, but I believe it will be substantial and enduring,” one guest speaker told Pendell. “We need more people like you in this arena.”

Some participants have extended their experience by taking part in the fellowship’s three-month mentorship. This optional addition to the program pairs participants with experienced mentors, helping them learn and grow within the Mackinac Center network.

Even in its pilot phase, the Freedom Fellowship has proven its value, providing career guidance, networking opportunities and intellectual nourishment for rising leaders.

With the first cohort’s success, the Mackinac Center looks forward to expanding the program, welcoming additional emerging professionals, and continuing to cultivate leaders who will advance the principles of liberty for years to come. The Mackinac Freedom Fellowship is not just a program. It is an investment in the future of the liberty movement. ■



By Jess Wyeth
Marketing Content Manager



Photo by MCPP

Giving Brings Joy

The weeks between the season of gratitude and the season of giving bring me to reflect on a core belief: Giving brings joy. After all, every gift is an act of hope, and who can be hopeful and unhappy at the same time?

For Mackinac donors, that hope is directed toward others, often toward people you will never meet. The quiet, outward-facing generosity of our donors makes our impact unique. Mackinac Center donors rarely give to meet a personal need or to assist someone whose story is familiar. Your gifts are offered for the benefit of workers, families, and job creators across Michigan. Those folks may never have the chance to thank you directly, but their lives are better because others chose to give.

Consider the workers who can keep more of their own pay rather than fund a union. Or the family that now has more educational options. The small business owner, relieved of unnecessary regulation, who can now hire additional employees, solve more problems and meet more needs. The gains in

opportunity, stability, and freedom our fellow citizens enjoy do not happen by accident. They are made possible because someone like you believes policy change can produce lasting improvements in people's lives.

Policy-focused generosity is a distinctive kind of giving. Some outcomes can be anticipated, but many of the most meaningful effects ripple outward in ways no one can foresee. Supporting this work requires vision, trust and a willingness to invest in the flourishing of strangers.

At the center of this kind of giving is hope. Every gift is an act of hope. Your generosity strengthens Michigan, improves daily life for countless residents, and, I trust, brings a sense of happiness to you as well. ■



By Jim Walker

*Vice President for
Advancement*