SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2026

IMPACT



MACKINAC CHALLENGES GOVERNMENT SECRECY OVER FLOCK CAMERAS

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FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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MACKINAC IN THE MEDIA

RealClear Politics

The Chicago Bears Are Playing America's Favorite Game—Eating Taxpayers

"Whether it's a multinational corporation or a sports franchise worth billions of dollars, these special interests shouldn't get a cent of taxpayer money."

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

MICHIGAN NEWS SOURCE
real. honest. news.

Michigan College Student Takes County to Court Over Flock Camera Records

"When government uses surveillance technology, the public has a right to audit how it is being used."

Steve Delie, Senior Attorney

The Detroit News

What Prince Harry and Meghan Markle can teach Michigan about school choice

"Parents, even royal parents, want to send their children to the best school possible. Let's give Michigan parents the ability to do it."

Michael J. Reitz, Executive Vice President

Washington Examiner

Socialists treat freedom as the obstacle. A thousand studies prove it's the solution

"Socialists and progressives seek better healthcare, education, housing, and environmental protection. We share these goals. But the evidence suggests the best way to achieve these aims is to use markets, not mandates; cooperation, not coercion."

Michael D. LaFaive, Senior Director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative and Matthew Mitchell, Senior Fellow with the Fraser Institute of Canada

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Michigan can't afford to keep qualified workers on the sidelines

"No person or employer should be forced to hire someone with a criminal background, and these workers are subject to background checks and other reviews. But at the same time, the state shouldn't make it illegal to give a person a chance."

Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications, and Ken Nixon, Director of Outreach and Community Partnerships with Safe & Just Michigan

DAILY CALLER

Michigan Tests Pay-Per-Mile System As EVs Cut Into Gas Tax Revenue

"Some people within the road lobby have wanted it to be an additional revenue flow rather than a replacement. But it's not a user fee if it's just an extra charge, and it would not improve efficiency and fairness if it's just another way to collect revenue."

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy



Photo by MCPP

LETTER FROM THE **EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**

Who will carry freedom forward?

I wish every Mackinac Center donor could spend time with the college interns we bring to the organization every summer.

We still do it the old-school way: They come to the office every day. We expect them to dress and act professionally. We give them meaningful, challenging work and train them in the issues the Mackinac Center works on.

Hundreds of interns have come our way over the years. The Mackinac Center is the launching point for a wide array of careers: lawyers, academics, think tank leaders, congressional staffers, recruiters, lobbyists, PR professionals, research fellows, fundraisers and teachers. Our interns have gone on to work at the White House, the FDA, Mercatus Center, Tax Foundation, Amazon, Hillsdale College and the U.S. Senate, not to mention multiple positions here at Mackinac.

This summer's 12 interns came to Mackinac from nine colleges: Michigan State, Northern Michigan, Hillsdale, Wheaton, Northwood, Saginaw Valley State, Cornerstone, Grove City College and Calvin University.

As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, many Mackinac supporters remember the bicentennial celebration in 1976. But our interns are in the generation that will celebrate the tricentennial in 2076.

> **“If we want young people to carry freedom forward, we need to give them responsibility now.”**

So, I asked them two questions: What makes you optimistic about America? And what makes you concerned?

I was struck by their answers.

They have confidence in America’s ability to endure. Cate Welch, our fiscal policy intern from Wheaton College, acknowledged that it is easy to get caught up in predictions that America won’t last another 250 years. History tells her otherwise.

“We are a gritty, proud and willing nation,” she said, “and I am very confident that those principles will continue to guide us through my generation and the generations to come.”

Natalie Hansen called America’s ability to “debate, change, and improve” one of our greatest strengths. Charlie Van Beek pointed to our culture of innovation: “This is not a place that is comfortable with just ‘getting by.’” Each generation, he said, is encouraged to improve on what it inherited. Jack Belcher said Americans still believe the fundamentals: “America was built around values of tolerance, liberty and free markets, and those values remain in our citizens today.”

But these young people aren’t naive about the challenges.

Several identified polarization as a major concern. Others worry about cynicism, disengagement and declining civic knowledge. Natalie wonders what would happen if an entire generation decided that keeping America strong and preserving its founding ideals “is someone else’s responsibility.”

That brings me back to our internship program.

If we want young people to carry freedom forward, we need to give them responsibility now. Give them meaningful work. Invest in them. Train them in the founding principles that make America exceptional.

Our interns tell us they value those things. Intern Dani Pohl said she appreciates working where she can “take ownership and have a real impact.” Madalyn Scott was grateful for Mackinac staff who took time to offer advice and invest in her growth.

Your support of the Mackinac Center helps us do all this.

There is plenty to worry about as America enters its next 250 years. But after spending a summer with these young people, I share Jack Belcher’s assessment:

“The future remains bright.” ■



By Michael J. Reitz

Executive Vice President

Michigan Students Deserve Better:

MORE SPENDING WON'T REVERSE FALLING SCORES

Summer is over, and the kids are back in school. What will they learn this year? If state test scores released in September are any indication, not enough. Most Michigan students again failed to demonstrate proficiency. The status quo in public schools is not acceptable; Michigan's future requires giving schools strong incentives to improve.

The latest results from the annual Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress are sobering. Each grade level tested — third through seventh — did worse in English Language Arts than last year. Just two of every five students are proficient in the subject. Third graders recorded the lowest reading scores in the test's 12-year history. Math scores were flat as well.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's education legacy is disappointing. Student performance has not improved during her term, even though taxpayers devote more money to public schools than ever before. The COVID-19 pandemic is no excuse. All states went through it, but Michigan trails most states in achievement growth since the lockdowns.

It's true public schools can only do so much. Student attendance is down. Kids spend too much time on devices rather than on healthy habits like socializing, reading, playing, creating, and solving problems. Students from low-income households, as always, struggle the most. But every state has these problems, and most still outperform Michigan.

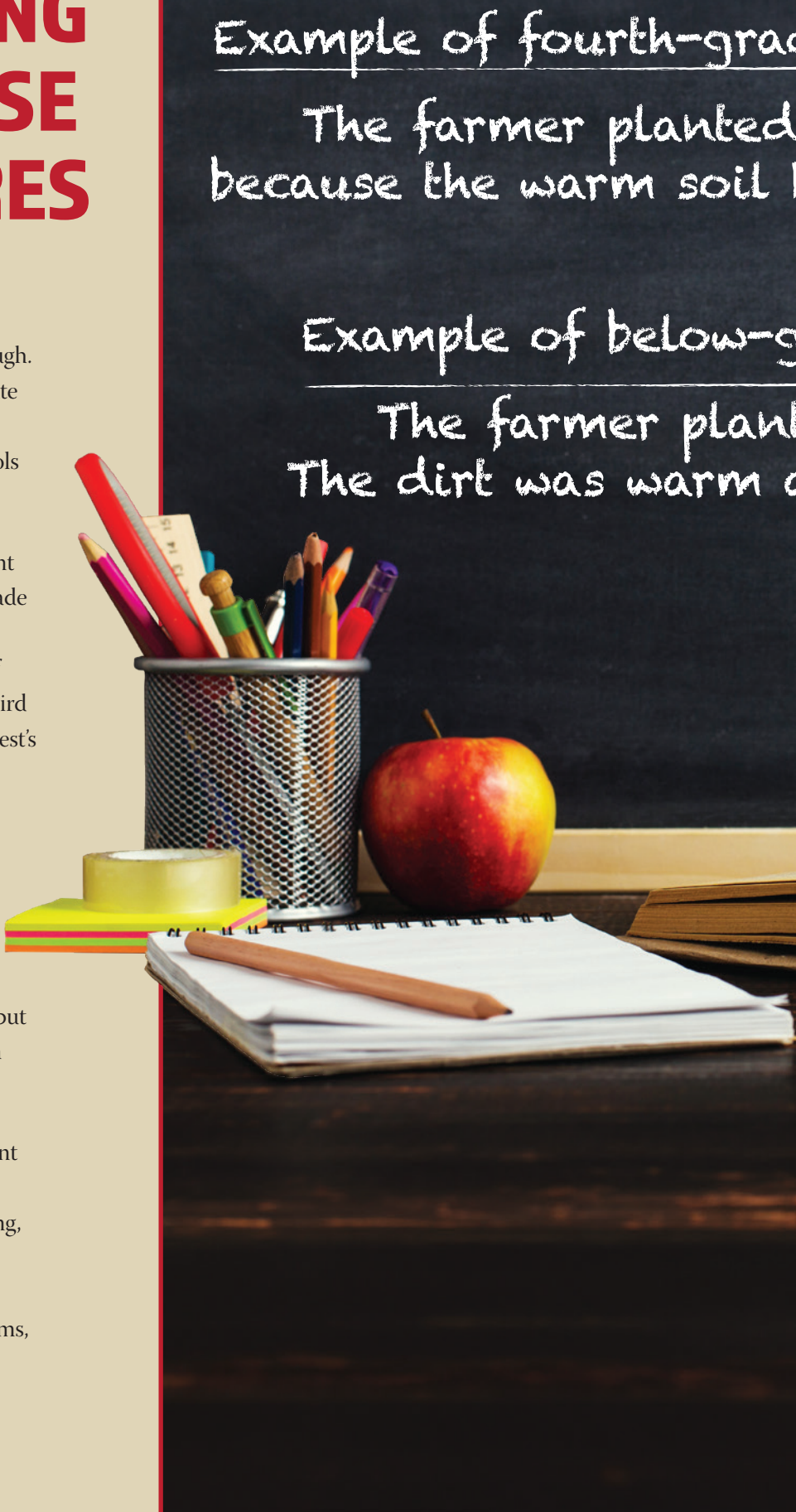
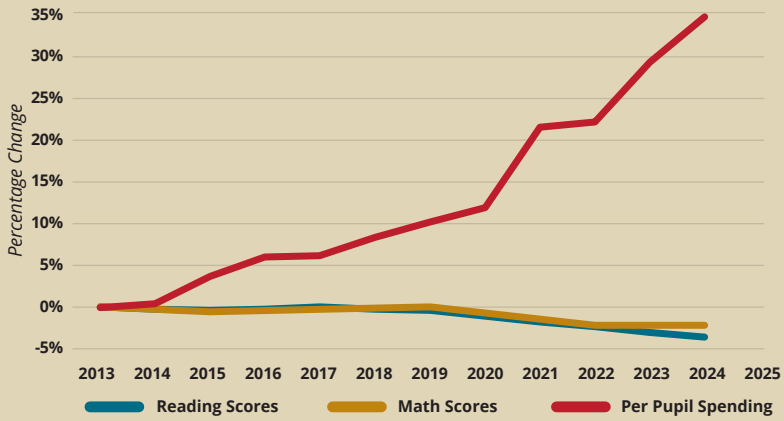




Photo by Adobe Stock

Michigan K-12 Spending (Adjusted for Inflation) and Student Achievement



Lawmakers boost spending on schools each year, funding new programs but demanding little accountability for performance. The state rarely intervenes in school districts despite consistently poor academic results. Michigan has tried many reforms, but few that create meaningful incentives for schools to improve.

School performance cannot depend solely on the goodwill of teachers, state officials and local bureaucrats. Government-run schools operate as regional monopolies, mostly insulated from the competitive pressures that push private sector businesses and organizations to improve and evolve. Michigan cannot create a free market in education overnight, but policymakers can give schools stronger incentives to serve students well.

Michigan cannot afford another year of increased spending that yields the same disappointing results. The Mackinac Center will continue to make the case for reforms that put students first, expand educational options and hold schools accountable for results. We will keep this issue before policymakers and help move Michigan toward an education system that creates incentives for schools to improve. ■



By Michael Van Beek
Vice President for Research

LAWMAKERS CONTINUE TO $PEND MORE

Michigan legislators, unlike their federal counterparts, are bound by the state constitution to balance their budgets. This means they can spend no more in a year than they expect to collect in revenue, plus anything they may have saved in the past. This constitutional standard is a limit, not a recommended spending level. Lawmakers can always practice restraint, and they ought to.

The latest state budget increases state spending — which excludes federal revenue and the small bits of local and private spending in the budget — from $48.4 billion to $50.2 billion. This is a 3.8% increase. It now costs about $5,000 to run the state government for every man, woman, and child in Michigan.

This is substantially higher than what the state used to spend. Before the pandemic, the state spent $34.4 billion. Had lawmakers practiced restraint and increased the budget only by the rate of inflation, they would have saved taxpayers $6.7 billion. That's a lot of money that could have been used to catch up on debts, save for a rainy day, or be left in taxpayers' pockets.



To be fair, people have gotten some things for their lawmakers' decision to spend more. Roads are now being repaired at roughly the rate they fall apart. Schools also get more money: roughly $23,900 for every student including state, local, and federal sources.

There has been a darker side to lawmakers' increased spending, however. They have allocated $4.6 billion in pork funding over the past eight years, or a little more than $1,000 per household. It's down to $180 million in the most recently approved budget, half the amount allocated in the previous fiscal year.

Lawmakers also approved a lot of selective business subsidies. They've authorized $8.6 billion in business subsidies during Whitmer's two terms. Much of this remains unspent, though not all of it. Major deals signed during the Whitmer administration pledged $2.7 billion for 20,595 jobs, and $1.9 billion has been spent so far for just 602 jobs — a massive difference between what was expected and what has transpired.

It all means that lawmakers can do better with less. We continue to encourage them to operate at sustainable levels and increase the budget by no more than inflation plus Michigan's population growth. (The population, unfortunately, has been stuck at around 10 million people for a generation.) A little bit of restraint can pay dividends for taxpayers. ■



By James Hohman
Director of Fiscal Policy



BY THE **NUMBERS**

14%

Increase in state government spending from the state's taxes, when adjusted for inflation, over Gov. Whitmer's tenure.

$1,000

Amount spent on pork projects per household over Whitmer's tenure.

2/3rds

Proportion of the Legislature needed to approve local or private spending, such as pork projects.



Photo by MCPP

CapCon Wins Award for Exposing SNAP Fraud

Michigan Capitol Confidential won the 2026 Marketing Campaign of the Year award from the State Policy Network this August for our 30-story series exposing fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

SNAP helps poor Michiganders buy groceries at 10,000 retailers statewide, but thieves across the United States and even overseas steal benefits through card skimmers installed in gas stations, grocery stores, liquor stores and other public places. Those devices copy SNAP card data that the criminals sell online, leaving Michigan families hungry.

We found a 400% increase in skimmer fraud from 2023–24. Criminals stole benefits so frequently that Michigan mailed an average of 738 replacement Bridge Cards every day in 2024.

CapCon was the only outlet in Michigan digging into SNAP fraud, and our stories influenced Michigan lawmakers to spend $17 million to upgrade SNAP cards for 1.3 million people.

We filed hundreds of public records requests, seeking information from federal, state, and local officials as we tried to discover the severity of the problem. We staked out discount retailers like Sam's Club and Costco for hours, looking for people pushing carts piled high with energy drinks, diapers, and baby formula — highly resalable items. We read over 500 pages of police reports detailing SNAP fraud in Oakland County, and fought Wayne County, which claims that it doesn't have a single document about SNAP fraud, even though it is the state's most populated county.




Photo by MCPP

SPN

The State Policy Network award recognizes campaigns that achieve real-world results, and our work paid off.

In 2025, the state reported $7.7 million in SNAP fraud, down from $14 million in 2024. Michigan has mailed upgraded cards to most people in the program, which should reduce fraud even more.

In some cases, we found that Michigan paid SNAP benefits to people who weren't eligible. Michigan has paid more than $4 million in SNAP benefits since 2024 to people with out-of-state addresses.

Michigan is now the first state in the Midwest to upgrade its SNAP cards. Ohio and New York are copying Michigan's playbook to upgrade cards, further showing CapCon's worth.



By Scott McClallen
Michigan Capitol Confidential Reporter

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.

Scan the code to sign up for our email list.

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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

COMPETITIVE POWER, AFFORDABLE RATES

THE CASE FOR EXPANDING MICHIGAN'S ELECTRICITY CHOICE PROGRAM

Michigan is entering one of the largest electric infrastructure investment cycles in its history. Over the next two decades, DTE and Consumers Energy plan to add nearly 30 gigawatts of new generation and storage for wind, solar and natural gas capacities at an estimated cost of $39 billion. That investment could triple electricity rates for everyone. Even then, however, these new resources to generate electricity may not be built fast enough to keep up with increased electricity use.

But Michigan's Electric Customer Choice Program could help. This program has allowed qualifying customers to purchase electricity from licensed alternative electric suppliers for more than two decades.

Utilities continue to own and operate the transmission and distribution system under the program. They also offer default service (provider of last resort) and are responsible for providing reliable service. The only difference for electric choice customers is how they obtain the generation portion of their electric service. Instead of relying on utility-owned generation that ratepayers pay for, choice customers get their supply from alternative providers who privately finance their own generating capacity.

Michigan's electric choice program saves electricity customers $185 million a year while providing reliable service. It offers an average of 30% savings for commercial customers and 12% for industrial customers. State law, however, has capped participation in the program since 2008 at 10% of utility sales.

This cap ought to expand. Every megawatt financed by customers in an electric choice program represents one less megawatt that utilities will need to finance and pay for through increased electric rates. A participation rate of 20% would result in $3.5 to $4 billion lower investment by utilities in new generation, and 30% participation would result in $7 to $8 billion lower investment. Lower investment means smaller increases in electric rates.

Consumers Energy and DTE are preparing for a major investment cycle, and state officials should respond. They should expand Michigan's Electric Customer Choice Program, increase the 10% cap to allow more customers to participate, and let private funding sources finance a larger share of new construction.

With your help, the Mackinac Center is preparing a major study on energy choice and meeting with all players in the energy market to head off Michigan's looming power emergency.



Photo by Adobe Stock

What should the Michigan Legislature do?

Expand the Electric Customer Choice participation cap from 10% to 30% through immediate or phased implementation.

Require utilities to reduce their future generation needs based on the power that alternative electricity suppliers will provide.

Allow new customers and existing customers that need more power to participate in the choice program and minimize utilities' need to spend money on new generation.

Allow nuclear power, including that used by alternative electric suppliers, to count toward Michigan's "net zero" mandates.

Act before utilities and state regulators lock in the next set of investment plans.



By David T. Stevenson
Director of Energy and Environmental Policy

MACKINAC CENTER
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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This year's cohort pictured with Mackinac Center Executive Vice President Mike Reitz.
Left to right: **Mei Bowers, Mike Reitz, Emma Paddock, Olivia Michiels, Ben Wright, Brian Weber, Bryanna Vitale**
*Not pictured: **Christian Witt**

MACKINAC FREEDOM FELLOWSHIP
EMPOWERS LEADERS FOR LIBERTY

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy is proud to celebrate the continued success of its Freedom Fellowship program. The fellowship is designed to help professionals in the early-to-middle stages of their careers model and uphold the principles of freedom that define our nation.

Following a strong pilot year, the Mackinac Center hosted its second cohort this spring, welcoming seven fellows who each completed the full program and earned their certificates of completion. This year's fellowship consisted of six biweekly dinner programs where participants explored the principles of free markets and limited government while engaging in meaningful professional development.

Each session focused on a key theme, including civil discourse, principled leadership, and advancing freedom through public service. Fellows also examined network-building, the rule of law, Russell Kirk's conservative principles, and strategies for staying active in the liberty movement. Mackinac Center experts and guest speakers guided participants through each topic.

After each session, fellows shared their key conclusions from the program, which were compiled into a resource capturing both individual and collective insights. In addition to offering their reflections, fellows often expressed their appreciation, noting that they will use the lessons they learned for the rest of their careers. The fellowship provided them with an excellent opportunity to connect with peers and learn from them.

Some participants have elected to extend their experience by taking part in the fellowship's optional three-month mentorship, which pairs fellows with experienced leaders. The relationship supports their continued growth within the Mackinac Center network.

Building on this momentum, the Mackinac Center also launched a network of fellowship alumni to foster continued connection, engagement, collaboration, and idea-sharing beyond the program itself.

With two successful cohorts completed, it's clear that the Freedom Fellowship provides professional guidance, networking opportunities and intellectual nourishment for rising leaders. The Mackinac Center looks forward to expanding the program, welcoming more emerging professionals and continuing to cultivate leaders who will advance the principles of liberty for years to come.

The Mackinac Freedom Fellowship is more than a program. It is an investment in the future of the liberty movement. ■



By Cami Pendell
Vice President for Government Affairs

Mackinac Challenges GOVERNME



Photo by MCPP

NT SECRECY
Over Flock Cameras

Communities throughout Michigan and across the country are engaged in a fierce debate about the balance between privacy and security, fueled by a rise of cameras in public locations. Unfortunately, lack of government transparency has made it increasingly difficult for the public to access the information it needs to have this debate. Josh Tewolde, a university student represented by the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation, is pushing back against this lack of transparency in his lawsuit against Genesee County.

Georgia-based Flock Safety is one of several companies that offer Michigan governments automatic license plate readers. These devices are cameras that passively record every vehicle that drives by. A Flock camera will capture a car's license plate, but much more as well: its make, model, color, and even the bumper stickers that adorn it.

> **"Michiganders shouldn't have to file a lawsuit to obtain public information, and Josh Tewolde's case is a perfect example of why we need stronger transparency laws."**

The Flock system builds a "vehicle fingerprint," which allows law enforcement with access to the footage to identify the vehicle and any other vehicle that might be associated with it. Information from the database is often shared across law enforcement agencies, though purportedly only with permission from the agency that shares the information. As a practical matter, Flock data is shared between departments across the country. There are roughly 4,000 automatic license plate readers in 54 of Michigan's 83 counties.

Understandably, mass passive surveillance has engendered significant concerns from privacy advocates, including Josh. Stories of abuse are common, with the Institute for Justice tracking more than 100 incidents across the country of law enforcement abusing plate readers. Advocates for these systems, meanwhile, maintain they are an effective tool that can solve otherwise unsolvable crimes.

How should law enforcement use Flock cameras, if at all? This debate is worth having. Government resistance to releasing records under Michigan's Freedom of Information Act makes it extremely difficult for Michiganders to get access to information about how the plate readers work in their communities. Without that information, it's next to impossible to know which cameras belong to which municipality, or which officials should be held accountable for deploying them.

Consider our client's request to Genesee County. Josh requested records that would tell him more about the county's use of Flock cameras, including its internal policies, audit logs, and contract with Flock. He also asked for records relating to his own vehicle and the location of any Flock cameras under contract with the county.



Initially, the county only released its contract with Flock. After several administrative appeals, the county agreed to release the sheriff's department's policies on the surveillance systems. But it refused to produce any footage of Tewolde's vehicle, the audit logs, or the location of Flock cameras. The county relied on two FOIA exemptions to justify these denials, but neither holds water.

Genesee County argued that it didn't own Flock camera information until it accessed the data as part of an investigation. This claim is flawed, as merely collecting the data creates a public record, subject to disclosure under Michigan law. Even without the law, it's clear that the county shouldn't have made such a claim because its contract with Flock explicitly states that the data "belong to and are retained solely by [the county]."

The county's refusal to reveal the location of its Flock cameras relied on a different exemption, which is equally suspect. In its response to Josh, the county claimed that revealing the location of these cameras would interfere with law enforcement investigations by letting criminals simply avoid the cameras. But Flock locations are already tracked by several third parties, such as Deflock.org, and are visible to the naked eye. Criminals who want to avoid the cameras can already know where they are.

MACKINAC CENTER LEGAL FOUNDATION

The county's response was lacking but predictable. The Mackinac Center Legal Foundation regularly files lawsuits, whether for its own benefit or on behalf of clients, challenging governments' refusal to be transparent. Our efforts have exposed the state's failure to count COVID-19 deaths accurately during the pandemic and the salaries paid by the University of Michigan to employees of its Office of Institutional Equity. We exposed the Michigan Education Association and its health insurance affiliate for wrongfully receiving $12.6 million in pandemic funding.

Michiganders shouldn't have to file a lawsuit to obtain public information, and Josh Tewolde's case is a perfect example of why we need stronger transparency laws. Until these laws are amended, the Mackinac Center Legal Foundation will fight to ensure that the people of Michigan have access to the records they need to hold government officials accountable. ■



By Steve Delie
Senior Attorney

Michigan Voices for Freedom Video Contest 2026

WHY ARE MARKETS BETTER THAN SOCIALISM?

Michigan's Classical Liberal Speech & Video Competition

Think markets work better than socialism? Prove it!



Photo by Adobe Stock

Michigan students are invited to make the case for free markets, economic competition and individual liberty in a two-minute original speech or video.

This isn't a history test. It isn't a debate club. And you don't need to be an economics major.

We're looking for students who can take a big idea, explain it clearly, and persuade an audience that freedom works better than government control.

The Challenge

Young Americans express growing support for socialism and collectivist ideas. This contest gives you a chance to make a compelling case for the alternative.

Free markets give people the freedom to choose, create, compete, innovate and build.

Your challenge is to explain why that matters. Choose an issue, tell a story, and make an argument. Show why economic freedom produces better results for individuals and communities.

Who Can Enter?

- **Michigan High School Division.** Open to Michigan students in grades 9–12.
- **Michigan Young Adult Division.** Open to all Michigan young adults ages 18–24.

How It Works

1. **Pick Your Argument**
   Review the annual prompt and decide what you want to say.

   Your topic might involve free markets, economic freedom, entrepreneurship, innovation, individual liberty, the costs of socialism or another aspect of classical liberalism.

2. **Make Your Case**
   Create a two-minute original speech or video.
   Be clear. Be creative. Be persuasive.
   You can speak directly to the camera, deliver a traditional speech or use storytelling and visuals to make your argument.

3. **Submit Your Entry**
   Upload your completed two-minute speech or video through the online submission portal before the deadline.

4. **Finalists Are Selected**
   A panel of judges will evaluate entries based on the competition rubric and select finalists in each division.

5. **Winners Are Announced**
   Finalists and winners will be recognized, with cash prizes awarded to the top entries.

Deadline

All entries must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. on **December 31, 2026.**

To learn the rules, judging rubric, prizes, and FAQs, use the QR code. ■

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE YOUR CASE?



Photo by SPN

Let Innovation Do Its Work

"There are no solutions, only tradeoffs," the economist Thomas Sowell observed. One of our roles at the Mackinac Center is to explain the tradeoffs in complex policy questions. Public anxiety over the rise of artificial intelligence and the data centers needed to back it gives us another opportunity to fulfill that role.

The Mackinac Center has participated in multiple events this year to assess AI policy and data center expansions. In April, we featured a discussion with representatives from industry, economics, journalism, and higher education. In August, we participated in a panel at the State Policy Network annual meeting to talk about state technology policy. More than 1,500 people attended that conference, and artificial intelligence was a hot topic.

Concerns often come from people who don't believe they will benefit from artificial intelligence, are skeptical of the value of data centers, or worry about energy, water, and land usage. Our work has tried to look plainly at all these issues.

While new technologies often provoke fears about economic disruption, these concerns are often overblown. Logging was supposed to mean the end of trees; a growing population was going to mean we weren't going to be able to feed ourselves; and "peak oil" was predicted decades ago.

It is too early to tell how significant artificial intelligence will be. American ingenuity, however, typically overcomes big problems — when the



Photo by Adobe Stock

> **"The government should not try to punish or help any industry, including information technology."**

government lets it. So how should policymakers and citizens think about potential technology regulation?

Existing regulations can address many of the concerns people bring up. Protections are on the books for water, energy, and land. Current rules about fraud and child safety also already exist. Authorities should pursue scammers and other bad actors who use technology to turbocharge their activities. Any new regulations need to make sense, not respond to groundless fears.

The government should not try to punish or help any industry, including information technology. This means no special tax breaks or subsidies, but also no extra rules or bans enacted for arbitrary reasons. Environmental and zoning rules, for instance, should apply across the board to companies and industries.

And a state hoping to grow and become once again a national leader cannot just say "no." Citizens should be open and optimistic about new industries; we never could have built the Michigan we love today without them. ■



By Jarrett Skorup
Vice President for Marketing and Communications



TEAMING UP TO EMPOWER MICHIGAN'S HOME HEALTH WORKERS



Photos by MCPP

"Caring for my son isn't my job, it's my life," Tammy Martin, a Michigan caregiver, once said. "The state can't just pretend I'm a government employee to justify handing me over to a union who doesn't have any power to affect my rights."

She was describing something Michigan has tried before. From 2005 to 2013, the state helped the SEIU pull union dues straight out of the Medicaid checks of home caregivers, most of them family members paid to look after a parent, spouse or child with a disability. The scheme collected more than $34 million before a legislative repeal and a decisive voter rejection ended it, and more than 44,000 caregivers left the union the moment they were free to do so. Last year, the state opened the same door again, reclassifying caregivers as public employees. When it came to a vote, just 13% of everyone eligible voted to unionize. The other 87%, 27,795 people, now answer to a union they never asked for.

A small fraction of eligible workers decided this outcome for everyone else, and most caregivers still don't know what it means for them. Closing that information gap is central to the Mackinac Center's work. We also partner with allies who share that goal, including the Freedom Foundation. On a rainy Saturday in September, Nicole Irrer and I were proud to join their canvassing effort in Grand Rapids, my hometown. Their team coached us on how to have real conversations at the door, and then we were off.

The Freedom Foundation's full effort spanned 16 days, as 37 canvassers knocked on 7,248 doors across Lansing, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Detroit. Nearly every caregiver reached had already heard from the SEIU. Almost none of them could explain, in their own words, what they were being asked to sign, what it would cost them, or whether any of it was even optional. Everyone was grateful for the outreach — and Nicole and I were proud to be a part of it.

"The Freedom Foundation's full effort spanned 16 days, as 37 canvassers knocked 7,248 doors across Lansing, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, and Detroit."

Standing in someone's doorway, in the middle of their own life, has a way of putting a fight like this in perspective. These are not abstractions in a policy brief. They are people trying to figure out whether they can trust what they've been told about their own paycheck. Talking with them face to face reminded us why this work matters, and it is why we are so grateful that you keep us in this fight.

None of this happens without you. Thank you for standing alongside Michigan's home health workers. ■



By Elizabeth Posthumus
Senior Director of Donor Communications

STAFF *Feats* OF SUMMER

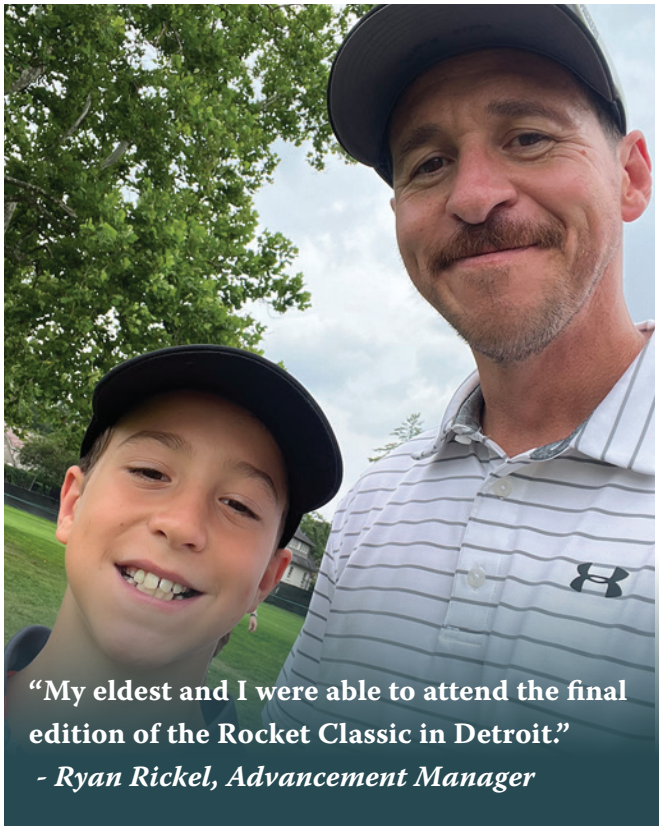
Summer at the Mackinac Center looked a little different for everyone. Some staff members explored Michigan's natural wonders, traveled the Midwest, celebrated major family milestones or cheered from the sidelines of a first baseball game. Others attended memorable sporting events or tackled ambitious projects closer to home. We asked a few team members to share a favorite summer feat, achievement or adventure from the season. Here's what they had to say.



"Coached my son in his first baseball game and was named the volunteer of the year for our Little League. My son threw out the first pitch for the league (which I caught)."
- Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications



"I chainsawed a new path at the property, with a Stihl 391!"
- Chris Smith, Database Manager



"My eldest and I were able to attend the final edition of the Rocket Classic in Detroit."
- Ryan Rickel, Advancement Manager



"We were on Traverse Bay for July 4 and celebrated, not only the 250th anniversary of the country, but also the 100th anniversary of the National Cherry Festival and my son's 14th birthday, which legitimately happened on the 4th."
- Michael D. LaFaive, Senior Director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative



"I climbed up the dune at the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in 45 minutes."
- Dave Stevenson, Director of Energy and Environmental Policy



"We celebrated the family's first wedding — for the eldest of our children."
- Jim Walker, Vice President for Advancement



"I wrote the 10th book in my 'Unremembered Realms' series and traveled all over Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio to promote it! I love spending time on the road and chatting with so many good American people."
- Mick McArt, Graphic Designer & Creative Projects Manager



A New Vision FOR BELLE ISLE

In his novel of ideas "Belle Isle: Detroit's Game Changer," Mackinac Center Board Chairman Rod Lockwood envisions the transformation of Detroit's 982-acre island park into a self-governing American free city and special economic zone. Set 29 years in the future, the book tells the story of a Belle Isle Free City with low taxation, principled organization, a capped population, free trade, an Old-World aesthetic, and sound rules for design and architecture.

Outside of his novel, Lockwood makes the case for the proposal in public appearances. He was interviewed on WJR's "The Great Voice" in April and presented the idea in September at a Council for Economic Growth event titled "Freedom Cities: Could Belle Isle Become an Economic Empowerment Zone?" The event invited business and civic leaders to consider whether a different regulatory approach could encourage investment, entrepreneurship and housing in Detroit.

Under the plan described, investors would pay Detroit $1 billion for development rights, privately finance the project and establish a city with its own tax code, governance and public services. The concept envisions as many as 50,000 residents, with workers and businesses also drawing on the surrounding city.

Whether the idea can move from an imaginative blueprint to a workable policy will depend on its legal feasibility, the willingness of elected officials to pursue it and the public's response to the trade-offs involved. For now, Lockwood is making the case that Belle Isle could offer Detroit an opportunity to test a fundamentally different model of urban growth.

This excerpt from Lockwood's novel shows one portion of that revival, detailing the free city's specific benefits to greater Detroit:

Joe reflected, "Before I left, I recall the downtown area of Detroit had made quite a turnaround, but the other areas seemed to have been left behind. But now the way you describe it, there is a coalescence that solves the problem of population density, or I guess lack of it. But doesn't the core of Detroit make it happen?"

"Absolutely. We need Detroit. Detroit's the cultural anchor for the area, including Belle Isle. It's one of the few cities on the continent that has a major league team in every sport — baseball, football, basketball, and hockey. Plus a world-class art museum, opera house, symphony, and theaters.

"But Detroit needs Belle Isle too. First of all, our residents comprise a major donor base to these institutions. But more importantly Belle Isle's reputation, which is now worldwide, has attracted tremendous investment to the area. High-tech manufacturing has added thousands of jobs on the Detroit side of the river. There are businesses headquartered on Belle Isle, but they manufacture in Detroit...

"Also, Detroiters have largely built Belle Isle. We've created thousands upon thousands of new jobs, particularly for the construction industry, as we built the new hotels, restaurants, schools, churches, homes, the monorail — you name it. Everything from scratch. During the construction heyday, our national tree was the construction crane! And now we have all kinds of permanent jobs, many of which are filled by Detroiters." ■

MACKINAC CENTER
FOR PUBLIC POLICY

140 West Main Street, P.O. Box 568
Midland, Michigan 48640

Make Giving Fun

Mackinac Center Vice President for Advancement Jim Walker has often said that giving can bring great joy. Our senior director of donor communications, Elizabeth Posthumus, believes we should be grateful for what we inherit and donate to people who can help light the way for the next generation.

I agree with both points, but when I give, I have to admit there's an entertainment factor, too. I like to tell my friends. I like to joke that the mission trip my church held, the trees planted in my name in the rain forest, or the most recent study the Mackinac Center published, all happened just a little bit because of me.

I suppose that sentiment runs in the family. My older brother, who serves on the Mackinac Center's Board of Scholars, donated $25 in July 2022. His first question was whether we would name the boardroom after him. That wasn't quite in the building plan, so I did the next best thing. I put a piece of paper outside my cubicle and named it "The Dr. Professor Daniel J. Smith Cubicle of Free Enterprise." Not even a day later, one of his friends outbid him, and I found myself selling my cubicle naming rights for $25 a month, a small tradition I keep up because it adds a bit of fun to giving. Each donation is meaningful and helps move our mission forward, and along the way, the donor gets naming rights over a cubicle at the Mackinac Center.

All jokes aside, that's what financial partnership is about. Whether a gift funds a cubicle nameplate or a policy study that inspires a change in law, it moves real work forward. And that work reaches communities, courts, and legislatures across Michigan and beyond.

So if you decide to give to the Mackinac Center, know that your gift can bring you real joy. Know that it helps light the way for the next generation. And know that you're always welcome to tell your friends about it and brag a little if you'd like. Oh, and if you'd like to sponsor my cubicle, I'd be glad to have you.

Thank you for being a part of this work, however you choose to tell the story. ■



By Chris Smith
Database Manager

