

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

# IMPACT

## A DEFINING MOMENT FOR CIVILITY

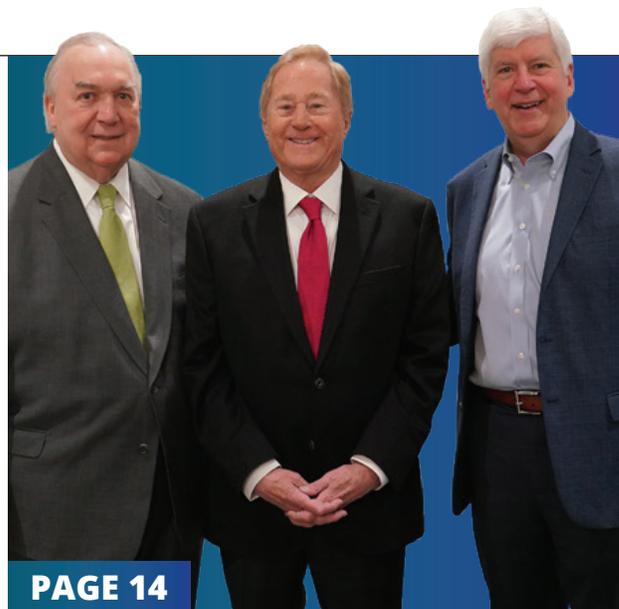
A Forum with Four Governors

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## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Parents Must Take Back School Boards

“More parents should run for school board, not to join the system, but to reform it.”

*Carol Beth Litkouhi, Trustee of the Rochester Community Schools Board of Education*



### Rochester Community Schools Sued Over Bylaw Limiting Trustee Speech

“Rochester’s policy attempts to silence trustees and keep their constituents in the dark about decisions that directly affect them.”

*Derk Wilcox, Senior Attorney*

## The Detroit News

### Michigan’s Inflated Teacher Evals Are Failing Students

“Michigan’s leaders should recommit to honest evaluations that reflect student performance, enforce consistent standards across districts and demand accountability when results don’t align with reality.”

*Molly Macek, Director of Education Policy*

## CRAIN’S DETROIT BUSINESS

### Opinion: For once, Michigan said No to New Business Subsidies

“For the first time in decades, Michigan’s lawmakers finished a year without authorizing more selective business subsidies. That’s excellent when the subsidies are ineffective at creating jobs, unfair to taxpayers and competing businesses and expensive to the state budget.”

*James M. Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy*



### It’s Groundhog Day All over Again on Free Trade

“Overall, America has more jobs than ever, and those jobs pay better than ever. And remarkably, the U.S. manufactures more than ever.”

*James M. Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy*



### What Indiana Got Wrong About Cigarette Taxes

“We do not smoke. We don’t want you to. But lawmakers from Maine to California should recognize that their cigarette excise tax policies may do more to enrich smugglers than to help people quit.”

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



**LETTER FROM  
THE EXECUTIVE  
VICE PRESIDENT**

# Timeless Truths

When Richard McLellan and Joseph Olson founded the Mackinac Center in 1987, they set out several clear aims in its governing documents.

The Mackinac Center existed, they wrote, to “conduct public policy research on matters affecting the people of the State of Michigan and to propose approaches to public policy issues consistent with traditional American values of maximum individual freedom, limited government and a competitive economic system.”

So from its inception, the Mackinac Center has existed to celebrate and promote “traditional American values.”

Some years later, the late Joe Overton, senior vice president at the Mackinac Center and father of the Overton Window, encouraged our team to celebrate the Fourth of July. He added these words to our employee handbook:

“All staff are encouraged to celebrate Independence Day with passion and verve, remembering it as the signatory day of a document embodying the most sublime of political ideals, an apogee in mankind’s quest for liberty of thought and action, the restoration of which is the vision of our organization.”



Photo by Adobe Stock

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- Joseph P. Overton

America celebrates 250 years in 2026. Both President Donald J. Trump and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer have called for celebrations throughout the year to mark the occasion. Similarly, the Mackinac Center will use 2026 as an opportunity to promote traditional American values.

No document better captures the timeless principles America was built upon than the Declaration of Independence. Two hundred and fifty years ago, 56 men (farmers, lawyers, merchants, physicians, clergymen) staked their lives, fortunes and sacred honor on those values.

All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights — chief among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The rights of mankind include the right to conduct trade with all parts of the world, the right to trial by jury, the right to legislative representation, freedom from taxation without consent, security in one’s person and home, and the right to encourage legal immigration.

The Declaration included powerful observations about how government best operates. Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. If a government destroys those rights, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it. An independent

judiciary is crucial to a free society. Legislative bodies should remain close to the people they represent. Multitudes of government offices and swarms of officers are an affront to liberty. The military must not be independent of civil power.

Though the founders fell short, in obvious and significant ways, of their proclamation that these promises were available to “all men,” the nation has moved closer to these ideals in the last 250 years.

The Declaration of Independence assumed a people capable of self-government — people committed to individual liberty, accountable government and economic freedom. In this anniversary year, the Mackinac Center will work to strengthen the foundations of our prosperity. We are confident that a free people, guided by timeless truths, will continue to prosper. ■



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

**By Michael J. Reitz**

*Executive Vice President*



# Make Kids Read, Hold Teachers Accountable

## And more lessons Michigan can learn from other states

The new year brings opportunities to address the education crisis and help struggling students in Michigan. Reversing the downward trend in achievement is paramount, and that can be done through policies that raise accountability standards and increase access to diverse educational options.

Literacy is the place to begin the discussion about education and accountability. In spring 2025, Michigan's third grade students scored their lowest performance on the English language arts portion of the M-STEP assessments since the test was first administered in 2015. Fewer than 40% of Michigan's third graders scored proficient or higher. Fourth graders rank 44th in the nation for reading.

A crisis of this magnitude means we must hold districts and educators accountable for student achievement. Michigan needs bold action. Mississippi and Florida made dramatic achievement gains after implementing new policies and accountability standards for literacy. Michigan recently enacted

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new literacy laws, but they lack the key provision of Mississippi and Florida’s literacy laws: a requirement that third grade students be proficient in reading before advancing to fourth grade. Students who do not meet this basic standard will fall further behind.

The state must hold teachers and administrators to rigorous performance standards. Last year, 98% of Michigan’s public school teachers and administrators were rated as “effective.” An evaluation system that awards nearly all school staff the highest score possible – while most students lack basic proficiencies – is broken. The Mackinac Center is fighting for policies that require evaluations to place greater emphasis on student achievement and tie personnel decisions to job performance.

Policymakers should also give students greater access to schools and programs that work best for them. They can do this by improving open enrollment

policies, enabling increased participation in Schools of Choice. They can make it easier for public schools

to offer innovative programming that supports students’ diverse interests by removing seat time requirements and simplifying student accounting policies. And they can fix regulatory barriers, such as building codes and zoning, that stand in the way of microschoools and alternative education models.

The Mackinac Center supports holding schools accountable

for student achievement and empowering parents to pursue the type of education that works best for their children. The future success of Michigan’s students depends on it. ■

“Michigan’s third grade students scored their lowest performance on the English language arts portion of the M-STEP assessments since the test was first administered in 2015.”



**By Molly Macek**  
*Director of Education Policy*



# 20 A REGULATORY AND LABOR POLICY AGENDA FOR MICHIGAN 26





## Lawmakers who want to pursue an affordability agenda should adopt Mackinac Center recommendations for occupational licensing, housing, health care regulation and labor policy.

**1** Reduce the burdens of occupational licensing. Michigan requires licenses for roughly 180 occupations, affecting about one-fifth of the workforce. While the state has enacted bipartisan licensing reforms in recent years, barriers to entering various occupations remain too high. Michigan should regularly review all licensing requirements to ensure they are still necessary. It also should fully recognize licenses issued by other states, making it easier for workers to move here. Criminal convictions are often a bar to getting licensed, but these restrictions should apply only to felony convictions.

**2** Lower housing costs by increasing the supply of housing. Government-imposed rules increase the cost of building, which raises prices and limits supply. It is time to reduce the regulatory obstacles to residential construction.

Many options are available.

Speed up the processing of permits. Eliminate unnecessary licensing requirements for builders and construction workers. Have level, statewide zoning to prevent local governments from restricting development through minimum lot sizes, parking space mandates and aesthetic rules. Make duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes legal statewide. Local governments should allow preapproved building plans and have shorter inspection timelines.

**3** Increase the supply of health care workers by reforming regulations. The Mackinac Center supports expanding scope-of-practice rules for mid-level providers such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists and nurse anesthetists. Current regulations prevent these professionals from practicing to the full extent of their training and worsen shortages in primary care. Loosening these restrictions would increase access to care and reduce costs.

**4** Give workers freedom to opt out of unions. Michigan laws force private sector workers to pay dues or fees to unions. A new legal scheme costs home caregivers hundreds of dollars each year by skimming their modest paychecks and sending funds to the SEIU, a large union.

Everyone should have the freedom to join a union — but not be compelled to join. Lawmakers should establish a fair labor environment by restoring Michigan’s right-to-work law.

End the incestuous relationship between unions and politicians by limiting what government employee unions and public managers can collectively bargain over. State and local government agencies should consider construction bids regardless of whether they use union labor or rules. ■

Adopting these proposals, which reflect the Mackinac Center’s broader push for deregulation and labor policy changes, will help the people of Michigan in 2026 and beyond.



**By Jarrett Skorup**  
*Vice President for Marketing and Communications*

“Respect every individual. Ask questions. Try to understand people.”



“Everyone is a unique individual, and government often forgets that.” That conviction drives Clark DenUyl’s work as a philanthropist, advocate of liberty and co-founder of the RB DenUyl Family Foundation. For DenUyl, preserving individual freedom is a guiding principle as well as a deeply personal mission rooted in family, legacy and a belief in the power of ideas to shape lives.

Raised in Wilmette, Illinois, just outside of Chicago, Clark credits much of his early education to late-night conversations with his father; discussions they called “solving the world’s problems.” Those conversations laid the groundwork for a lifelong interest in free-market philosophy.

The DenUyl family has longstanding ties to Michigan.



Photos from the DenUyl’s

Clark is a fourth-generation summer resident of Macatawa, where his family has maintained cottages for decades. “Michigan means a lot to us,” he says.

Clark studied philosophy at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, a decision shaped in part by his uncle, Doug DenUyl, a philosopher who has written extensively on liberty. Clark later earned both an MBA and a master’s in sports business management from the University of Central Florida. He spent 13

# A PERSONAL MISSION TO SUPPORT DOCTORS AND FREEDOM

years in sports marketing, working his way up at an experiential marketing firm and helping to lead campaigns for major brands like Pepsi, AT&T, and Nissan.

The loss of Clark's brother in 2015 and his father in 2018 marked a turning point. In 2021, he and his mother founded the RB DenUyl Family Foundation, naming it in honor of his father. "We started the foundation to give back to the doctors and health organizations who helped them," he says. What began as an expression of gratitude soon evolved into a way to continue the family's longstanding commitment to philanthropy.

Two priorities guide the foundation: health care and pursuit of liberty. The foundation focuses on organizations where contributions have a significant impact. While the medical side of the family's giving is deeply rooted in personal loss, the liberty side is where Clark has found his greatest passion. He actively engages with the organizations the foundation supports, attending conferences, studying policy, and seeking out leaders who share his values.

After his uncle mentioned the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Clark wanted to support its publications and legal cases, expanding freedom at the state level. The Mackinac Center's efforts to combat forced unionization, in particular, resonated with him, as did its work to protect individual rights through litigation. "If the government tells you what to do, a private citizen usually can't fight back unless it's through the legal system," Clark says. This reality has informed his philanthropic strategy.

In addition to valuing legal advocacy, Clark sees education as a critical part of cultural renewal. The family foundation works to introduce younger generations to the principles of free markets. Partnering with the Mackinac Center is one way it does that.

As he looks ahead, Clark hopes to grow the foundation by strengthening its partnerships with a core group of highly effective liberty-focused organizations. What matters to him is preserving freedom and ensuring the next generation understands just how much it matters.

The foundation is, above all, a tribute to Clark's father and brother. Their lives and values continue to inspire him. "It's really about honoring their legacy. That's what drives me," he says.

One lesson from his father continues to guide Clark's life. "Respect every individual," he says. "Don't assume where someone's coming from. Ask questions. Try to understand people before making statements. My dad never preached that. He lived it. That's something I carry with me every day."

That respect for the individual, paired with a belief in limited government, is what drew Clark DenUyl to the liberty movement, and it fuels his support for the Mackinac Center today. ■



**By Naomi Saneda**  
*Former Advancement Intern*



*Government  
Serves Best  
When it Refrains  
from Taking  
from All*

The 250th anniversary of America's founding is a time to reflect on the nation's guiding principles and the inspirational words of our founders. As Thomas Jefferson once said, "The public interest is best served not by what government gives to some, but what it refrains from taking from all."

This principle applies to the Mackinac Center's fiscal policy goals for 2026. We oppose selective subsidies, unsustainable spending and punitive tax policies.

For decades the Michigan Legislature authorized a new business subsidy program every year. That changed in 2025, when it did not create any. But the temptation to do so will arise again this year, and lawmakers should resist. These programs fail to create jobs, and they waste resources by transferring money from all taxpayers to serve a few corporate interests.

The state's corporate handout agency, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, has a decades-long reputation for lack of transparency and accountability. It has been sued by the Mackinac Center and others for its secrecy. Last year Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel criticized the corporation's stonewalling tactics. Some lawmakers recently introduced legislation to create greater transparency at this organization, and we'll be working to see those bills receive the attention they need.

But transparency alone is not enough. Some spending can be transparently irresponsible. That is why the



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Mackinac Center announces its Sustainable Michigan Budget targets each year. We ask lawmakers to practice restraint and increase the budget by no more than the rates of population growth and inflation combined. The approach recognizes the simple truth that the government should not grow faster than the people who pay its bills.

Restraint would show that a tax hike is unnecessary. A large tax hike proposal that may appear on the November ballot would end Michigan's flat tax and levy the nation's seventh-highest rate on high earners. This burden would fall on small business owners who provide jobs, and the effects would hit more than those subject to the hike. If this proposal makes the ballot, expect to see the Mackinac Center discuss it far and wide.

Jefferson's insight remains as relevant today as it was 250 years ago. Michigan's path to prosperity does not run through selective subsidies, opaque agencies, excessive government spending, or punitive tax policy. It runs through transparency, restraint and policies that allow people to keep more of what they earn. ■



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



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# A DEFINING MOMENT FOR CIVILITY

## A Forum with Four Governors



It's not often that four former governors from both parties appear side by side. Thanks to the Mackinac Center and its partners, they did — gathering in Lansing to make the case for civility in an increasingly divided political climate.

Former Govs. Rick Snyder, James Blanchard, Jennifer Granholm and John Engler joined together at a Lansing event organized by the Michigan Civility Coalition. The coalition includes the Mackinac Center, Michiganders for Civic Resilience, Oakland University Center for Civic Engagement, Democracy Defense Project, and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation.

“A Defining Moment for Civility: A Forum with Four Governors” came amid concerns over censorship, cancellations, doxing, and increasing threats of violence toward politicians, activists and reporters. But the four executives spoke with mutual respect in the face of political disagreement.

Granholm framed the discussion as an opportunity for constructive dialogue. “I am eager to soothe my own raging beast by having a civil conversation with three governors who know the importance of respect and bipartisanship even as we may disagree about the president,” she said.

Several panelists reflected on the importance of cooperation in sustaining democratic institutions. “The greatest threat to America, in my view, is us,” said Snyder. “And that’s our lack of ability to get along with one another. That’s our greatest threat, and we need to do something about it.”

Blanchard highlighted the value of personal relationships amid political differences. “We are friends and we get along and we might not agree on stuff,” he said. “It’s important for you to understand that and know that we’re committed to working together in the future, like we hope all of you will do.”





Engler reflected on governing after elections and the importance of institutional continuity. Discussing post-election politics, he said, “We didn’t then start protesting because we didn’t win. Being able to work through to get solutions to problems is a very civil thing to do. Using issues for political advantage is a very uncivil thing to do.”

Despite their differences, the governors demonstrated a shared commitment to civic engagement. The event drew large-scale news coverage, with stories in *The Detroit News*, *USA Today*, and *Fox 2 Detroit*.

Mackinac Center President Joseph G. Lehman closed the event with an observation about his recently departed father.

“Mainly what people will remember about my dad is how he made them feel,” Lehman said. “And that wasn’t because Dad was some towering exemplar of charisma.

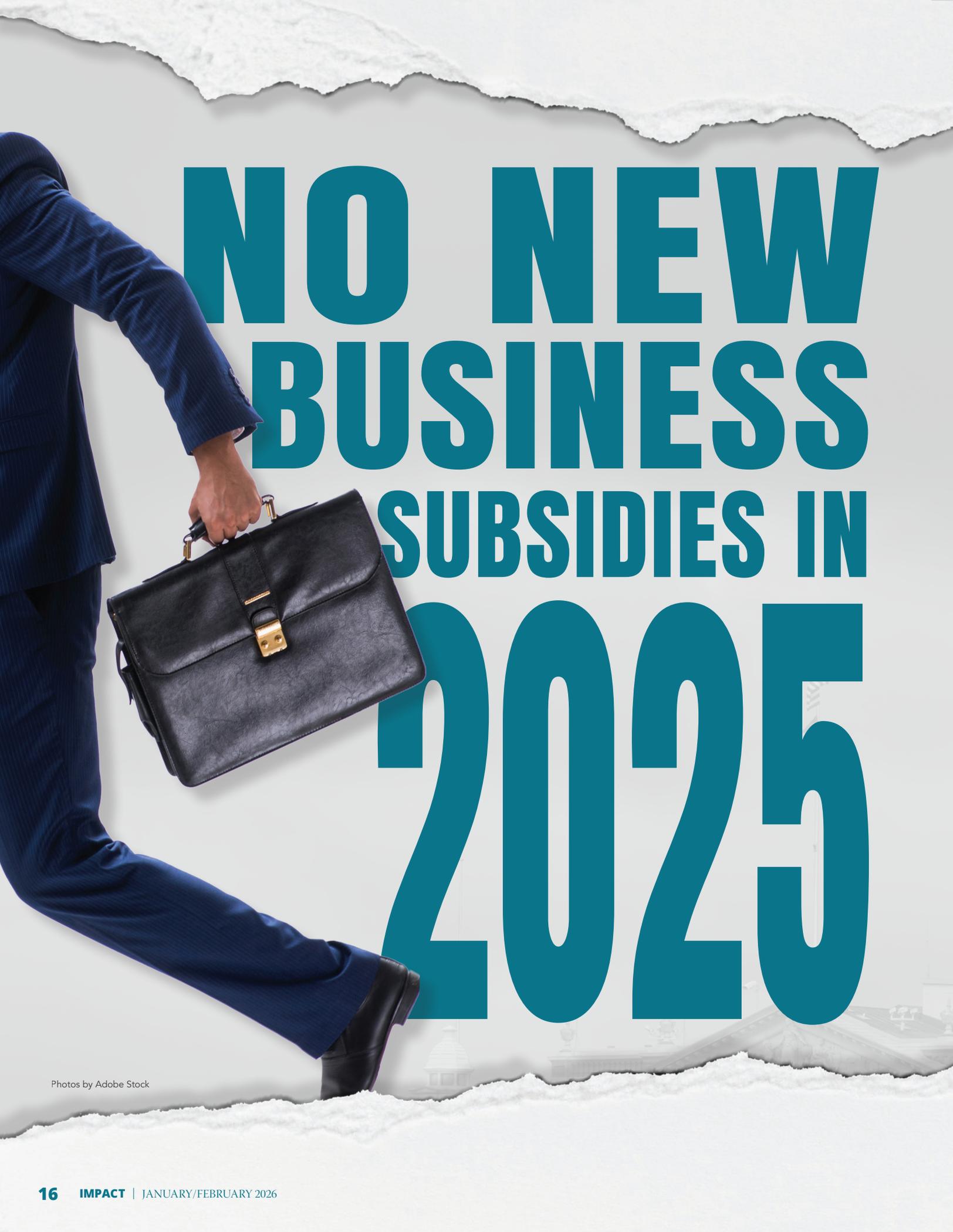
... It’s fair to say that my dad was civil in ordinary ways, that he was fair, generous. He let bygones be bygones. He acted as if everyone he dealt with was somebody whose help he would probably need in the future,” Lehman said. “And Dad detested politics. So naturally, I ended up at the Mackinac Center. And I’m better off having been associated with each of these former governors over the years, even though we’ve all disagreed back and forth, all of us.”

Lehman concluded his reflection with this message: “If we want to get better as a society, if we want to live in relative peace with one another, if we want to acknowledge one another’s basic human dignity, we need the kind of social progress free speech and civility promote.” ■



**MICHIGAN CIVILITY COALITION**





# NO NEW BUSINESS SUBSIDIES IN 2025

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A little disagreement in the Michigan Legislature can be a good thing. Lawmakers passed a record low number of bills into law in 2025. Even better, they approved no new business subsidies. None. That's the first time that has happened in decades, and it vindicates one of the Mackinac Center's key messages.

We've been trying to foster bipartisan skepticism about taking money from all taxpayers and handing it to select companies. That practice is ineffective at creating jobs, unfair to businesses that do not receive largesse, and costly to the state government. It also ought to offend our basic principles of what government should do. The state should set the rules for everyone, not play favorites in the private economy. This is not how a free market works.

It looks like our efforts are paying off. The state budget reflects growing bipartisan skepticism about corporate welfare.

It wasn't always this way. We keep a scorecard of how legislators vote on business subsidies, and thanks to our Michigan Votes legislative tracker, we can go back to 2000. In the early 2000s, the Republican-led Legislature couldn't agree with the Democratic governor about much, except that the state needed to subsidize more businesses.

This was not limited to the Granholm administration. Elected officials approve \$900 million a year in

business subsidies on average. But they approved none in 2025.

It's great to see our work influence the policy debate. We've maintained a consistent position the whole time. We've done sophisticated empirical research to demonstrate that the spending just doesn't work. We've tested messages to win people over. We've highlighted excesses and abuses of economic development officials. We've shown that the deals between state officials and subsidy recipients rarely deliver on their promises. Indeed, for every 100 jobs that lawmakers promise to create, they produce just nine jobs.

We must keep up the case against selective business subsidies. There is a perpetual demand that politicians show they're doing something about jobs. And politicians naturally assume the most direct way to do that is to write large public checks to big companies.

It feels great to make a difference. It is satisfying when lawmakers reiterate our findings when taking stances on good policy. And I am excited to keep the opposition to selective business subsidies going in 2026. ■



**By James M. Hohman**  
*Director of Fiscal Policy*



**MACKINAC  
STAFF  
PROFILE**

# Meet David Stevenson Director of Energy and

## His life has rarely followed a straight

David Stevenson grew up in Camden, New Jersey, just across the river from Philadelphia. His parents and grandparents all lived in New Jersey, and for most of his life, he assumed he would too.

He learned the value of work early. His mother and sisters ran a ceramics business out of the family basement, which gave him an early start in work. As a preschooler, Dave earned 10 cents each time he wrapped a carton full of finished pieces. He later mowed lawns, shoveled snow, delivered newspapers and, at age 16, worked at a gas station. “I pretty much always had work,” he says.

That work ethic extended to investing. At 15, Dave bought his first share of stock after being inspired by an exceptional high school economics teacher who emphasized free-market principles. When the stock – Communications Satellite Corporation – doubled in two months, Dave wanted to invest those earnings in

Texas Instruments. His father told him no. “That was a costly mistake,” Dave notes wistfully.

At Rutgers University, Dave initially studied engineering before switching to economics. Its blend of analytical thinking and real-world application suited him. Agricultural economics, which combined science and markets, was especially attractive.

After getting his degree, Dave spent 23 years at DuPont, starting in inside sales in the Empire State Building before moving to the company’s corporate headquarters in Delaware. Over time, he worked in polyethylene manufacturing, technical services and business management, helping launch seven new markets. One of those products generated more than \$1 billion in profit.

The offer of a corporate buyout caused Dave to move to southern Delaware and start six service businesses



# n, the Mackinac Center's nd Environmental Policy

t line – and that's exactly how he likes it



aimed at the tourism industry. Today, his adult children run them, and a third generation is already involved.

Public policy eventually pulled him in a new direction. In 2011, Dave began leading energy and environmental work at the Caesar Rodney Institute, where he helped stop costly regional carbon taxes and exposed wasteful renewable subsidies. Two news outlets, including Bloomberg News, declared him to be the man who killed offshore wind. His research on the EPA's Clean Power Plan played a role in *West Virginia v. EPA*, a landmark decision.

In it the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that only Congress can grant agencies explicit authority for actions of vast economic and political significance. Dave later served on President Trump's EPA transition team in 2016.



Photos by David Stevenson

Now at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, Dave is focused on energy, particularly the case for nuclear power as a reliable, low-emissions alternative to wind and solar. He doggedly works to solve long-standing challenges such as what to do with spent nuclear fuel.

Dave's life outside of work is as full as his life in it. He and his wife Kimberley, a former journalist, have seven children and 19 grandchildren. He climbed Washington's Mount Rainier and Peru's Machu Picchu, biked across the United States and has visited six continents.



"A big reason we both came to Michigan is we like adventure," Dave says. "My life has been a series of adventures, and I'm excited to continue that at the Mackinac Center." ■



**By Jarrett Skorup**  
*Vice President for Marketing  
and Communications*

# MEETING MICHIGAN'S ENERGY NEEDS

requires a switch to nuclear power

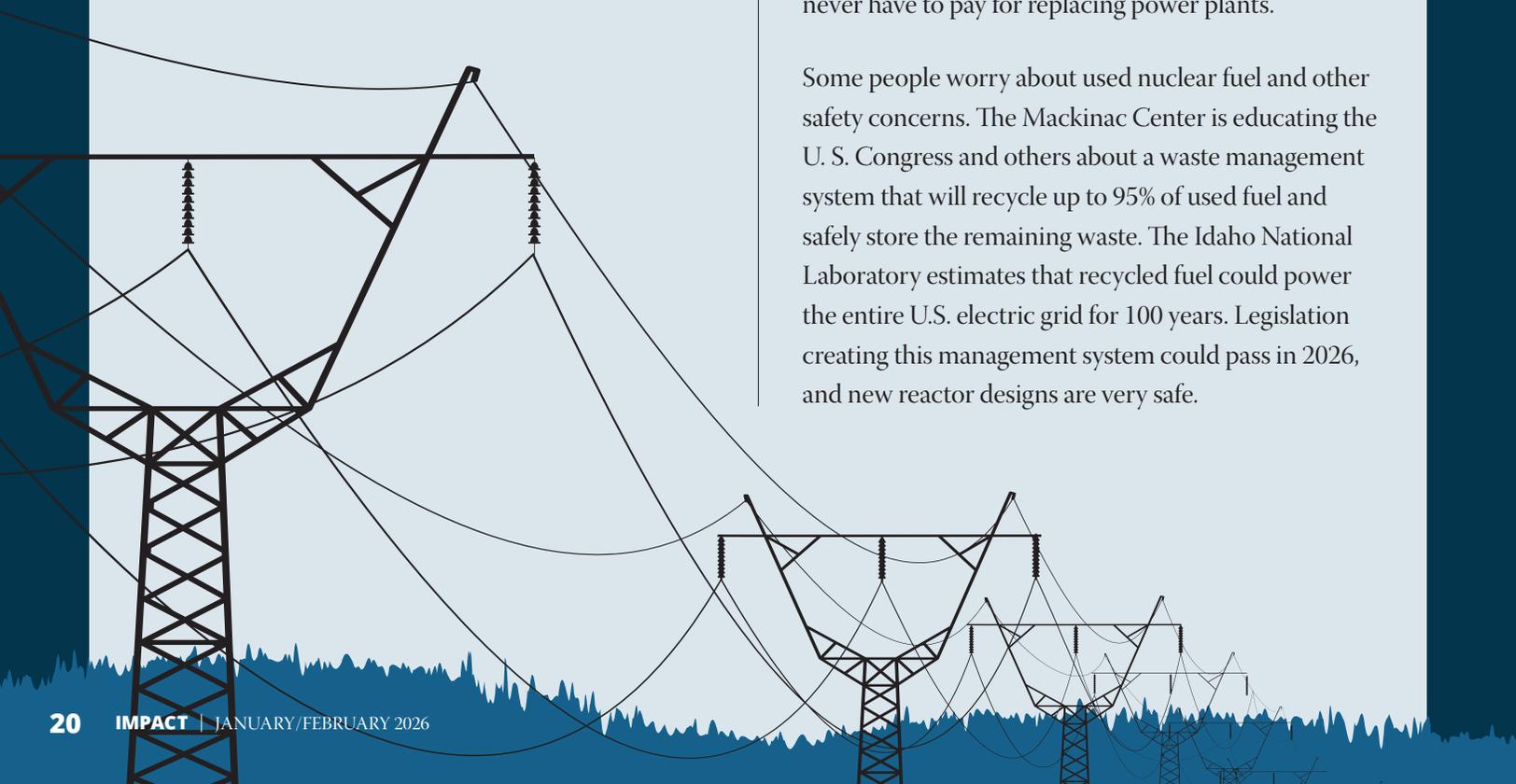
Power from solar and wind can be unavailable for days at a time. Both are often unavailable on the coldest and hottest days, when demand for power is at its peak. Solar power in Michigan generates electricity for about four hours a day, on average, and solar projects last only about 25 to 30 years. Wind power in our region operates about 27% of the time, and wind projects last about 20 to 25 years. Parts of decommissioned projects of either type end up in landfills.

Meanwhile, we are on the brink of a nuclear power renaissance. Nuclear energy generates no air

pollution and emits no carbon dioxide. It is a reliable source that only shuts down for refueling, which can be scheduled for when electric demand is at a minimum. In contrast with solar and wind projects, nuclear projects can last 60 to 80 years.

A Mackinac Center study, "Michigan's Expensive Net-Zero Gamble," shows electricity from nuclear power can cost half as much as or less than electricity from wind power, depending on the nuclear reactor's design. Nuclear does even better than solar, costing 30% to 70% as much. Your electric bill payments will fund these new projects, so even your grandchildren may never have to pay for replacing power plants.

Some people worry about used nuclear fuel and other safety concerns. The Mackinac Center is educating the U. S. Congress and others about a waste management system that will recycle up to 95% of used fuel and safely store the remaining waste. The Idaho National Laboratory estimates that recycled fuel could power the entire U.S. electric grid for 100 years. Legislation creating this management system could pass in 2026, and new reactor designs are very safe.



Michigan policymakers need to change the current plan in two major ways:

- Let existing power plants stay open until their replacements are running.
- Allow nuclear power to supplant solar and wind power as the choice for future electric generation projects. ■



**By David Stevenson**  
*Director of Energy and  
Environmental Policy*

## BY THE NUMBERS

**56¢ per kWh**

Wholesale electricity price at 8 a.m. on Jan. 27—vs. a typical 4¢—as tight supply drove costs higher

**4 Hours per Day**

Average amount of electricity generated by solar panels in Michigan each day, leaving long gaps needing to be backed up by batteries or other fuels

**\$123 Million**

Lost Consumers Energy revenue that could have lowered electric bills, due to early closure of the J.H. Campbell plant (2025–2026)



# Open Governor's Records for a More Accountable Michigan



The Mackinac Center's 2026 policy recommendations start right at the top, with a call to add the governor and lawmakers to Michigan's Freedom of Information Act. We're also fighting against a misguided and constitutionally unsound effort to overturn America's Electoral College.

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act gives citizens and watchdogs a tool to discover what their

government is up to. But the state Legislature and the governor's office are still exempt from the law. Michigan is one of only two states with this broad exemption, which limits the public's ability to hold top officials accountable.

Our 2026 recommendations will help Michiganders better understand how their government operates and how politicians spend their money. Economic

development deals — especially taxpayer-funded business subsidies — should be fully open to public scrutiny. Taxpayers have the right to know where their money is going and whether public officials keep their lofty promises about these corporate handouts.

The Mackinac Center also opposes a major national effort to undermine the constitutional order in presidential elections. The Center recommends lawmakers avoid joining the coalition of states that wish to eliminate the Electoral College. This election safeguard ensures that voters in all states have their voices heard in national elections. As the United States of America enters its 250th year, we must stop this effort to replace the longstanding norms of our republic with a legally suspect interstate compact that would throw national elections to the largest states and those with the loosest election laws.

These recommendations are necessary reforms to make Michigan's government more open, responsive and accountable. There seems to be an increasing number of controversies and scandals in local and state governments. Requiring officials to make more records public would act as a critical deterrent to those who would abuse taxpayer resources. The Mackinac Center will continue to champion policies that give the public more access to the workings of government. ■



**By Michael Van Beek**  
*Director of Research*

# ONLINE RESOURCES



## **MichCapCon.com**

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



## **WorkersForOpportunity.org**

Advancing the liberty of employees across the country and protecting First Amendment rights.



## **Mackinac.org/MCLF**

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



## **OpportunityMichigan.org**

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



## **FrankBeckmannCenterForJournalism.com**

Keeping citizens informed with news and analysis that expose government overreach and abuse.



## **MichiganVotes.org**

Track every bill, amendment and roll call vote in the Michigan Legislature from 2001 to today.



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# SMART ON CRIME

## FOR A SAFER MICHIGAN IN 2026



Photos by Adobe Stock

Michigan lawmakers shouldn't be soft on crime. They should be smart on crime. Criminal justice policy should be judged on three core criteria. Does it improve public safety? Does it reduce costs for taxpayers? Does it increase opportunities for former offenders to become productive, self-sufficient members of society?

Lawmakers must ensure proper funding for the courts, prisons and police, as well as the right training and standards for those who protect the public. At the

same time, lawmakers should be fiscally responsible, which means lowering the costs of law enforcement and prisons.

The most important contributor to long-term cost savings is successfully reintegrating prisoners into the workforce, a critical component of reducing crime. Lawmakers should give priority to policies that promote meaningful employment for ex-offenders.

Michigan should join other states in eliminating civil

# POLICIES



**“The most important contributor to long-term cost savings is successfully reintegrating prisoners into the workforce.”**

asset forfeiture, so that governments may retain assets they have seized from individuals only after securing a judgment in the criminal court system. Under current law, police can seize property suspected of being connected to criminal activity. The government can maintain ownership of it even if the owner is never convicted of a crime.

While recent reforms have curbed some abuses, existing protections remain insufficient. Civil forfeiture entices law enforcement agencies to supplement their budgets through seizures, and it has harmed individuals who were never found guilty of wrongdoing.

The Mackinac Center strongly supports expanding education and workforce training programs within Michigan’s prison system. Our research finds that incarcerated individuals who participate in educational and job-training programs are much less likely to reoffend, are more likely to find employment after release, and earn higher wages than those who do

not. Workforce training programs offer the highest return on investment for state spending, while college-level education provides the highest returns for offenders.

Michigan should expand access to education and training opportunities in prisons. It also should better match adult basic education and GED programs with postsecondary options.

Inmates should be able to reduce their time in prison by participating in and completing programs shown to reduce recidivism.

These proposals reflect the Mackinac Center’s vision for a criminal justice system that prioritizes safety, accountability, and rehabilitation while more effectively using tax dollars. ■



**By Jarrett Skorup**  
*Vice President for Marketing and Communications*

# CapCon's Most-Read: Top 10 Stories of 2025

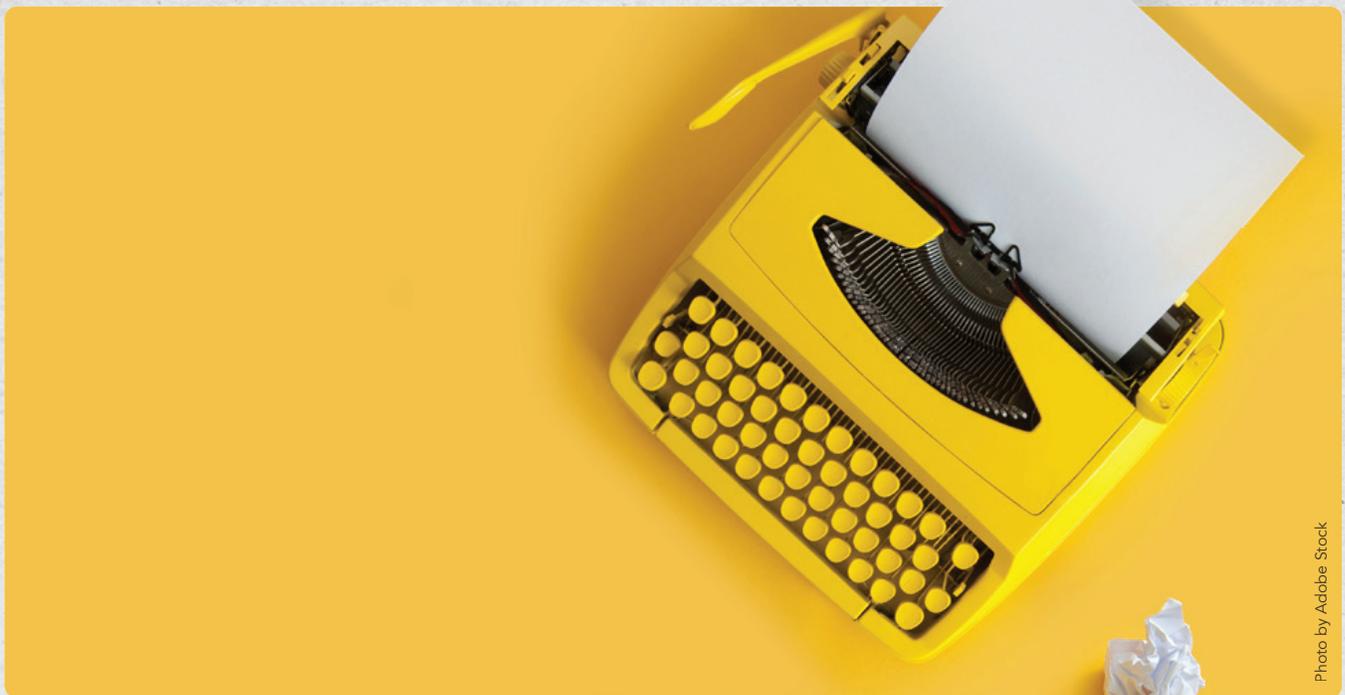


Photo by Adobe Stock

From Lansing to your hometown, Michigan Capitol Confidential uncovers what government leaders accomplish — or fail to accomplish — and how their decisions affect the lives and wallets of Michigan residents.

We published 260 stories in 2025, but readers told us with their choices which issues they thought were most important. Here are 10 articles that received the most views.

## 1. Michigan offered \$6 billion; company said 'no.'

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation gave Genesee County \$259 million to prepare a site for a company, in a proposed deal that would have been among the largest corporate welfare packages ever. But the company declined.

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## 2, 4, 6, 10. Food stamps and Medicaid subject to fraud.

CapCon's second-, fourth-, sixth- and tenth-most-read stories revealed widespread problems in how the state administers benefit programs:

- A state worker was fired after reporting food benefits stolen from taxpayers (2nd).
- The food stamp and Medicaid programs are vulnerable to theft (4th).
- Botched handling of Medicaid, Medicare, and food stamp benefits led to a \$415 million bill from the federal government (6th).
- Oversight failures caused a 387% increase in food stamp fraud from 2023 to 2024 (10th).

## 3. Grosse Pointe trustee threatened at school board meeting.

During the public comment time of a Grosse Pointe school board meeting, a local activist told a trustee, "It's lucky for you, I'm no Luigi (Mangioni)." Mangioni has been charged with first-degree murder in the shooting of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson in New York City in December 2024.

## 5. One-party control of the Legislature brought sweeping changes.

A Democratic trifecta controlled the Michigan Legislature and governor's office in 2023 and 2024. As 2025 started, CapCon examined the consequences.

## 7. Law allows DNR to enter private property without a warrant.

Current law allows the Department of Natural Resources to enter private land without a warrant. CapCon reported on pending legislation to curb this practice.

## 8. Electric vehicle makers take nearly \$1 million in subsidies, close shop.

State officials gave two EV makers \$900,000 in taxpayer-provided subsidies. The companies decided, after creating only 66 jobs, to lay off employees and move to North Carolina.

## 9. Attorney General Dana Nessel sues the oil industry while staffers drive gas-powered vehicles.

Nessel announced plans in 2024 to sue oil and petroleum companies, citing damage to the environment when Michiganders fill up their vehicles. Her staff, meanwhile, used 77 vehicles, most of which were gas-powered, according to the 2025 state fleet plan obtained by CapCon. ■



### By Jamie Hope

*Assistant Managing Editor of  
Michigan Capitol Confidential*

## Why We Give: Stories From Our Partners in Liberty

“I could plant myself on the front steps of the Michigan Capitol every day for the rest of my life and still never have the influence and impact that the Mackinac Center does.”

A longtime supporter shared this with me last summer, and it captures why people invest in our work — and the different ways they do it.

Our donors come from many backgrounds, but they share a devotion to liberty and a determination to preserve it. In my work on the advancement team, I hear their stories. While donors unite around our mission, each one partners with us in a unique way.

For some, it's about amplification. They know individual voices reach only so far. Strategic gifts to targeted projects let us take their concerns to policymakers and courtrooms with the force of sustained advocacy. These investments drive landmark litigation, investigative journalism that changes laws, and research that reframes debates.

For others, it's about sustainability. One monthly donor told me that while big projects are exciting, the daily work makes them possible. Consistent giving keeps researchers researching, lawyers litigating and reporters investigating. Steady support helps us plan for the long term and stay engaged when others move on.

For still others, it's about legacy. Legacy Society members include the Mackinac Center in their estate plans, representing deep trust in our mission and its future importance. They believe the freedom they've enjoyed should endure for generations.

There is no single profile of a Mackinac Center donor, and that's a strength. Liberty belongs to everyone. However you choose to give, you amplify your voice, extend your influence and help turn freedom from an ideal into reality.

Thank you for trusting us with this responsibility — and for investing in tomorrow. ■



**By Hailey Wieland**  
*Donor Relations Manager*