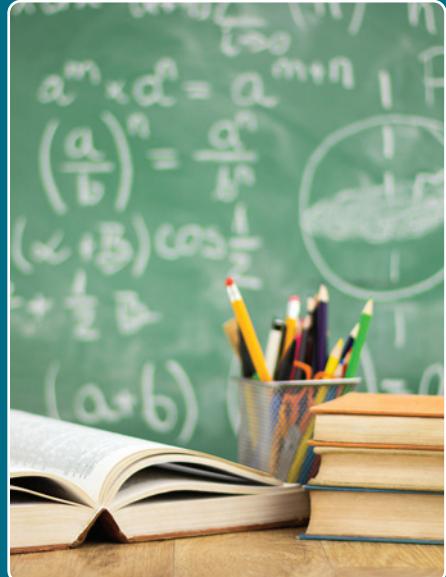


IMPACT



MACKINAC WINS IN MICHIGAN BUDGET:

Spending package delivers hard-fought reforms

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Why Courageous Speech Still Matters

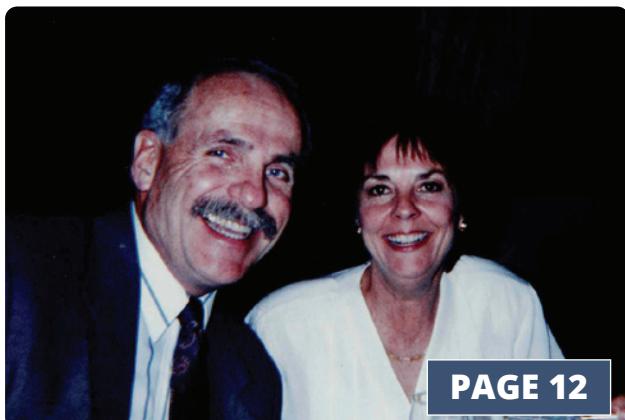
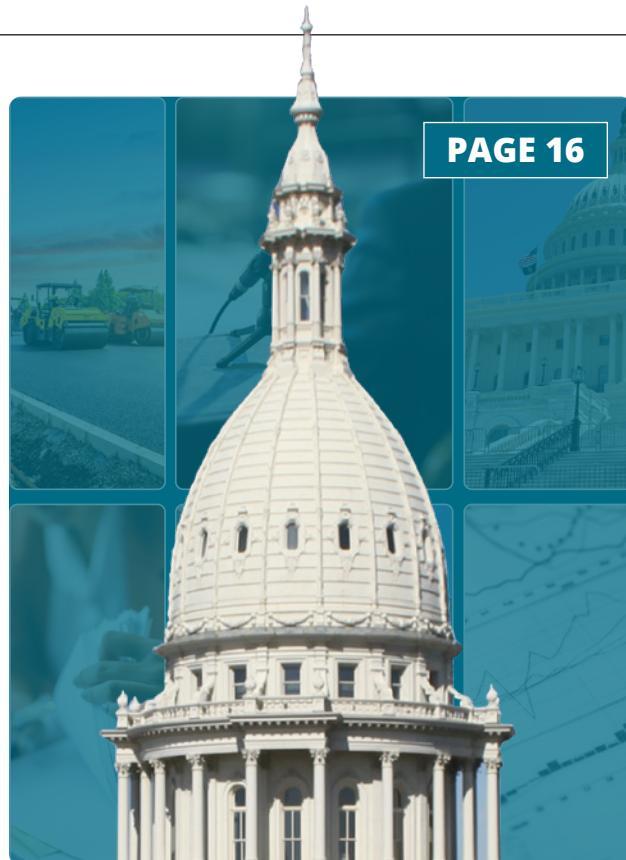


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for Liberty**



Washington Examiner

When Fighting Trump, Take Union Claims with a Grain of Salt

“Unions claim that the president’s actions hurt workers, the economy, and even the country as a whole... The last time government unions opposed sweeping reforms, they were dead wrong.”

Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications

The Detroit News

With the Michigan State Budget Complete, What Should Lawmakers Do Next?

“The budgeting process showed that state leaders can work together despite divided government. Any new legislation needs to thread the same bipartisan needle.”

Michael Reitz, Executive Vice President

NATIONAL REVIEW

The Choice That Will Determine Gretchen Whitmer’s Future — and Michigan’s

“Since the start of the year, Whitmer’s fellow Democrats, who control the state senate, have demanded a blowout budget that Michigan can’t afford.”

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

The Detroit News

Michigan Can Easily Handle Adding Data Centers

“Michigan needs to revisit the punishing and unrealistic global warming goals that are pushing the state into an energy crisis.”

Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications

Bridge Michigan

Michigan Earmarks Face Scrutiny as Judge Reviews Millions for Ballparks

“If the Center prevails, it could challenge millions in other grants approved in recent years, money that’s gone to nonprofits, parks, cities, townships and counties, attorney Patrick Wright said after the hearing.”

Patrick Wright, Vice President for Legal Affairs

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Tourism Could Help Revitalize Midwest Factory Towns

“By modernizing zoning laws to allow more housing types — duplexes, townhomes, apartments above storefronts — and welcoming regulated short-term rentals, Midwestern towns can capture the full value of their tourism rebound.”

Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications



LETTER FROM
THE EXECUTIVE
VICE PRESIDENT

How Do You Deal with Failure?

We recently interviewed a man for a role at the Mackinac Center. He asked a question that no job candidate has ever asked me.

“How does your team respond to setbacks and failure?”

The question spoke volumes. Everyone is on their best behavior in a job interview; the candidates talk about their best qualities, and the employer talks about why people should work there. This man’s question revealed a pragmatic outlook: If setbacks and disappointment are part of this work, and of course they are, does this organization have resilience and determination?

We talked about several setbacks. During the 2023-24 legislative session, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Michigan Legislature dismantled many reforms the Mackinac Center and its allies had championed. The state repealed right-to-work, watered down historic pension reform, abandoned education accountability measures, and stopped the momentum of a school choice measure.

Around the same time, the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation filed a lawsuit on behalf of several taxpayers to uphold a cut to the personal income tax.

Photo by Adobe Stock

“At the Mackinac Center, we seek to pivot, moving to another pathway when the one we are on is closed off,”

The Legislature had recently cut the income tax rate from 4.25% to 4.05%, saving taxpayers \$700 million. Attorney General Dana Nessel released an opinion that the rate cut would expire after only one year. We sued, but the Michigan Supreme Court declined to review the case.

Those are failures to secure or maintain a victory. Another kind of failure is programmatic — a project fails to take off or retain its usefulness. For many years we ran a high school debate workshop, training students on the principles of economics and sound policy. We trained nearly 11,000 students over 30 years, but demand for the program had slowed by the time we ended it in 2018. It's hard to sunset programs you're proud of.

The Mackinac Center has encountered another sort of major setback: three colleagues have been laid to rest while working at the Center. Joe Overton, Bruce Beerbower and Amy Green — all taken far too soon, far too early.

So back to our interviewee's question: "How do you respond to setbacks and failures?"

We can take the long view on our policy recommendations; we aren't limited by term limits or political cycles. And optimism is of critical importance. We learn from our setbacks.

There are many ways to change public policy. Pass a bill in the Legislature. Litigate a constitutional precedent in the courts. Persuade a majority of people to embrace an idea. Enact a ballot measure to amend the state constitution. Work at the municipal level or with state agencies or through administrative rules. At the Mackinac Center, we seek to pivot, moving to another pathway when the one we are on is closed off.

Finally, we remember the charge Winston Churchill gave at Harrow School in 1941: "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never. In nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense." ■

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

By Michael J. Reitz

Executive Vice President

TALK OF THE WHITE HOUSE:

In the American federal system, states serve as laboratories of democracy, testing bold reforms that often shape national policy. From education and labor to environmental and criminal justice reform, state-level initiatives frequently lay the groundwork for broader change.

Since its founding in 1987, the Mackinac Center has developed policy solutions to advance worker freedom. Today, many of these commonsense reforms inform federal conversations. In September, in partnership with the Institute for the American Worker, the Mackinac Center leaders visited the White House and Congress to present labor policy proposals that promote accountability, innovation and individual rights.

Reform efforts include proposing model bills that return decision-making power to citizens and their elected representatives — away from entrenched union leaders. One much-needed reform is to curtail union official time, which allows public employees to perform union duties while on the taxpayer's dime. Federal officials revealed that more than 500 employees of the Veterans Administration spend 100% of their time on union work, diverting resources from veterans who deserve better care.

The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation is currently engaged in a legal battle with the state of Michigan and a leading union over home care providers. The lawsuit challenges an attempt by the Whitmer administration

“Reform efforts include proposing model bills that return decision-making power to citizens and their elected representatives – away from entrenched union leaders,”



Photo by MCPP

State-Level Reforms Drive National Change

to have these individuals classified as state employees who may then be compelled to pay the Service Employees International Union for its purported collective bargaining activities.

It's also important that public policy protect the secret ballot in union elections. Laws recently enacted in three states ensure that any entity receiving public subsidies must safeguard employee privacy in union elections. Congress is exploring how to broaden this reform nationally.

We are also working to free the nation's 73 million independent contractors from outdated labor laws that stifle flexibility and opportunity.

The Mackinac Center's proposals aim to empower freelancers as they choose their own path.

These are just a few examples of how state-level innovation can drive national transformation. With thoughtful policy and strategic outreach, the Mackinac Center, in coordination with our allies at the Institute for the American Worker, is working to shape the future of labor policy, one state at a time. ■



By Julie Ferguson
Senior Director of Strategic Partnerships





Photo by MCPP

FOUL BALL

\$2.5M Ballpark Earmarks Challenged in Court

The Mackinac Center took the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to court last month in a lawsuit challenging \$2.5 million in unconstitutional grants to two local baseball stadiums — one in Lansing, the other in Utica.

The case is being led by the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation's vice president of legal affairs, Patrick Wright, assisted by Senior Attorney Dirk Wilcox.

In the Michigan Court of Claims, Wright argued that these grants violate Article IV, Section 30 of the Michigan Constitution, which prohibits public funds from being used for private or local purposes unless approved by a two-thirds vote in both chambers of the Legislature. The spending bill that included these stadium earmarks passed with a simple majority, and the funds were hidden in vague, last-minute language.

These aren't major league arenas; they're hometown parks backed by private investors, and yet taxpayer dollars were quietly funneled to them under the guise of public spending.

At the hearing, Judge Brock Swartzle expressed skepticism toward the state's defense, particularly its claim that the stadiums serve a broad public purpose. "If this is just for the people of Utica or the people of Lansing," he said, "I don't see how this survives."

We couldn't agree more.

The defense argued that non-local residents visit and enjoy the ballparks, therefore giving them a broader

benefit to the Michigan community at large. Mackinac Center attorney Wright called this the "one-tourist test" and brought up comparable hypotheticals that exposed the hilarity of the rule. Should the entire state be taxed for a youth soccer field in Saginaw? What about a pond in a Muskegon park?

This case isn't just about two baseball fields. It's about restoring the principle that tax dollars should serve the public, not confer political favors.

Over the past three years, Michigan lawmakers have handed out more than \$1 billion a year in earmarked projects. These backroom deals are frequently justified as "economic development," but too often they are little more than political giveaways with questionable return.

We filed this case to push back and remind Lansing that following the constitution is not optional.

A ruling on our motion to pause the stadium funding is expected by the end of the year. No matter the outcome, we'll continue using every tool we have to hold government accountable and protect Michigan taxpayers. ■



By Jessica Wyeth
Marketing Content Manager



Photos by Atlas Network



Mackinac Center Equips the World:

Van Beek Leads Research Workshop in Indonesia

Mackinac Center Director of Research Michael Van Beek traveled to Jakarta, Indonesia, in September to train international allies on how to publish high-quality policy research. While we focus on Michigan issues, the Mackinac Center for decades has supported the broader liberty movement by offering support and insights to think tanks around the world.

The Atlas Network, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that partners with and connects think tanks worldwide, tapped Van Beek to help teach a course on conducting and publishing public policy research. Van Beek manages the Mackinac Center's publication process and has produced hundreds of reports over the last decade.

Twenty-five participants signed up for the course, which featured online training modules and a three-day workshop in Jakarta. They came from Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and other locales. These hard-working students spent more than 20 hours together refining their skills in crafting research questions; collecting and analyzing data; and drafting, editing, peer-reviewing and publishing the results.

Van Beek revealed best practices the Mackinac Center has developed over the years for producing policy reports. Project leaders should establish quality controls to ensure data and results are accurate. Experts need to write first-rate prose that is easy for nonexperts to understand. Publications ought to feature high-quality graphics and design, because their goal is to persuade policymakers and the public through professional, attractive and factually correct products.

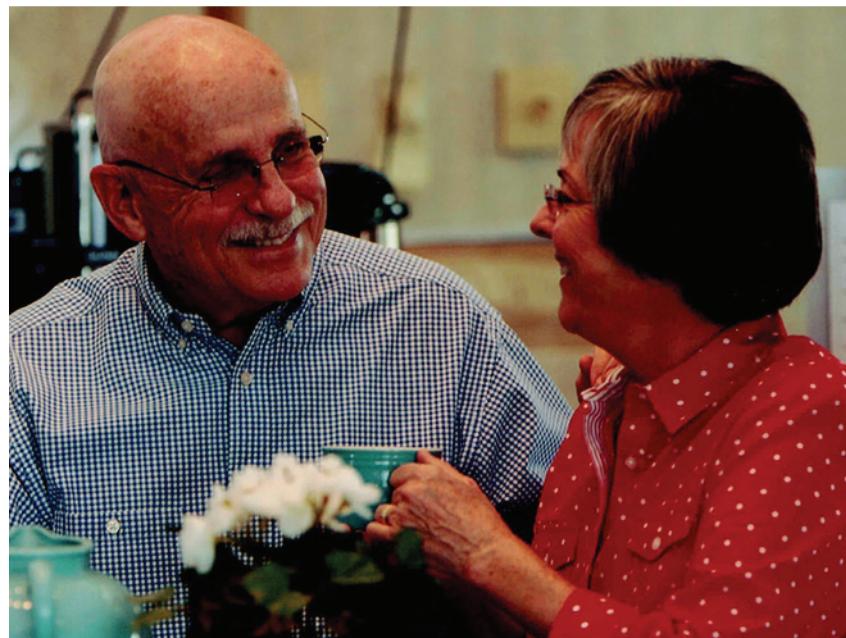
Participants offered enthusiastic feedback, with several noting that the training will help them get started with producing quality research. Each participant developed a research plan for a future policy report during the workshop, so the training will produce tangible benefits for these think tanks.

The Atlas Network is offering two more of these trainings in 2026: one for think tanks in Latin America and another for those in Africa. "I look forward to participating in both workshops and helping our friends at free market think tanks around the world develop and improve their research capabilities," Van Beek said. ■



Photos by Richard Weber

“In a time when lies can overwhelm reasoned discussion, the Mackinac Center stands out as a beacon for those seeking clarity.”



Richard Weber

A Lifelong Advocate for Liberty and Free-Market Principles

Richard “Rich” Weber embodies the pursuit of knowledge and thoughtful political engagement. “As I’ve aged, I’ve become more adamant about my conservative beliefs,” he reflects, tracing his evolution from a time as a more liberal youth to a dedicated supporter of the liberty movement.

Rich grew up in Bay City during World War II. “Young children during those times were heavily influenced by the atmosphere of conflict and unrest,” he recalls. But he had a strong family that shaped his traditional worldview. That grounding helped him as his views on the wider world evolved amid the social turmoil of the 1960s.

Rich’s career was as dynamic as his beliefs. Over three decades at Dow Chemical Company, including an assignment in Switzerland, he gained priceless exposure to many perspectives, which deepened his understanding of political and social issues. “I began writing about important issues after my retirement in 1995,” he explains. While letters to politicians once elicited responses, some thoughtful and some not, the rising use of email often meant his messages were lost in a sea of communication.

On the plus side, the internet led Richard to organizations like the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. “I feel like I’m putting my fingers in the dyke, trying to hold back the tide of misinformation,” he says. “The Mackinac Center gives me more fingers with which to plug the holes!”

Rich’s worldview is grounded in a nuanced understanding of history and current events. “Watching the Democratic Party shift away from its more moderate values has solidified my beliefs,” he notes. His passion for liberty is rooted in creating a better world for his wife, Joey, their children and grandchildren.

Rich values the Mackinac Center’s rigorous research and dedication to free-market principles. “When using that research now in my communications, it offers the potential of enhancing the quality of decision-making with factual data,” he says. “In a time when lies can overwhelm reasoned discussion, the Mackinac Center stands out as a beacon for those seeking clarity.”

When asked why he supports the Mackinac Center, Rich is clear. “I believe they are vital to fostering understanding and promoting our shared values to a greater audience.” Joey Weber shares her husband’s commitment to philanthropy and plays a guiding role in the family’s charitable giving.

Rich Weber’s journey reflects a lifetime devoted to advancing liberty and thoughtful engagement. He champions the Mackinac Center as part of a greater goal to sustain informed dialogue in an ever-changing political landscape. ■



By Michael Schut
Director of Strategic Partnerships



WHY COURAGEOUS SPEECH Still Matters

There is a tendency to lionize and laud the dead, but the emotional outpouring for Charlie Kirk was of a scale seldom seen. Charlie's hidden killer assassinated him with a single shot in front of 3,000 young people, guaranteeing that his death would be remembered for two things — the grisly act itself, and his survivors' responses.

Perhaps no fallen public figure in recent memory has evoked such a breadth and depth of mourning, or inspired so many hundreds of vigils, as the leader of Turning Point USA. That's not because Kirk's was the only high profile assassination in their lifetimes. It's because his assassination was so unlike most others.

Public assassination victims usually fall into one of three categories — someone with government power, the object of a grudge (such as UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, who was recently murdered on a Manhattan sidewalk), or a representative member of a targeted group (such as the lovely young couple gunned down not long ago outside a Washington, D.C., Jewish center).

Charlie Kirk fit none of these types so much as another, much rarer, fourth category. He was simply a man with a voice and a following. We have to remember all the way back to the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. to find another killing like

Kirk's. King's movement was much bigger, which may be only one reason his assassination changed a nation.

The other reason is what most of us share with both Kirk and King. We want a voice, and we want our ideas to have a following.

In their despicable killings, we can likewise see ourselves potentially targeted for merely speaking our minds and trying to find others who might agree with us. Those are basic human desires, and ones fiercely protected by American law and tradition. I bet even many who didn't agree with Kirk very much were glad to see someone brave enough to try to break the progressive left's stranglehold on college campuses. He debated to win, but not to destroy. He was sharp but not cruel.

I want Mackinac Center supporters to know what they can expect of us, so I'll partially quote what I told the Mackinac Center team minutes after Kirk's death was announced publicly.

"Many people we know supported Charlie Kirk and felt a strong connection to him. They are shocked and grieving. Some of them may feel angry and vengeful. In addition to the devastation felt by his family and closest friends, his huge following ensures that



unpredictable social and political consequences will flow.

"Nevertheless, our job now is to be the alternative to any ensuing chaos, confusion, violence, disorder, and just general wickedness. We are in the business of sometimes standing on a stage and saying true but unpopular things, and we will stay in that business. Fearlessly. The people who count on us will know that they aren't alone, crazy, beaten, or powerless.

"Everyone who attends [our events this week] will see us model our best effort at exercising free speech, persuasion, discourse, and civility."

Charlie Kirk was making America better. We can make the country yet better by following his example of courage and devotion, and by respecting the dignity of our opponents. ■



By Joseph G. Lehman

President of the Mackinac Center

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MACKINAC CENTER PRIORITIES WIN IN 2026 STATE BUDGET



Michigan's budget for fiscal year 2025-2026 was passed by a divided Legislature and signed by a Democratic governor, but it contains important elements that will help all Michigan residents. Reforms in road funding, school spending and corporate welfare reflect ideas the Mackinac Center has supported for many years.

There are thousands of influential people whose livelihoods rely on state spending, and they lobby elected officials for more. We don't. We call for restraint. The Mackinac Center supports budgets that do not reach deeper into taxpayers' pockets (or as tax hikers say, "look for revenue options").

But even with all of those people who stand to gain from spending hikes, elected officials do hear our voice.

The latest budget agreement has a lot of what we've called for.

The budget spends more on the roads — likely getting the state on pace to repair roads faster than they deteriorate — and it does so mostly without raising taxes. Lawmakers were very close to this point in 2019, but Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's insistence on a tax hike led to a stalemate on road funding.

That changed this year. The Republican-majority House was able to get agreement with the Democratic-majority Senate and the governor to substitute the sales tax levied on fuel purchases with an equivalent per-gallon tax on fuel. The sales tax largely goes to schools, while per-gallon taxes go to roads. Michigan





is one of the few states to have levied both, and substituting one for the other is a way to spend more on roads without raising taxes.

The road debate is old, and one of the Mackinac Center's long-standing arguments is that the poor condition of the roads is no excuse to force people to pay the government more. The state economy is growing, and this generates more revenue for lawmakers to keep roads in good working order.

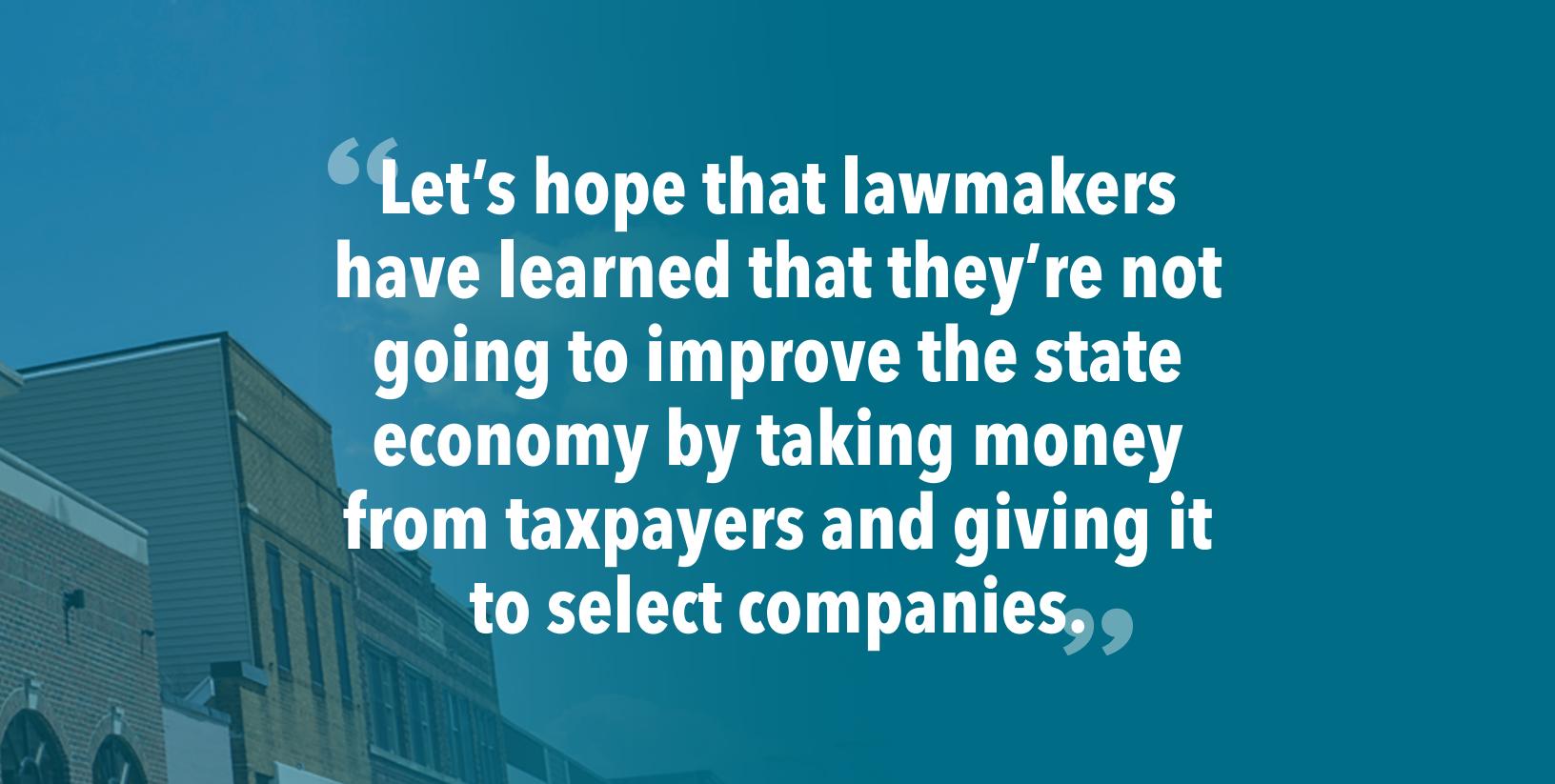
School interest groups attacked this reform idea because they'd be left with less. However, the 2026 budget substantially increases funding for schools. Elected officials authorized \$510 million more in

education funding than they did in last year's budget.

One reason lawmakers had more money for schools is that they stopped funding the state's largest business subsidy program. Officials have used the program to give just nine companies \$1.45 billion in taxpayer money to create 14,779 jobs. To date, the companies have received \$720 million but have yet to create a single job, according to the latest state report. These companies are unlikely to meet expectations: Subsidy deals from 2000 to 2020 delivered just 9% of the number of jobs promised.

Let's hope that lawmakers have learned that they're not going to improve the state economy by taking money





“Let’s hope that lawmakers have learned that they’re not going to improve the state economy by taking money from taxpayers and giving it to select companies.”

from taxpayers and giving it to select companies. The basics of the business climate are what matter to job growth, not whether the state writes the biggest checks to the biggest companies. Lawmakers moved in that direction with their latest budget.

These are wins for taxpayers, and they show the Mackinac Center’s influence. It comes not from the conventional modes of power, from having an army of supporters engaged in politics, but through years of research, arguments and advocacy. We have shown that lawmakers can fix roads without raising taxes, that business subsidy money can be better spent elsewhere. And the political environment allowed for these ideas to be enacted.

Lawmakers had to come together across the political divide to get a budget approved, and neither side got everything it wanted. I could gripe about a lot of what got passed.

But the new budget shows the progress the Mackinac Center has made by patiently moving the window of political possibilities in the direction of freedom. ■



By James M. Hohman
Director of Fiscal Policy



A NEW ERA FOR WORKERS FOR OPPORTUNITY

Seven years ago, I joined the Mackinac Center to build its first government affairs effort and lead its Lansing Embassy office. With that solidly established and making an impact in Lansing, Mackinac's leadership recently asked me to become the first executive director of our Workers for Opportunity labor reform project and help "level up" this multistate initiative. I am excited by the opportunity to apply our expertise in labor policy to other states and free millions of workers from their unwanted unions.

This move is a return to my roots. My life in the think tank world began in 2007 at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. In that year, we launched Texas' groundbreaking conservative reforms of criminal justice policy. As we contemplated how to get other states to replicate our success, we developed a project called Right on Crime.

Until then, you could count on one hand the number of state-based free-market think tanks that worked on criminal justice policy. So, we built a team of specialists who would work with our fellow think tanks and assist state policymakers as they pursued similar reforms. To date, Right on Crime has successfully contributed to reform efforts in 39 states. Mackinac's own work in this area is a direct result of its engagement with Right on Crime.

Labor policy today is in a similar position to where criminal justice was 20 years ago. Seventeen states have right-to-work laws, while nine more enshrine it in their state constitution.

The Mackinac Center has been the state-based think tank with the most developed expertise and emphasis

on labor policy, due in part to the frontal assault on right-to-work the state saw over the last decade. A lot of union abuses fly under the radar, in Michigan and elsewhere. Once they appear, our allies lean on us to respond.

Over the coming months, we plan to build the policy and communications infrastructure of Workers for Opportunity so that its efforts complement Mackinac's work for the people of Michigan.

A more robust and effective Workers for Opportunity helps Michigan in many ways. When we come alongside other think tanks to help them curb union abuses in their states, we built trust and a relationship. They can help us on issues where they have the greater expertise than we do.

Perhaps most importantly, as we make it easier for workers in right-to-work states to leave their union, we drain the pot of union political money available for left-wing causes. Over the next year, unions will funnel colossal amounts of political money into Michigan to promote radical ballot measures and elect pro-union candidates.

Your support for the Mackinac Center and Workers for Opportunity advances freedom across America — especially in Michigan. ■



By David Guenthner

*Executive Director of
Workers for Opportunity*



Photo by MCPP



CapCon Reporting

STIRS UP



Reform in SNAP Program

Michigan taxpayers will get extra protection against food stamp fraud thanks in part to reporting by Michigan Capitol Confidential. The 2026 budget includes funding to upgrade Bridge Cards from magnetic stripes to chip-enabled technology that will make it harder to steal user information.

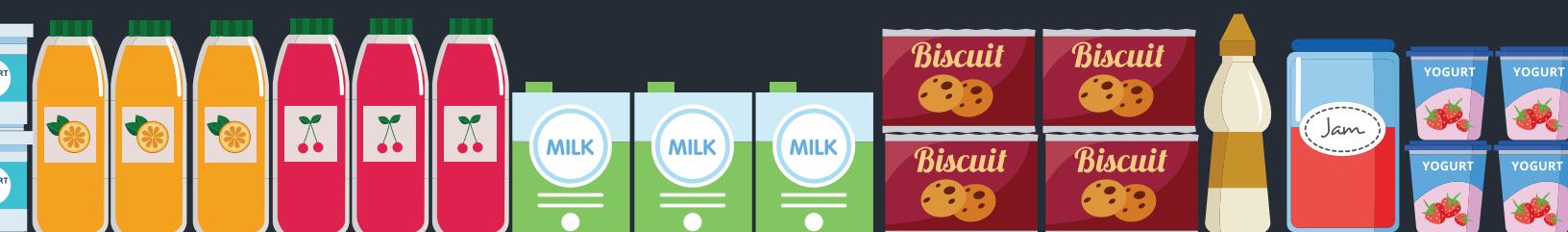
When the House approved a bill in September requiring chip-enabled Bridge Cards, bill sponsor Rep. Jason Woolford, R-Howell, pointed to a months-long CapCon investigation of Bridge Card fraud. Woolford cited our report that payments tied to fraud in Michigan's food stamp program jumped 387% from fiscal 2023 to 2024, costing taxpayers at least

\$14 million. The budget signed in October went further, appropriating \$16 million for the upgrade.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides benefits to 1.4 million Michiganders each month. Recipients currently use Bridge Cards with magnetic strips, which are easily cloned by scammers using skimming devices.

Woolford said the legislation would require the Department of Health and Human Services to issue chip-enabled cards with stronger security protections.

"Taxpayer dollars should never be vulnerable to criminals who are looking to exploit hardworking



Michigan families,” Woolford said. “By adding secure chip technology to Bridge Cards, we can better protect families while ensuring taxpayer resources are used for their intended purpose.”

Fraud victims have shared stories of stolen benefits drained from hundreds of miles away. In Detroit, Kaiysha Warner lost \$762 overnight when her benefits were accessed from Massachusetts. In Flint, Ella Montez Hodo saw \$360 vanish the same way, stolen from New York.

State records show the scale of the problem. In 2024 alone, Michigan issued more than 269,000 replacement Bridge Cards — an average of 738 every day.

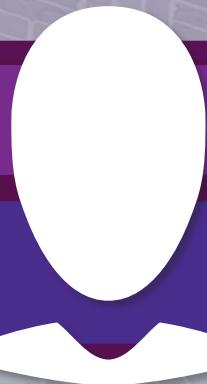
Local records also reveal dozens of fraud cases, from 30 in Kalamazoo to 137 in Dearborn.

By moving to chip-enabled cards Michigan has taken a significant step toward stopping criminals from stealing food aid meant for the state’s poorest residents. ■



By Scott McClallen

Michigan Capitol Confidential Reporter



Fresh Faces at Mackinac

We're excited to welcome Sarah VandeLaar, Hailey Fader, Holly Montalbano, Matt Lampert and AnnMarie Pariseau to the Mackinac Center team this year. Each brings valuable experience and skills that are already making an impact.

Sarah M. VandeLaar

In a brand new role, Sarah is helping to further shape the workplace culture at Mackinac as **Vice President for People and Operations**. She brings a passion for building people-first workplaces where a healthy culture drives a lasting impact.

"At the Mackinac Center, I have the privilege of working for an organization with a mission I sincerely

believe in — one that fosters a purpose-driven culture grounded in integrity, service, liberty and opportunity for real people."

Hailey Fader

Hailey joins the team in **Donor Relations**. She helps cultivate relationships with supporters, donors, and partners, ensuring that those who believe in our work feel connected and appreciated.

"It's remarkable to work alongside people who dream big and stand firm with such perseverance, clarity and conviction."

You can spot Hailey outside the office performing



with the Midland Community Orchestra — she's a classically trained violinist!

Holly Montalbano

With years of event expertise, Holly is our new **Director of Events**. She leads the planning, coordination, and execution of events — large and small — that connect people to our ideas and initiatives. Her extensive experience in event planning was on full display during our busy summer season, when she jumped right in to keep everything on track.

In the summer, Holly enjoys spending time in her garden or watching sunsets over Lake Michigan from the front deck of her family cottage. "You can never get enough of those magical moments!" she says.

Matt Lampert

Matt serves as the Mackinac Center's **Director of Finance**. He manages the Center's financial operations, ensuring accuracy and long-term sustainability. Matt's thoughtful approach and attention to detail support the day-to-day work of our teams and the broader goals of the organization.

Aside from running the Detroit International Half Marathon in 2024 and training for other races, Matt enjoys serving at his local church; planning hiking trips; and watching U-M football, the Detroit Tigers or the Detroit Lions.

AnnMarie Pariseau

After years of leading media relations in the nation's capital, AnnMarie joined the Mackinac Center as **Director of Communications**. She oversees the Center's external messaging, media relations and storytelling efforts.

"From the moment I began working at the Mackinac Center, I recognized its commitment to advancing freedom, striving for excellence, and fostering an enjoyable workplace."

In and out of the office, AnnMarie is an avid reader. Her favorite novel is "The Count of Monte Cristo" by Alexandre Dumas. ■

*Pictured from left to right:
Sara M. VandeLaar, Hailey Fader,
Holly Montalbano, Matt Lampert,
and AnnMarie Pariseau*

FIGHTING FOR TRANSPARENCY:

Mackinac Center and Detroit Free Press Sue Over Subsidy Secrecy

The Detroit Free Press, represented by the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation, sued the Michigan Department of Treasury in July to uphold a core principle: Michigan taxpayers deserve transparency in how their public funds are spent.

The lawsuit seeks financial reports tied to subsidies granted to Bedrock, a real estate company building developments in Detroit. Bedrock received a deal to collect hundreds of millions in subsidies for what the state calls “transformational brownfield plans.” This program diverts taxes meant for schools, roads and public services to developers, who are expected to create jobs and boost Michigan’s economy. But are these promises being met?

Detroit Free Press business reporter J.C. Reindl filed a Freedom of Information Act request for records showing whether Bedrock is delivering on job creation and economic growth, and how much public money it

received. The treasury department denied the request, claiming the reports contain confidential taxpayer information. But these financial records, accountings, audit reports and other documents concern public funds, not individual private tax returns, and the Michigan Constitution mandates their disclosure under the open records law.

“The press has an important watchdog role and a responsibility to the public interest,” Reindl said in a Mackinac Center press release. “The records we seek are critical to understanding how taxpayer dollars were used for development projects receiving

subsidies and should be a matter of public record.”

Without these public records, it’s impossible to assess the costs and weigh them against benefits. “With the Mackinac Center’s help,” Reindl added, “we can unlock some facts on what exactly Michigan taxpayers are rewarding under the program.”

“**The press has an important watchdog role and a responsibility to the public interest.**”

ONLINE RESOURCES



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By AnnMarie Pariseau
Director of Communications



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By Victoria Hoffman

*Advancement Engagement
Associate*

