

MAY/ JUNE 2025

IMPACT

*An Evening
with the
Mackinac
Center*

**MIKE ROWE
STANDS UP
FOR HARD
WORK**

PAGE 16

- 3 **Mackinac in the Media**
- 4 **Plan to Win, Prepare to Defend**
- 6 **Legal Foundation Takes Action Against Earmark Abuse**
- 8 **Line 5 Tunnel Advocacy Pays Off**
- 10 **Dave Card Leads by Serving: Commitment to Others Drives Career and Support**
- 12 **Workers Win in Utah and Tennessee**
- 14 **Justice Department Cites CapCon in Energy Emergency Lawsuit**

PAGE 14



PAGE 16

- 16 **Mike Rowe Stands Up for Hard Work at Evening with the Mackinac Center**
- 19 **Ed Levy Jr. and Terry Bowman Accept Honors as Liberty Advocates**
- 20 **The Steady Hands Behind the Scenes: Christine Bowerson**
- 22 **New Report Measures What Matters in Schools**
- 24 **Mackinac Center Research Unpacks Cigarette Tax Hikes**
- 26 **House Road Plan Puts Mackinac Center Findings to Work**
- 28 **Persistence in Policy**



**MACKINAC
IN THE
MEDIA**

THE HILL

'We Win, They Lose' — GOP Should Take Reagan's Approach When It Comes to Unions

"If union coercion is wrong, then anyone who loves freedom has a duty to fight it — without apology and without quarter."

Joseph G. Lehman, President

The Detroit News

You Can't Always Cut What You Want

"Reagan was right: It is nearly impossible to end a government program. It's good that elected leaders are trying."

Michael J. Reitz, Executive Vice President



US Justice Department Sues Michigan to Block Climate Change Lawsuits

"The anti-energy and net-zero policies pushed by the state of Michigan, Attorney General Dana Nessel, Governor Gretchen Whitmer, restrict access to reliable energy and drive up costs for all Michigan residents."

Scott McClallen, Michigan Capitol Confidential Reporter

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

A Lawsuit to Seal Michigan's Pork Barrel

"The Mackinac Center for Public Policy sued Michigan's labor department Tuesday, arguing that the budget tramples legal restrictions on earmarks."

The Wall Street Journal Editorial Board

Newsweek

Could AI Really Replace Teachers? Not So Fast, Experts Say

"Customizing the curriculum and allowing students to progress in different subject areas at different paces based on their mastery of information — that would be a game changer for the way public schools typically operate."

Michael Van Beek, Director of Research

Bloomberg

Enbridge's pipeline tunnel in Michigan gets expedited by U.S.

"Proponents of the project, including the Institute for Energy Research and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, have urged Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to support approving it on national security grounds, arguing in a February letter that the environmental review for the tunnel had been going on for nearly four years."

Ari Natter and Robert Tuttle, Bloomberg News



LETTER
FROM THE
PRESIDENT

PLAN TO WIN PREPARE TO DEFEND

Dwight D. Eisenhower, a lifelong supporter of the Boy Scouts, doubtless knew the Scout motto “Be Prepared.” Historians credit Ike with a somewhat counterintuitive reflection on military strategy: “In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”

I thought of the general’s lesson recently when a film producer asked my estimable colleague Mike Reitz how to plan for the future.

Planning charts a course, but preparation positions us to seize a moment. While planning is part of preparation, it cannot account for every contingency. In battle — military or public policy — the plan positions us for offense while the whole of preparation positions us to change the offensive tactics or go on defense when necessary.

At the Mackinac Center, we prepare to advance sound policy when conditions allow, ready for action in an unpredictable world.

Every plan has its limits. Some of the best (worst) examples are found in government central planning, which consistently fails. From Soviet five-year flops to Michigan’s industrial policy schemes that waste billions, grand plans often

Adobe Stock

“Public policy is unpredictable – our system’s checks and balances demand compromises that reshape even the best ideas,”

backfire, hide ulterior motives, burden taxpayers with high costs, and emanate harmful unintended consequences. Shelves sag under the weight of government plans that are ignored outright. Remember when we got lockdowns, mandates, and suppression of civil liberties instead of the emergency plans that had been written before the pandemic?

The Mackinac Center didn’t have a plan for countering Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s illegal and unconstitutional emergency orders, but we were prepared with a robust legal strategy and our donors’ generosity. We ultimately prevailed at the Michigan Supreme Court.

Our 2025 Policy Recommendations report shows where we want our plan to take us this year. Public policy is unpredictable — our system’s checks and balances demand compromises that reshape even the best ideas. Planning lets us go on offense for reforms that fuel opportunity.

Yet preparation is often the key to defense. We wanted to defend against Whitmer’s top priority for the 2024 lame duck legislative session (while her party still controlled both houses), a huge expansion of corporate welfare. We prepared

our defense with a perfectly timed study by my colleague James Hohman. He detailed twenty years of failed projects that produced only nine percent of the jobs promised. Lawmakers refused to go on record supporting more of the same, the industrial policy push fizzled, and almost the entire Democrat agenda ran aground before the session ended, stranding 400 bills we’re better off without. Now that the Democratic trifecta in Lansing has ended, we are better prepared to seize the opportunities divided government creates.

Your support strengthens our readiness. And we must remain ready because neither victories nor defeats are permanent. Your generosity and ideas prepare us to advance free markets and limited government, whether we’re crafting policy or defending principle. As battleground conditions shift, you can count on us to promote liberty and opportunity in Michigan and beyond. ■



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

By Joseph G. Lehman

President of the Mackinac Center

MACKINAC CENTER TAKES ACTION AGAINST *EARMARK ABUSE*



Michigan lawmakers routinely sidestep a constitutional provision when they direct state taxpayer money to private parties or specific local government projects. Now the Mackinac Center's legal arm is taking the state to court to challenge earmarks, otherwise known as pork projects.

Last year's state budget contained more than \$1 billion in earmarks, including \$10 million for Potter Park Zoo in Lansing and \$10 million for a youth sports complex in Frankenmuth.

The Michigan Constitution requires that earmarks receive a two-thirds vote in both chambers of the Legislature. A project demonstrates its importance by receiving a supermajority vote, the thinking goes.

Recent sittings of the Legislature have passed budgets filled with earmarks that lack the required two-thirds

vote. In the past, the Michigan Supreme Court called attempts to work around the supermajority requirement "subterfuge." But the courts have more recently become complacent and allowed legislators to practice such subterfuge.

“Politicians keep coming up with ways around the prohibition to support nebulous claims of economic development.”

The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation is challenging these earmarks. We filed a friend-of-the-court brief in a case brought by a third party, questioning a special grant to pension plans for Detroit public

employees. And in May we also brought, as a plaintiff, a larger, more direct court challenge to abuse of the earmark process.

Our lawsuit argues that bypassing the supermajority requirement makes the constitutional provision meaningless and void while ignoring the explicit intent people showed when they established the





By Derk Wilcox

Senior Attorney

current constitution in 1963. Our briefing shows that the Constitutional Convention delegates were specifically asked to allow such spending for economic development. The delegates and the voters who ratified the constitution rejected such claims, however, and they rejected them repeatedly. Michigan's constitutions have contained such prohibitions for over a century.

Yet politicians keep coming up with ways around the prohibition to support nebulous claims of economic development. The courts have been acquiescing to the Legislature's claim that earmarks do not need a two-thirds vote because they are in the public interest or are for a public use. When that claim is challenged, a court must determine whether the project meets the standard, not just defer to legislators' characterizations.

With this challenge, the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation will try to confine the budget to its constitutional role of funding only items that benefit the state as a whole. The state should promote economic development by providing a good economic climate with lower taxes and regulatory hurdles, not by giving special favors to well-connected players. ■

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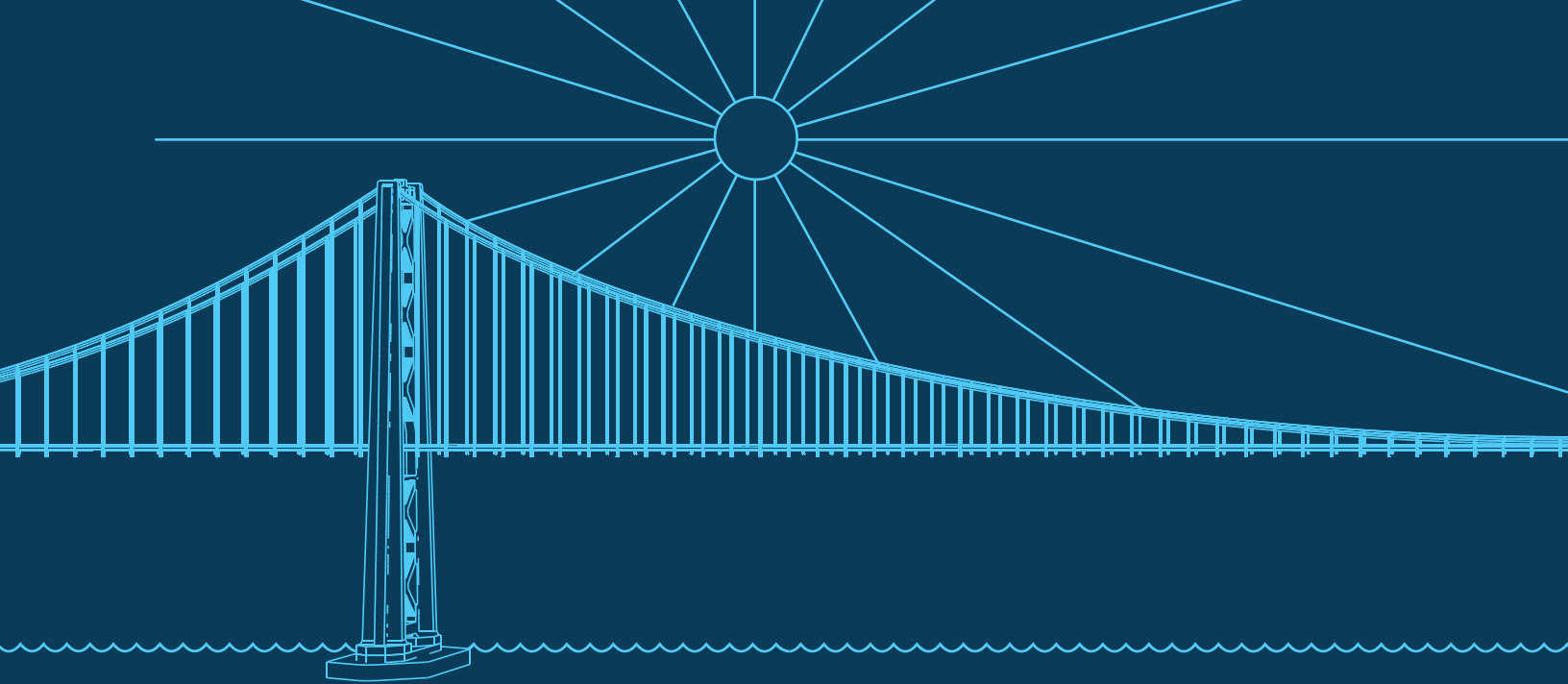
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LINE 5 TUNNEL ADVOCACY PAYS OFF

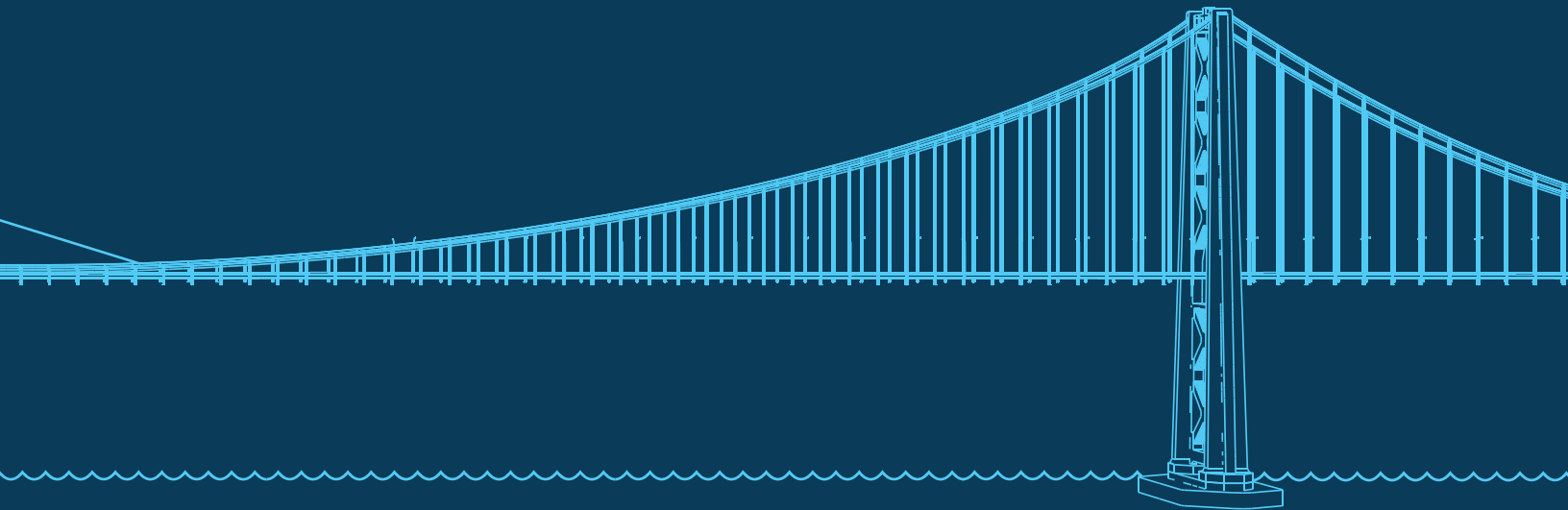
ENVIRONMENTAL APPROVAL WILL HELP SECURE MICHIGAN'S ENERGY FUTURE

The Mackinac Center's Energy and Environmental Policy Initiative scored an important win in April for Michigan's environment and economy. The Defense Department's decision to expedite its environmental review for the Line 5 Tunnel project came after years of advocacy for a plan that could provide reliable and affordable energy while also protecting the environment and our natural resources.

We recently partnered with the Institute for Energy Research to expand our impact and show that principled collaboration can safely move mountains — or, in this case, pipelines. As Michigan's governor

and attorney general work to shut down the crucial Line 5 pipeline, we have been making a strong case for a project that will enhance energy security in the Midwest, foster economic growth, safeguard the Great Lakes and protect Michigan's environment.

The Line 5 Tunnel, proposed by Enbridge, would relocate a 4-mile segment of the pipeline to a concrete-lined tunnel 100 feet below the Straits of Mackinac. Moving the pipeline would protect the waters of the Great Lakes from the potential for an oil spill. It would also ensure the continued flow of 540,000 barrels of essential fuels each day. These fuels account for 55% of



Michigan's propane needs, support regional refineries, provide nearly 34,000 jobs to the region and contribute more than \$20 billion to the regional economy.

When bureaucratic delays threatened this vital project, we stepped in.

In February 2025, Mackinac and IER co-wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, urging the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expedite the federal Environmental Impact Statement process for the tunnel. Our efforts were consistent with a presidential executive order declaring a national energy emergency.

On April 15, the Army Corps announced that it would expedite the process for the Line 5 Tunnel project, one of more than 600 potential projects. The public draft of the environmental impact statement was published May 30. This is good news for Michigan and the nation. Rapid agency responses to major infrastructure projects help to promote energy reliability. They also reduce the costs and burdens of navigating complex permitting processes.

The Mackinac Center's partnership with the Institute for Energy Research combines our deep understanding

of Michigan's needs with the institute's national policy expertise. Our arguments have resonated in both Washington, D.C., and Lansing. The collaboration has been featured in several news outlets, including Bridge Michigan and Bloomberg. It also encouraged successful efforts to pass a resolution in the Michigan House urging federal officials to accelerate approval of permits. The resolution underscores how aligning with like-minded organizations magnifies our voice and influence.

The fight to secure a safer and more reliable pipeline isn't over. The federal process has taken so long that Enbridge has had to reapply for the state permits that the Michigan Public Service Commission approved in December 2023. But Mackinac remains committed to supporting this project and other energy solutions that benefit all Michiganders. ■



By Jason Hayes

*Director of Energy and
Environmental Policy*

Dave Card Leads by Serving

Commitment to others drives his career and his support for the Mackinac Center

Three principles have defined Dave Card's life and career: freedom from tyranny, freedom in Christ and freedom to serve others. These principles inspire his support for the Mackinac Center's vision of an educated, self-governing society.

Dave spent his childhood in an East Lansing neighborhood surrounded by men — World War II veterans — who understood that freedom is precious. This experience left Dave with a deep appreciation for American ideals.

Dave's grandfather had a significant impact on his life. A small-town school principal, Carl G. Card later

became a professor of poultry science at Michigan Agricultural College, now Michigan State University. He also served as mayor of East Lansing, chairman of the East Lansing State Bank and president of the local Kiwanis Club.

Dave, like his grandfather, studied at MSU, taking up civil engineering before serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy for three years.

"I didn't know how to be a leader until I was required to be one," Dave says. His grandfather's example of service inspired him to be the best servant-leader he could be.





“I didn’t know how to be a leader until I was required to be one.”

Dave’s post-Navy career took him to work for the city of Lansing and Meridian Township.

When he wasn’t on the job, Dave helped with the Christian Service Brigade, a youth development organization. He mentored two fatherless boys and saw that government handouts were hurting families, not helping them. “Investing in people and teaching them personal and financial responsibility,” he decided, was the solution.

Dave still leads the East Lansing unit of the Christian Service Brigade, where he teaches young boys the importance of freedom, responsibility and character. “Citizenship does not mean receiving, it means responsibilities,” he says. “It means serving others.”

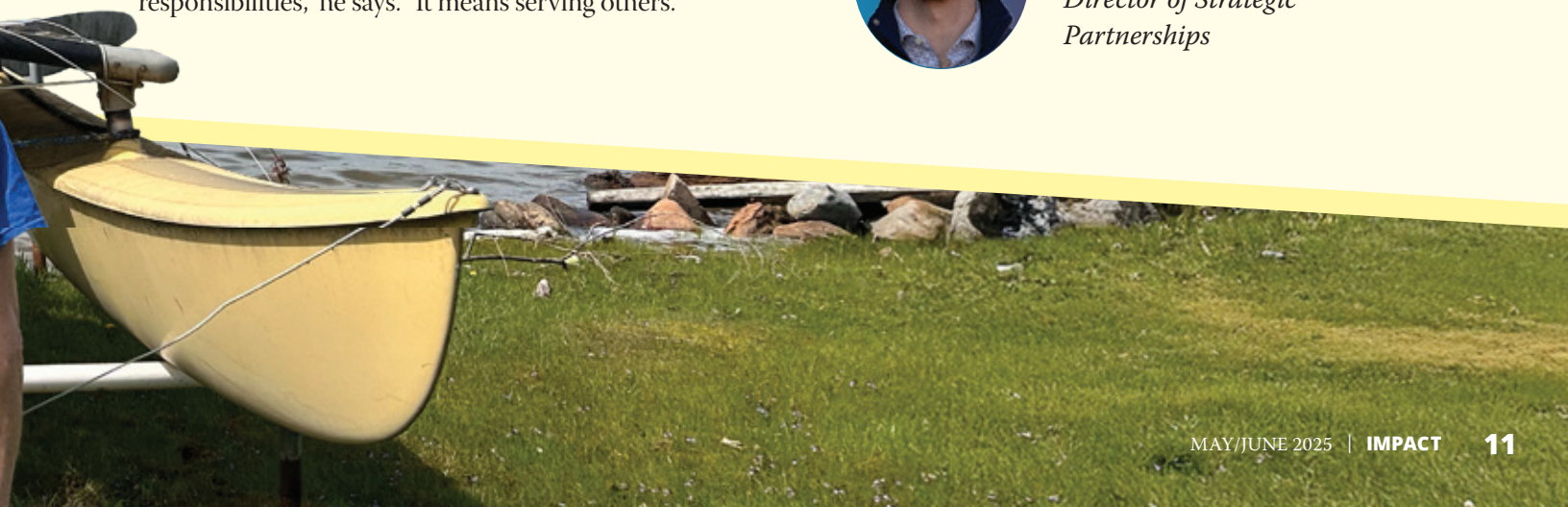
Dave is proud to be an American citizen. The U.S. Constitution, he says, “is the most radical thing since Jesus Christ,” and it has led to the most prosperous, generous society in the world.


A society that encourages prosperity and is built for self-governance gives people power to serve the less fortunate. Dave supports the Mackinac Center’s work to further truth and limit government, but more importantly to encourage the educated, self-governing society that our founders envisioned. ■



By Nathan Burgard

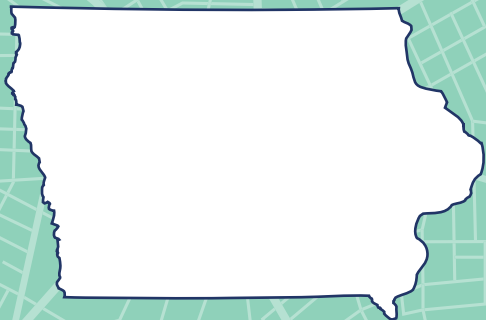
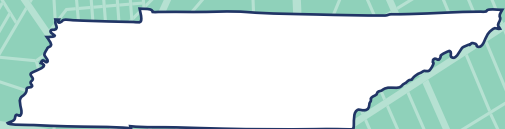
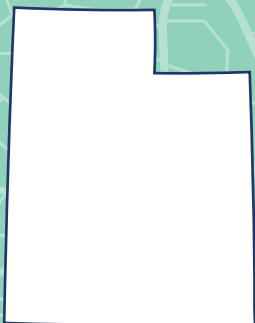
Director of Strategic Partnerships





WORKERS WIN

in UTAH AND
TENNESSEE



Workers for Opportunity, a Mackinac Center initiative, racked up two recent wins as leaders in Tennessee and Utah enacted state laws incorporating our pro-market ideas. We're also fighting for worker freedom in Iowa, in the face of intense opposition from unions and some public employers.



In Utah, WFO partnered with Rep. Jordan Teuscher and Sen. Kirk Cullimore to pass HB267. This landmark law ends collective bargaining for public sector unions, prohibits taxpayer-funded "release time" and institutes transparency requirements for union spending. The new law, signed by Gov. Spencer Cox and backed by Senate President Stuart Adams and House Speaker Mike Schultz, empowers workers to negotiate directly with their employers and make informed decisions about union membership.

Predictably, national unions are spending millions trying to undo this progress through a ballot referendum. The NEA alone is spending \$3 million. Unions have secured enough signatures to force a referendum, so the law is on hold. Our team remains engaged with our partners in Utah to determine the most effective way forward.



In Tennessee, lawmakers protected taxpayers by restricting the scope of community benefits agreements. These agreements, which piggyback on state economic subsidies, have become a tool of politically motivated groups to divert money and influence to their own causes — often liberal ones. The new law, sponsored by Speaker Cameron Sexton and Senate Majority Leader Jack Johnson, prohibits these agreements from

imposing unrelated mandates — such as hiring quotas or union demands — on job creators. With Gov. Bill Lee’s recent signature, the law reaffirms Tennessee’s commitment to economic freedom and taxpayer accountability. In the last few years, Tennessee has enshrined right-to-work in its state constitution and enacted paycheck protection for teachers. It also required a secret ballot vote on any unionization effort involving companies that receive economic development funds from state taxpayers.



In Iowa, WFO is fighting to protect the integrity of union recertification elections, which are required under a 2017 law. Currently, public sector unions must win majority support every contract cycle to remain certified. Yet some public employers sabotage the process by refusing to provide employee lists to the Iowa Employment Appeal Board. This blocks the elections altogether. WFO is advocating for legislative fixes that would require timely submission of employee lists, penalize noncompliance and allow courts to intervene swiftly. Unfortunately, conflicts within the Republican caucus caused the bill to die on the last day of session. We are evaluating our next steps and remain committed to strengthening this important policy. ■



By Tony Daunt
*Senior Director of
 Workers for Opportunity*

ONLINE RESOURCES



MichCapCon.com

Michigan Capitol Confidential reports with a free-market news perspective.



WorkersForOpportunity.org

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140 West Main Street, P.O. Box 568
 Midland, Michigan 48640 | 989-631-0900
 Mackinac.org | mcpp@mackinac.org

Project Manager
 Jessica Wyeth

Editors
 John LaPlante
 Tim Cavanaugh

Designers
 Mick McArt
 Hannah Golab

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CITES CAPCON

in Energy Emergency Lawsuit





By Scott McCallen

*Michigan Capitol
Confidential Reporter*

The U.S. Department of Justice cites a Michigan Capitol Confidential story three times in its lawsuit against state leaders over their targeting of energy producers.

Attorney General Dana Nessel announced in 2024 that she plans to use three out-of-state law firms — Sher Edling LLP, DiCello Levitt LLP and Hausfeld LLP — to sue oil and gas companies for allegedly contributing to climate change. CapCon broke this news in October.

The Justice Department has responded with a complaint alleging that Attorney General Nessel's legal campaign exceeds constitutional limits and ignores federal supremacy. The Justice Department's suit refers to our October story in its introduction as well as in its allegations and claims for relief. This is the first time a CapCon story has helped trigger a federal lawsuit.

The 22-page suit names the attorney general and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer as defendants.

Michigan signed 17 attorneys to act as special assistant attorneys general. They must win or settle to get paid.

CapCon began covering this effort as soon as the state requested proposals from trial lawyers in May 2024.

A year later, other media outlets started reporting this news, though the state has yet to file a lawsuit against oil and gas companies.

If that lawsuit succeeds, the energy companies will likely pass settlement fees onto consumers and employees, said Jason Hayes, director of energy and environmental policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Michiganders already pay some of the highest electricity costs in the nation.

CapCon consists of two writers, two editors and our graphics team. But we regularly scoop The Detroit News, Detroit Free Press and MLive — news outlets with more than 60 writers — thanks to your donations and story tips. This year, we've written more than 60 exclusive stories and have filed more than 100 public records requests.

Your donations help us to obtain public records, break news and dig into stories that other outlets won't touch.

While other outlets copy and paste press releases written by politicians, CapCon provides exclusive reporting that you won't read anywhere else. And we bring the receipts. ■



*An
Evening
with the
Mackinac
Center*

MIKE ROWE STANDS UP FOR HARD WORK AT AN EVENING WITH THE MACKINAC CENTER

The strength of a movement often shows up in the conversations it inspires and the communities it brings together. The Mackinac Center welcomed more than 500 friends and supporters on May 1 to celebrate another year fighting for liberty at the annual Evening with the Mackinac Center. The awards ceremony and keynote address by Mike Rowe took place at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, where guests explored the exhibits over cocktails and after dinner.

State lawmakers, business leaders, policy advocates and community members joined to make this our

The foundation's mission aligns closely with the Mackinac Center's philosophy that change begins from the ground up.

This message came to life when Mike joined Mackinac Center President Joseph G. Lehman on stage. The two started up a conversation with the familiarity of old friends, which they in fact were — as of the night before.

Joe had spotted Mike while out to dinner and struck up a conversation that didn't end until several hours later.



best-attended Evening with the Mackinac Center. Attendees included former Gov. John Engler; U.S. House Rep. Tom Barrett; former U.S. House Rep. Mike Rogers; and gubernatorial candidates Mike Cox, John James and Aric Nesbitt.

Mike Rowe, known for the hit Discovery Channel series "Dirty Jobs," has long defended the value of skilled trades. His hands-on experience with people across the country shaped his deep respect for their work and inspired him to launch the mikeroweWORKS Foundation in 2008. The foundation supports scholarships for students pursuing training in the skilled trades and aims to reframe the way Americans view technical and vocational careers.

"I'm in the room with a guy I met in the bar last night — around 9 o'clock," Mike told the audience. "Next thing I knew, it was much later than that, and we had made friends with everybody in the joint." That's what happens when you put two charismatic personalities, both passionate about empowering others, in the same room.

Joe added some context. "We spent about three hours together last night, and then about 25 young master technicians from all over the country — we used to call them mechanics — they were here for a meeting at Ford. And they figured out who you were and waited for a brave one to approach and tell you that you're their hero."



Mike then spent an hour with these young professionals. He didn't merely shake hands and take selfies; he gave each of them personal attention.

When Joe asked what prompted Mike to take that time, he responded, "It's not that I talked to them so much as that I listened to them. ... But the real reason is that I love it. I love to sit there and listen to stories of young men and women who are so full of enthusiasm and skill and hope." Some of them had even benefited from Rowe's scholarship foundation.

The conversation also covered the skills gap currently threatening the American economy. The two men were optimistic that we can fix the misallocation of skills that has resulted from politicians' single-minded and expensive drive to increase college attendance. Their discussion concluded with a standing ovation from everyone in attendance.

Evenings like this reflect what makes the Mackinac Center's work possible and powerful: dedicated friends, thoughtful dialogue and an unwavering belief in individual liberty. As Mike Rowe illustrated, change often begins when we listen to and empower those who build, fix and serve behind the scenes.

We are deeply grateful to all who join us — in person and in spirit — to celebrate this mission. With your support, we are working to remove barriers, advocate for freedom and ensure that opportunity is within reach for every Michigander. ■



By Jessica Wyeth
Marketing Analyst

Mackinac Center Honors Advocates of Liberty Ed Levy Jr. and Terry Bowman



Accepting the award on behalf of Ed Levy Jr. was his nephew Evan Weiner.



Terry Bowman poses with his award beside Michael Reitz & Joseph G. Lehman.

This year's "Evening with the Mackinac Center" included a tribute to two individuals whose courage and dedication to liberty has left an imprint in Michigan.

The Champions of Freedom Award went to Edward Levy Jr., a respected business leader and policy advocate, in recognition of a lifetime of principled entrepreneurship and service.

Levy built a multigenerational family business with an important principle: "Always treat others as we wish to be treated and work hard to gain the same treatment from others." Rising through the ranks from junior laborer to executive chairman, he earned the admiration of employees and peers. Throughout his career, he exemplified diligence, mutual respect and ethical leadership.

A staunch supporter of Detroit's revitalization, Levy backed education and workforce initiatives to create opportunity and drive economic growth. Since 1996 he has served on the Mackinac Center's board, helping to shape our mission by offering strategic guidance and philanthropic support.

Terry Bowman, a former long-time United Auto Workers member, received the Lives, Fortunes, and Sacred Honor Award for his stand against compulsory union dues that funded political causes he and others opposed.

In 2010, Bowman founded Union Conservatives and became a voice for right-to-work reforms in Michigan. At personal and professional risk, he testified before lawmakers, appeared in the media and spoke with fellow union members. His work has enabled millions of workers nationwide to stand up for their rights. He continues his advocacy today as board chair of the Institute for the American Worker while working full-time at Ford Motor Co. His life exemplifies the spirit that inspired this honor.

Together, Levy and Bowman represent the courage, vision and commitment essential to advancing freedom in Michigan and across the country. ■



By AnnMarie Pariseau

Senior Director of Communications



The Steady Hands Behind the Scenes



Meet Christine Bowerson, Senior Director of Operations at the Mackinac Center

As a leader in the operations department at the Mackinac Center, Christine Bowerson has the type of job where success can be defined as “nobody notices.” She supports the staff, works in financial and health benefits, and makes sure things run smoothly. A varied background makes her a great fit for the job.

“I’ve done two tours of duty here,” Christine says. “The first time was in 2011, just answering phones and working on a few short-term projects. But they asked me to stay on part-time, which was perfect for my family situation.”

That early stint led to several years in fundraising before she stepped away for family reasons. She later returned as office manager, and her role has steadily expanded from there. Today, she oversees everything from the daily operations to the intern program she proudly helped build.

Christine’s work ethic was shaped early by her life in Utica, Michigan. “My dad was a truck driver and a single parent. Neither of my parents finished high school. They dropped out to help their families. They were a little embarrassed about that and really pushed education.”

Christine became the first in her family to attend college, earning a business degree from Northern Michigan University, where she also met her husband, Ray.

The Bowersons became foster parents with the goal of adopting. “I felt blessed to be able to stay home with our children. I loved kids and we had the space,” she says. “We knew it was hard to place sibling groups, so we wanted to meet that need. In two and a half years, we adopted five children to add to our family of five.”

Christine worked as a substitute teacher and took odd jobs while raising their large family. Her husband served in the Michigan Department of Corrections for more than 30 years before starting his own handyman business. Christine’s greatest joy in life is traveling with her husband of 33 years and spending time with her kids and four grandkids.

Christine learned about the Mackinac Center through friends. “I really fell in love with our mission and our work,” she says. “But the best part is working with our operations team. A lot of what we do is behind the scenes, and that’s how it should be. When it runs smoothly, nobody notices. That’s the goal.”

A particular point of pride is the intern program. “We have one of the best intern programs in the liberty movement. We provide a robust program that gives students the full experience as staff of the Center. We also do fun outings such as visiting the state Capitol, the Russell Kirk Center, the Michigan Supreme Court and a Great Lakes Loons game. The interns give year-end presentations. It’s a full experience,” she says. Her family has even housed 15 interns. “I love the whole program: meeting them, placing them, housing them, staying in touch and following their careers. It’s incredibly rewarding.” ■



By Jarrett Skorup

Vice President for Marketing and Communications



NEW REPORT MEASURES WHAT MATTERS IN SCHOOLS

Michigan residents can learn how their local schools measure up in the latest edition of the Context and Performance Report Card. The 2025 CAP report ranks the state's public elementary and middle schools by using their standardized test performance over three years, from 2022 to 2024. It highlights the top 100 schools as well as the bottom 100. The report tells the world which schools have improved and which have declined the most since pandemic-era lockdowns.

Unlike traditional school rankings, the Mackinac Center's report card considers the socioeconomic makeup of the student population, not just standardized test scores, when calculating a school's grade. By adjusting for student poverty, the report card provides a more accurate assessment of school performance. Some schools scored better when accounting for poverty than their test scores alone would suggest.

The 2025 report card includes both conventional public and charter schools. Consistent with previous report cards, Dearborn Public Schools demonstrated strong performance and placed more schools in the top 100 than any other district. Dearborn STEM Middle School earned the No. 1 slot.

Charter schools are well represented in the top rankings, too. They account for 22% of the top 100 despite representing only 12% of the schools in the report card. Pembroke Academy, a Detroit charter school, placed second on the list. Hamtramck Academy landed in the top 10 for the third

consecutive time, and Frontier International School, a neighboring charter school, was fourth.

The report card also identifies the top-ranking schools in each of four geographic settings: rural, city, suburban and town. The rural category has the greatest number of schools in the top 100. Conversely, only five of the top 100 schools are in towns.

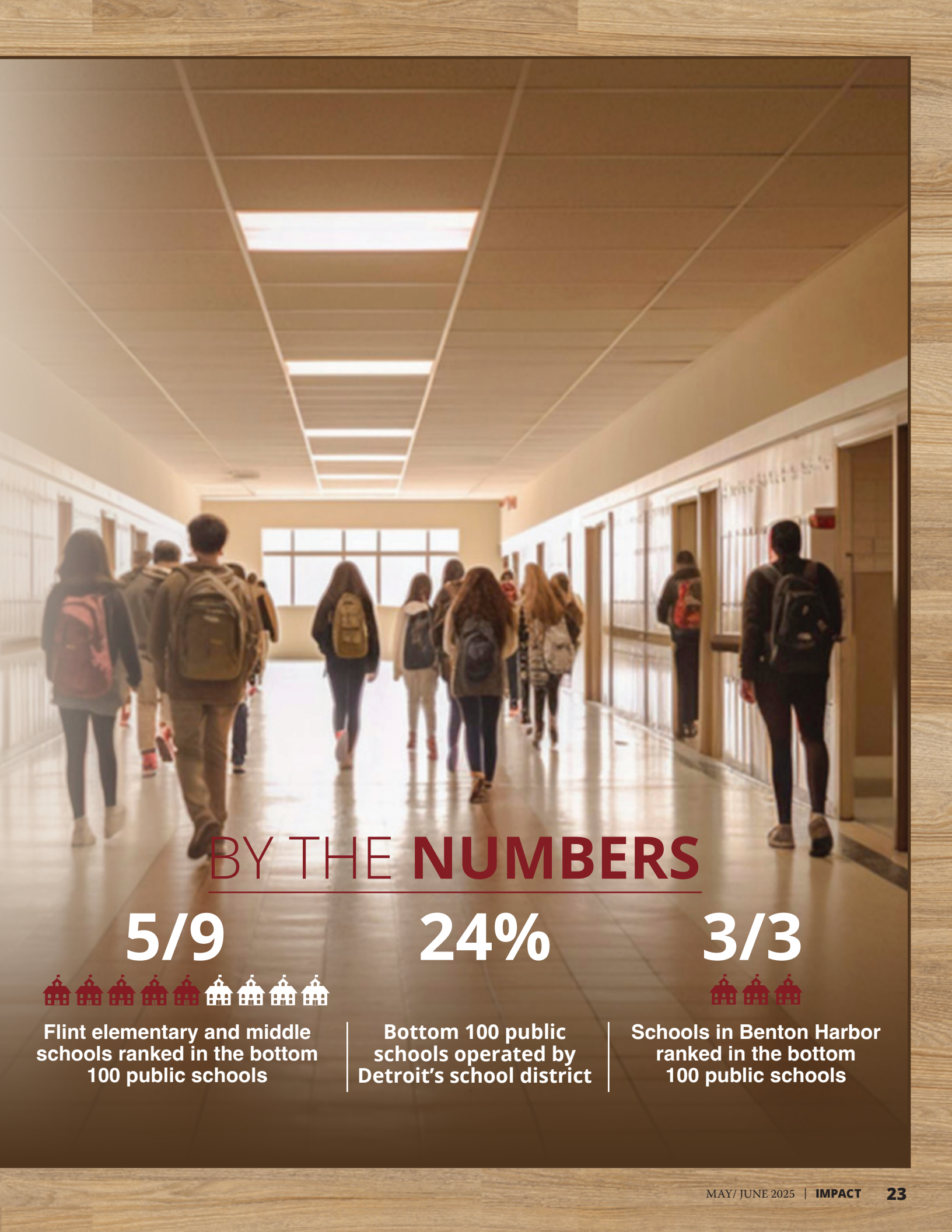
Michigan residents also can learn how their local schools have fared since the COVID lockdowns. The report reveals the schools with the largest post-COVID gains and declines by comparing their 2025 and 2019 scores. Gros Cap School in St. Ignace showed the most growth: It improved from an F in 2019 to an A in 2025. New Paradigm College Prep, a charter school in Detroit, declined the most. Its score dropped by more than 25 points.

The Mackinac Center is committed to providing transparency for school performance. The 2025 CAP Report Card is an important tool for anyone interested in improving student achievement.

A complete list of school rankings is available at mackinac.org/CAP2025. ■



By Molly Macek
Director of Education Policy



BY THE **NUMBERS**

5/9



Flint elementary and middle schools ranked in the bottom 100 public schools

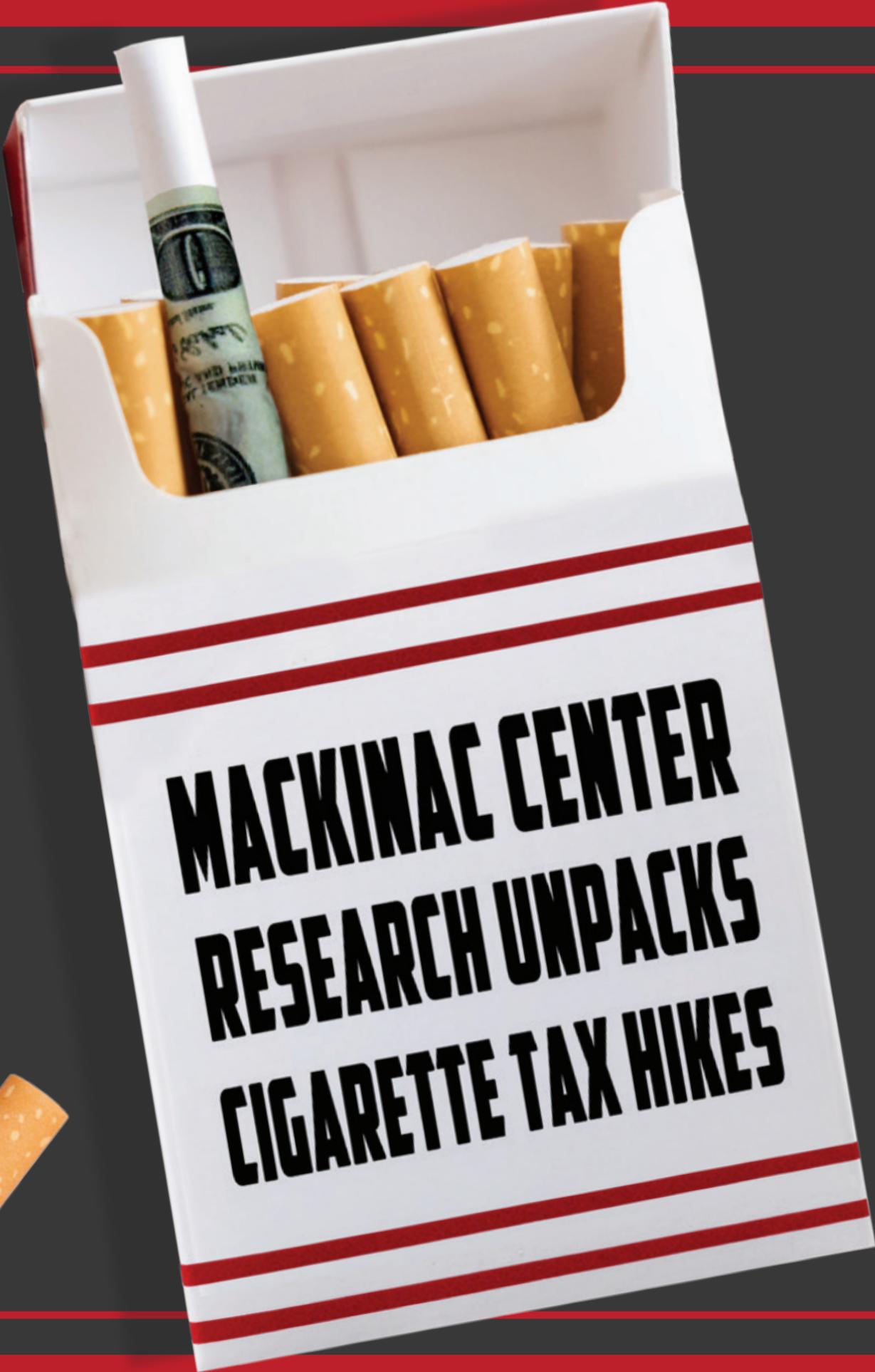
24%

Bottom 100 public schools operated by Detroit's school district


3/3



Schools in Benton Harbor ranked in the bottom 100 public schools



**MACKINAC CENTER
RESEARCH UNPACKS
CIGARETTE TAX HIKE**



Lawmakers in several states have drawn on perspectives from the Mackinac Center as they consider proposals to raise excise taxes on cigarettes. The Mackinac Center has provided tax impact analyses, testimony and other useful information to state lawmakers and legislative committees.

Committees in Maine and Rhode Island held hearings in February on proposals to raise the per-pack cigarette tax by \$1.00 and 50 cents, respectively. I provided testimony to various committees in both states. I later provided testimony in Montana and warned officials in the state of Washington about the prospective fallout of raising the tax by \$2 a pack.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy maintains a statistical model that estimates the degree to which cigarettes are smuggled from state to state, as well as into the country from Mexico and out to Canada. It includes data on the 48 contiguous states. Though we built the model for a 2008 Michigan-centric study, we update it every year. This makes it the go-to source for information on proposed cigarette tax hikes around the country.

We refer to “smuggling” as actions to avoid or evade a state’s cigarette tax. The model projects that Maine’s proposed tax increase would double the state’s smuggling rate to 14% of all cigarettes consumed. It also tells us that Mainers could be expected to smuggle 1.5 million more packs of cigarettes in from New Hampshire.

Rhode Island’s cigarette excise tax is already \$4.50 per pack. The proposed tax increase of 50 cents would cause the state’s smuggling rate to reach 35% of consumption and lead to a net loss of revenue from the cigarette excise tax.

Washington’s proposal is perhaps the most dramatic. It already has a high cigarette excise tax of \$3.02 per pack. The proposal would raise it to \$5.02 per pack.

Our estimate is that smuggling would leap to 59% of the marketplace from the current 37%.

Michigan’s cigarette tax rate is \$2 per pack. There are no current proposals to raise it. The state’s smuggling rate wafted

downward to 17% of the marketplace through 2022 (the latest year for which we have data). In 2006 the smuggling rate was more than 34% of total in-state consumption.

To read more about the Mackinac Center’s cigarette smuggling research, visit: www.mackinac.org/smokes.

“Our estimate is that smuggling would leap to 59% of the marketplace from the current 37%,,”



By Michael LaFaive

Senior Director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative



HOUSE ROAD PLAN PUTS MACKINAC CENTER FINDINGS TO WORK

Michigan lawmakers may yet fix the state's roads without raising taxes. As they consider a plan that would put the state on course to fix roads faster than they fall apart, legislators are relying on Mackinac Center work.

The Mackinac Center worked with RMG Research in November 2024 to find messages that worked with voters about the state's ineffective business subsidy programs. Through it, we found that 84% of voters would rather have the state spend its money on roads than corporate welfare.

Michigan's Republican majority House leaders must have paid attention to our poll results. They put together a road plan in March 2025 that

redirects money away from the state's business subsidies and toward roads.

"We prioritize roads over corporate giveaways," Michigan House Speaker Matt Hall said. "Instead of giving the big corporate giveaways to the eight or ten most connected corporations in Michigan, we can fix the roads by treating everyone the same."

It's not just a popular policy; it's a good idea. Subsidizing select firms is a waste of taxpayer money. The handouts rarely pan out; major deals deliver just 9% of the jobs that get announced, according to Mackinac Center research.



Meanwhile, it is the state's responsibility to ensure that the roads it owns, and the roads local governments own, are kept in good working order. Most people in the state get where they want to go through the road network.

While we've done much to criticize business subsidies over the past few decades, we've also done a lot to show that the state doesn't need to raise taxes to fund its priorities. State taxes collect much more revenue than they did before the pandemic.

The bills to transfer money from corporate welfare to roads got some bipartisan support: Seven of the state's 52 Democratic House representatives joined with Republicans to pass them.

That may matter because the bills will need the support of a Democratic-majority Senate and the state's Democratic governor.

Moving the money earmarked for corporate welfare to the roads ought to get broad bipartisan approval. It's a better use for money and better for the state economy. People would appreciate having better roads without higher taxes. ■



By James Hohman

Director of Fiscal Policy

Persistence in Policy

At the Mackinac Center, we often celebrate victories, from expanding school choice to cutting red tape for entrepreneurs to protecting workers' rights. Wins matter. But no policy victory is ever final. Each is just a step in the broader journey toward a freer Michigan.

Opponents of freedom are always working to reverse progress. They push relentlessly to move the Overton Window, the range of ideas considered acceptable in public policy, away from liberty and toward more government control. If we aren't actively shifting that window toward freedom, someone else is shifting it away from freedom.

That's why our work is about more than implementing good policy. It's about changing

the climate of opinion. Through research, storytelling, and education, we do more than influence laws; we change the way people think about them. We aim to move the Overton Window toward ideas that once seemed radical, such as right-to-work or education choice, and make them mainstream.

This work takes persistence. It takes principled leadership, especially when political winds change. Our work requires the support of others. It needs your support. Thanks to you, the Mackinac Center doesn't just respond to policy debates. We reframe them entirely.

Thank you for standing with us to protect and advance freedom in Michigan and beyond. ■



By Victoria Hoffman

Advancement Engagement Associate

