

MAY/JUNE 2024

IMPACT

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**MACKINAC
IN THE
MEDIA**

CRAIN'S GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS

Rerun on film subsidies remains ineffective, expensive

“Research by state governments, academics and economists around the nation demonstrates that subsidizing Hollywood is ineffective at helping the economy or state treasury.”

Michael LaFaive, Senior Director of Fiscal Policy

The Detroit News

Examine families when deciding how to grow Michigan's population

“The takeaway is simple: States that experience job growth will see population growth as well. Perhaps policymakers are overthinking the problem. Instead, they should examine how families actually make decisions about where to live and work.”

Michael Reitz, Executive Vice President

CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Improve Michigan's business subsidy transparency and accountability

“While administrators compile huge reports on the state's economic development programs, they are still unable to answer basic questions about them. It shouldn't be difficult to tell residents how much of their money went to businesses and how many jobs that spending created. Yet here we are.”

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

Newsweek

Stop the Hollywood Handouts

“For years, movie producers have played states against each other and reaped billions in taxpayer money. The smart strategy for state lawmakers is to stop playing.”

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

USA TODAY

From Taylor Swift concerts to Hollywood film shoots, economic claims deserve skepticism

“Thankfully, no one is really hurt when the news media touts misleading studies about Taylor Swift concerts and tractor pulls at the state fair. But people are most certainly hurt when ‘economic multipliers’ are used to justify wasteful taxpayer subsidies – a phenomenon that happens almost daily.”

Jarrett Skorup, Vice President for Marketing and Communications, and James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

The Detroit News

Minimum wage mandates are bad for the economy

“There is so much evidence to demonstrate the harm such mandates do, it's a wonder they are championed at all. Minimum wage mandates are bad for people and the economy whether they appear on a ballot or are adopted by Lansing lawmakers.”

Michael LaFaive, Senior Director of Fiscal Policy, and Rebekah Paxton, Director of Research and State Coalitions at the Employment Policies Institute



LETTER FROM
THE EXECUTIVE
VICE PRESIDENT

OUR FINEST HOUR

The movie “Apollo 13” contains one of my favorite scenes.

The goal is to land on the moon. While in flight, mission commander James Lovell, played by Tom Hanks, informs mission control in Houston that a fire in the oxygen tank has disabled the spacecraft. Safe return of the crew is doubtful.

Back at mission control, the NASA director huddles with a PR advisor. “It could be the worst disaster NASA has ever experienced,” the director says.

Flight Director Gene Kranz, played by Ed Harris, overhears his boss’s prediction. “With all due respect, sir,” he says, “I believe this is going to be our finest hour.”

And it was.

The Mackinac Center has written down a handful of values that we use to shape our workplace culture. One of the values is optimism. Here’s how we describe it: “We think better times are ahead of us and that we can make Michigan a better place to live. We face the future with optimism and good cheer.”

Optimism is a choice, not a byproduct. Optimism is most necessary when little exists to justify it.

Photo by Adobe Stock

“We think better times are ahead of us and that we can make Michigan a better place to live. We face the future with optimism and good cheer.”

The Mackinac Center team grounds its optimism in several assumptions: Each person has dignity and should be free to maximize his or her potential. Government exists to protect individual liberty. The free-market recommendations we offer can be — should be — enacted. Not only enacted, but celebrated, because the ideas will secure opportunity and prosperity. We are focused on Michigan policy because we have chosen Michigan as our home. We won't save America without fixing Michigan.

We choose to see economic developments, political trends and new technology through an optimistic lens.

I've wondered whether optimism affects public policy. Do optimistic people embrace different policies than pessimists do? A few years ago, the technology analyst Dan Wang wrote an essay arguing that optimism drives innovation. Economists, he said, should consider optimism as human capital. Long-term investment, risk tolerance, exploration: They all require optimism.

Every physical object around us, says my friend John Tillman, exists because someone had a vision and took risks to make it or move it. If that's true for the economy, the insight can be extended to groups of people as well.

A pessimistic organization huddles in upon itself, defensive and fearful. It exaggerates risks and overcompensates for them. It sees the world through a scarcity mindset and assumes that someone else's gain comes at a cost. The pessimist is an expert on the problem but rarely discusses solutions.

You can spot the optimistic organization because it presumes that others act with good intent. Its people are generous with time and resources. The optimist is not blind to uncertainty or risk, but nevertheless works hard because the future is worth shaping. Optimists prefer persuasion over domination. They attract followers and collaborate with allies.

Our state faces immense challenges right now. You don't need me to detail those challenges. We are proud to work with friends like you to secure a brighter future for Michigan. ■



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

By Michael J. Reitz

Executive Vice President



Schools Ignored Congressional Intent for COVID Aid

You may not have noticed, but over the last few years public schools have scaled back their normal pleadings for more taxpayer money. That's probably because school districts are flush with cash, thanks to the massive amounts of financial aid they received from the federal government during the COVID-19 pandemic.

School districts in Michigan received about \$6 billion in extra funding in 2020 and 2021. Federal officials intended for schools to use this money immediately to combat learning losses caused by closing classrooms and forcing students into remote learning. But schools

didn't do that, and new Mackinac Center research exposes all the details.

Cassidy Syftestad Klutts, a doctoral fellow at the University of Arkansas, conducted the research. She analyzed state financial reports that show how districts spend taxpayer money. This information is reported directly by school districts themselves.

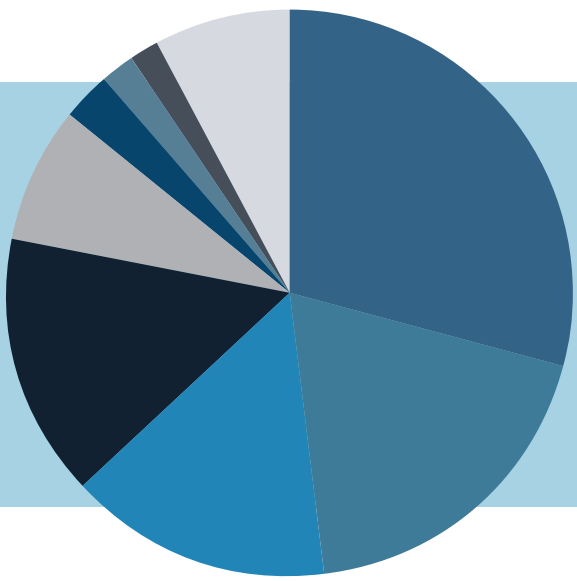
Klutts found that districts are not nearly as nimble as federal government officials might believe. They spent only 1% of the extra funding they received in the first year of the pandemic. They didn't do much better in the second year, 2021-22, spending another 15%. More than half was still left to spend after the third year. It appears that school districts are not good at quickly launching new programs and services, even if they might be critically important for student learning.

Instead, school districts mostly spent this extra money on hiring more employees and giving existing employees pay raises. It's unlikely that giving current employees pay raises helped alleviate the learning losses districts created by closing schools for prolonged periods.

Klutts also puts this extra funding into its proper context. Six billion dollars is a lot of money, but school districts in Michigan already receive far more. In the three years since the pandemic began, districts spent \$86 billion. Only 3% of that was from federal COVID relief funds. The emergency funds are a drop in the bucket.



Photo by Adobe Stock



Michigan Public Schools' COVID Spending Breakdown

- 31% Salary
- 20% Purchased Services
- 16% Benefits
- 16% Supplies
- 8% Capital Outlay
- 3% Copyright Fees, Software License, Agreements
- 2% Transfers
- 2% Repairs/Maintenance
- 2% Other

There are important lessons here for policymakers. During an emergency, they shouldn't assume that dropping a ton of cash on government programs will help them deal with the emergency. Michigan's school districts did very little with their extra funds during the pandemic period. They reserved most of the money for after the pandemic and used a majority of the extra funds to support their existing operating model, not to expand or improve services for children. Money is not the answer to everything. Even in an emergency. ■



By Michael Van Beek
Director of Research

BY THE NUMBERS



\$6 Billion

Total amount of federal COVID-19 aid given to Michigan schools

\$51,193

How much Flint Community Schools received in COVID-19 funds per student

\$86 Billion

What Michigan public schools spent from 2020-2022 (including COVID-19 funds)





Photo by MCPP

For nearly 15 years, Michigan Capitol Confidential has kept an eye on Lansing — and Detroit, Flint, Cheboygan, Marquette and many other places across Michigan. It offers millions of readers thousands of articles about hundreds of cities in one state.

The work will continue and be turbocharged as Scott McClallen joins the team. Scott joins CapCon

this month as a reporter, after five years at the news organization, The Center Square.

“I’m excited to start working at such a great company,” he says. “With the Mackinac Center’s experts, editors, and unique skill set, we will break news and shine a light on topics that legacy media can’t or won’t report.”

Beyond the Spin: CapCon's Skeptical Lens on Michigan's Issues

Welcoming Scott McClallen to Michigan Capitol Confidential

The goal of CapCon is to be a news service focused on the issues and angles traditional media doesn't cover. It brings in a free-market perspective, skeptical of government involvement and its purported solutions.

All great journalists are skeptical. Unfortunately, much of what news media produces isn't skeptical of government programs or results.

Many articles in Michigan have been written about school budgets. Some have even noted spending is up. But very few, if any, articles have noted that Michigan's education spending is the highest it has ever been, while most measures of student success are poor. CapCon does that story.

As Michigan lawmakers work on reinstating a film subsidy program, many articles quote its proponents, and some speculate on the stars who might come if taxpayers pick up part of the tab for their films. CapCon focuses on what economic experts say about film subsidy programs (they're against them) and the results from the last time taxpayers spent \$500 million on films (a host of flops, bankruptcies and temporary jobs).

Hundreds of times per year, state agencies send out press releases touting economic development deals – by which they mean big businesses getting direct subsidies through the tax code. Some lawmakers even campaign against “corporate power” – which hasn't stopped them from approving \$4 billion in select favors. Only CapCon has investigated and followed up, again and again and again, to show that the promised jobs rarely get created. CapCon doesn't do press release reporting, and we do not assume that what the government says is true.

Government officials and those receiving the money will always advocate for more money. A good, skeptical media should measure the results. That's what CapCon does. ■



By Jarrett Skorup

*Vice President for Marketing
and Communications*



Louisiana State Capitol Building Photos by Adobe Stock



GOOD POLICY IS CONTAGIOUS

Workers for Opportunity's success in the South shows how quickly good policy can spread



Alabama State Capitol Building Photo by Adobe Stock



Steve Delie (left) testifies in front of Louisiana lawmakers on April 25, 2024

Alabama and Louisiana are making significant strides toward enacting major reforms supported by the Mackinac Center’s Workers for Opportunity (WFO) initiative.

Alabama’s state legislature passed Senate Bill 231, to require a private ballot vote on unionization efforts at companies that receive state taxpayer-funded incentives. Gov. Kay Ivey signed the bill May 13.

The Workers for Opportunity team was proud to be part of this successful effort and we’re thankful for our partners at the Alabama Policy Institute, particularly its president and CEO, Stephanie Smith. Her testimony, and her knowledge of the legislative process in her home state, was effective and helped drive home the importance of protecting workers’ freedoms.

Of course, public policy wins require principled and strong leadership from legislators. State Sen. Arthur Orr was a terrific bill sponsor, shepherding the bill through his chamber and working closely with House Majority Leader Rep. Scott Stadthagen to ensure the legislation would pass.

In a step that illustrates the value of WFO’s work, Sen. Orr introduced his bill after reading about our success in Georgia and deciding Alabama’s workers deserved the same protections their neighbors enjoyed. You’d be hard-pressed to find a better example of how good public policy is contagious!

And we’re not done yet. In Louisiana, we are working hand-in-hand with our allies at the Pelican Institute in the waning days of the legislative session to educate and encourage lawmakers to pass a worker freedom bill package. My colleague Steve Delie flew to Baton Rouge at the end of April to testify on that legislation. If enacted, these bills would protect workers’ paychecks and their right to a private ballot, limit the use of taxpayer dollars for union activities, and provide greater accountability for union members.

I look forward to sharing even more positive news with you in the coming months. ■



By Tony Daunt

Senior Director of Workers for Opportunity

An Evening with the Mackinac Center



Photos by MCPP

The spirit of liberty and the principles of a free-market economy were celebrated in grand style at this year's "An Evening with the Mackinac Center" dinner in Grand Rapids, headlined by renowned journalist Megyn Kelly.

More than 400 friends of liberty turned out for the event, including former Govs. John Engler and Rick Snyder, state lawmakers, business leaders, policy advocates and community members.

J.C. and Tammy Huizenga kicked off the evening with welcoming remarks, saying, "Tonight, we gather to celebrate liberty and reinvigorate our commitment to the founding principles of our nation through fellowship with like-minded friends. In the Mackinac Center, we've found a stalwart champion, a tireless voice and a threatening foe to government encroachment on our liberties."

They introduced Mackinac Center President Joseph G. Lehman, who set an ambitious tone, declaring that the people in the room aimed to change the world. He emphasized the vital role of state think tanks, saying, "Change doesn't start in Washington, it ends there. ... It starts with us in our own states and in our communities."

Lehman described how this change happens, starting with ideas, then building support for those ideas until they are politically possible. He cited Michigan's becoming a right-to-work state as an example, stating, "Nearly everyone said that Michigan would never become a right-to-work state. We never believed that at the Mackinac Center, but we knew it wouldn't happen overnight, it wouldn't happen on its own and it wouldn't happen by accident. It would take decades of passionate, principled persuasion to create the right conditions for lawmakers to find the idea favorable enough to support."

He didn't gloss over the fact that right-to-work was repealed last year, reminding attendees

that Michigan has been and continues to be a battleground state. Our wins are not permanent, but neither are our losses.

He said that data increasingly shows that right-to-work remains popular. Lehman questioned why the legacy media isn't reporting that Democrats repealed a popular law, putting congressional seats at risk in the upcoming midterm election. This was a good preview of his discussion with the featured speaker, Megyn Kelly.

With an extensive background in law and media, Kelly offered a unique perspective on media, politics and public policy. She began by reflecting on her career, from her time as a corporate litigator to her high-profile roles at Fox News and NBC. Kelly shared insights into the challenges and opportunities she encountered as a journalist committed to presenting unbiased news in a highly polarized media landscape.

One of the key themes of Kelly's address was the vital importance of civility in media and politics. Understanding, respecting and connecting with the people affected by news stories or public policies is crucial in creating a better future for all.

She clarified that her definition of civility includes being open and honest, because voters deserve to know the truth about the people they elect and the policies those officials support. Politeness is not the same thing as civility, she added. A person who is polite but does not tell the truth is not civil.





She pointed to elite reporters as a problem. “We need to get back to the day and age when you had working-class guys and gals out there from blue-collar families doing the reporting.”

Kelly’s remarks resonated deeply with the attendees. The Mackinac Center focuses on thoughtful policy debate.

Also that night, Lehman presented Dick and Ethie Haworth with the “Champions of Freedom” award, which honors those whose lives exhibit a faithful dedication to the principles of freedom and self-reliance. Lehman pointed out that very few have received the award, but it was well-deserved in this case. Dick and Ethie are always thinking of ways to make an impact and influence their community. You can read more about this award and the Haworths on page 16.

Rodney Lockwood, a member of the Center’s board of directors since 1996 and its current chairman, gave the closing remarks, stating, “Tonight, we’ve gathered to focus our energy on a common purpose: liberty and opportunity for all people. Checking government overreach because government doesn’t create prosperity – people do. Advancing market-based policies that free people to realize their potential.”

The Mackinac Center is Michigan’s best chance to realize this vision. ■



By Elizabeth Posthumus
Director of Donor Communications



FIGHTING FOR TRANSPARENCY

Photo by Adobe Stock

The Mackinac Center filed an appeal on April 4 with the Michigan Supreme Court in a case that has major implications for how the state's Freedom of Information Act applies to local governments. If the court does not take the case, it will be far more difficult for citizens to hold their local governments accountable.

The case arose when our client, Carol Beth Litkouhi, noticed that the Rochester Community Schools District had offered a high school course titled "A History of Ethnic and Gender Studies." Carol Beth was curious about the subject matter being taught and attempted to gain access to course material. She had limited success working directly with teachers and curriculum specialists, and the district told her to file a FOIA request.

Carol Beth did so, but the district provided very little material in response. The course had been taught for over six months, but she only received a syllabus and some materials from the course's first two weeks. She appealed that decision, but the district stood firm. That's when she came to the Mackinac Center, and we sued on her behalf.

In the lower courts, school officials claimed that because teachers fall outside FOIA's definition of "public body," the district has no obligation to obtain records that were retained by teachers, even if those records were related to a teacher's official duties. Many teachers' official records

have been disclosed in the past. Even so, both the trial court and the Michigan Court of Appeals agreed with the district.

If these decisions stand, the implication would be enormous: Only the records retained by a local public body, rather than by its employees, would be subject to FOIA. This means that records of municipal employees, such as teachers, firefighters, and police officers would only be subject to disclosure if they are also possessed by the public body itself.

Similarly, records held only by the mayor, township manager, or superintendent would also likely be exempt from FOIA under this interpretation. On the other hand, records retained by a city council, township board, or school district would still be accessible.

The Michigan Supreme Court should grant the Mackinac Center's request. Failing that, the Legislature must act swiftly to ensure that Michigan's poor record on transparency does not get even worse. ■



By Stephen Delie

*Director of Transparency and
Open Government*

Dick and Ethie Haworth

CHAMPIONS OF FREEDOM

Dick and Ethie Haworth received the Mackinac Center's "Champions of Freedom" award at "An Evening with the Mackinac Center," in Grand Rapids on May 9.

Dick, a member of the Center's board of directors, said he and Ethie were "deeply honored" by the award, which reads in part, "Dick and Ethie Haworth have placed a permanent imprint on the course of public policy in Michigan."

Evidence of Dick and Ethie's legacy can be seen across the state. They have created lasting opportunities for Michigan's people by building a multigenerational family business and investing generously in their community. They have earned the love and respect of countless friends, volunteers and benefactors of institutions such as the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital, the Make-A-Wish Foundation and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

"Dick and Ethie deeply understand how blessed they are to live in the greatest country on earth, to be free to create opportunities for themselves and opportunities that help other people flourish," said Joseph G. Lehman, Mackinac Center president. "They value this so highly that they are not content to merely enjoy this for themselves. They want to uphold and advance the founding principles of this country so that millions of other people have the chance to flourish as they have."

In 2008, Dick became the first major CEO to publicly call for Michigan to pass a right-to-work law. It was a daring act of courage in the face of powerful entrenched opposition, and Michigan made history in 2012 by adopting that law. Legislators repealed the law a decade later, but the public still supports it. When right-to-work is restored, hundreds of thousands of Michigan workers will be free to work on their own terms because of the unwavering leadership and personal financial leadership of those who never gave up the fight. ■



Photo provided by the Haworths

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

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Photos by the Mackinac Center



By Elizabeth Posthumus
Director of Donor Communications



Supreme Court Could Open Doors for Michigan Students

The Mackinac Center asks the U.S. Supreme Court to hear Blaine Amendment challenge

The Mackinac Center and attorney John Bursch are asking the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a case that could give Michigan families meaningful school choice options.

We are representing five families from across the state who want to use their Education Savings Accounts to help offset the cost of K-12 tuition. Unfortunately, Michigan has an antiquated and bigoted Blaine Amendment, which prohibits public funds from being used for private schools.

This wouldn't be the first time the Supreme Court has heard a challenge to a Blaine Amendment. Recently, in the 2020 decision *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, the justices struck down Montana's Blaine Amendment, which prevented parents from using a state-funded scholarship program to pay for private religious schools. The court ruled that Montana violated First Amendment rights. If a state offers a taxpayer-funded school choice program, religious schools cannot be excluded.

While most states saw the demise of their Blaine amendments, Michigan's survived. In Michigan, broad language bans state aid from being used to fund any nonpublic school, not just religious ones.

Michigan's Blaine Amendment is deeply rooted in religious bigotry. The primary group

supporting the 1970s ballot measure that created the amendment was called the Council Against Parochialism, which tapped into anti-Catholic bias. At the time the vast majority of private schools were both religious and Catholic.

Michigan families are now watching as friends and relatives in neighboring states get greater access to school choice programs. Our state could one day provide this life-changing assistance, particularly for low-income families. As most parents will tell you, every little bit helps.

If the Supreme Court doesn't accept this case, states would be able to resurrect their Blaine amendments by using our state's language as the new model. It's only a matter of time before another state tries to imitate what Michigan has done.

Michigan needs to catch up with the rest of the country and pass widespread school choice reforms – not lead a counterattack against school choice. If the Supreme Court decides to hear the Mackinac Center's case, Michigan families could soon see a vast increase in options. ■



By Patrick J. Wright
Vice President for Legal Affairs



The Lupanoff Family

“What I’ve discovered over the past year is that there’s a lot of standing up that needs to be done. Especially for our kids.”

The Bagos Family

“To have the option to choose schools would be life changing. For everyone, not just us.”



The Hile Family

“Education is education, and it should be the parents’ opportunity and choice to explore other options for their kids that maybe they didn’t think were feasible. Hopefully this lawsuit can help with that.”



Samantha Jacokes

“Competition makes everything better. By having education choices for my kids, I can make sure they’re getting the best instruction possible.”



The Leitch Family

“By bringing light to this issue, we can let parents know that there are other options out there for their kids, and that’s the most important thing.”



Midland, MI



Sheridan, MI



Vancouver, BC



Snover, MI



Oakland Charter Township, MI

Photos by MCPP

Energizing the Public on Energy Issues

Educating the public is a critical component of the Mackinac Center's energy and environmental policy work. We keep people informed about the pressing issues facing our state and country by publishing studies, appearing in the media and spreading our work across online platforms.

But there are more personal ways to reach a broad audience. Directly interacting with people across Michigan, the Midwest, the nation, or even the continent helps the public understand the essential role energy plays in our lives, health and well-being.

More Americans are waking up to our government-imposed energy crisis and are concerned about the growing instability of the North American electric grid. They want more complete answers on energy policy. In response, we have ramped up our efforts to get information to the public on the value of affordable, reliable energy and the need for free markets in improving environmental management.

I have presented information to various groups on the problems with new state and federal energy laws and the need for free-market ideas to play a larger role in energy and environmental policy. In 2023, I presented to almost 1,800 people at 31 events across North America. As of mid-May this year, I have spoken to more than 1,200 people at 18 events across the continent.

Audiences range from large groups of college students in Vancouver and Toronto to industry, community, and political leaders in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. I recently had the opportunity to join a panel at an academic conference held by Northwood University, discussing the interconnected nature of North American and European environmental and energy policies.

The developed world is on a self-destructive path to achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions. Despite what green groups and elected officials have told us, forcibly transitioning our electric grid and transportation systems will do little to nothing to slow global warming. China and India's growing emissions quash any of our efforts. Instead, the transition will cause electricity prices to increase rapidly while ensuring our energy supply becomes dangerously unreliable.

Net-zero mandates represent a serious threat to Michiganders' health and wealth. Thanks to your support, the Mackinac Center brings that message directly to the people. ■



By Jason Hayes

Director of Energy and Environmental Policy



**MACKINAC
STAFF
PROFILE**



Photos provided by the Van Beeks

‘If Politicians Were More Like Referees, We’d Be Better Off’

A profile of Michael Van Beek, director of research at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy

You won’t be surprised to learn that Michael Van Beek grew up in West Michigan, given his family name. But unlike many of Dutch ancestry, he got a chance to dig into his heritage.

“Our family lived in the Netherlands for three months in 2019,” he says. “It was an opportunity to learn more about our ancestry, especially since my wife’s family is also Dutch. And for our three kids to experience a different culture for a bit. We loved it.”

Mike’s interest in genealogy stems from a passion for history. He majored in the subject at Hope College and went on to earn a master’s degree from Purdue University. He taught high school at a small private school in Grand Rapids before coming to the Mackinac Center in 2009.

“My teaching experience opened my eyes to the impact public policy has on education,” Mike says. “It seemed that every barrier to improving how well schools could educate students stemmed from some misguided law or regulation.”

He started at Mackinac as the director of education policy before becoming the director of research in 2015. In that role, he manages the Center’s long-form research publications. He also manages our Board of Scholars, a group of academics and field experts who support and contribute to our mission.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mike became an expert on the state’s emergency power laws and lockdown orders. Mike began tracking and explaining

these rules after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer took to issuing executive orders without the consent of other elected officials. His work received widespread attention in the media and online. The Michigan Supreme Court cited his research into the state’s history of emergency powers, holding that the governor’s orders were illegal and unconstitutional.

“The government’s overreaction to the pandemic clearly demonstrated the problems with the administrative state,” Mike says. “State agencies run by unelected bureaucrats have the legal authority to literally control our lives, and all they need is a reason.”

Sports have always been a big part of Mike’s life. He captained Hope’s baseball team and was a three-time all-conference player. As a college senior, he was the league MVP. He now spends countless hours in the evenings and on weekends coaching, playing, or watching his kids play soccer. He also referees, a role Mike says parallels his work in public policy.

“Being a good soccer referee seems to be about making the right decisions,” Mike said. “But your more fundamental role is to create a predictable environment that allows the players to flourish and achieve their best. If more politicians viewed their role in the economy that way, we’d be much better off.” ■



By Jarrett Skorup

Vice President for Marketing and Communications



Photos by MCPP

One Life: A Story of Quiet Heroism

History is filled with individuals who have acted heroically but remain unknown. Every so often, however, their stories come to life, and we see the profound impact one person can make.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy recently had the chance to share one such inspiring story at a screening of the film “One Life,” which chronicles the extraordinary life-saving work of Sir Nicholas Winton. The poignant film, starring Anthony Hopkins, sheds light on a story that remained largely untold for decades.

Winton, a British stockbroker, orchestrated the rescue of 669 children, most of them Jewish, from the Nazis

during World War II. Winton’s heroic actions went unnoticed until researchers and a popular television program brought his remarkable story to light.

Lawrence W. Reed, president emeritus of the Mackinac Center, shared the story of Winton’s courageous efforts in his monograph, “The Difference One Can Make: The Story of Nicholas Winton.” Reed, along with his former Executive Assistant Kendra Shrode, had the privilege of meeting “Nicky,” as friends called him, many times before his passing in 2015.

At the screening, Reed and Shrode shared personal reflections on Winton’s legacy.

“The humility of the man was one of the most endearing aspects of his personality,” Reed told an overflow crowd at a Midland movie theater. “Where would we be in the Nicky Winton story if he and the others who helped him hadn’t mustered courage to do something? Thank God there are people of courage in this world who face danger or adversity and teach us all a lesson about what it means to stand up about what you know to be right.”

Shrode spoke of her interactions with Winton. “He was just a terrific guy. He was a remarkable man and we have wonderful memories.”

The event underscored Winton’s enduring relevance and the importance of honoring those who act selflessly in the face of unimaginable adversity.

The film and the insightful remarks paid powerful tribute to Sir Nicholas Winton’s lasting legacy of compassion and bravery, reminding us all of the profound impact one individual can make. ■



By Holly Wetzel
Director of Public Relations

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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Mackinac Center Events Foster Thought-Provoking Discussions

The opportunity to focus on a single topic with equally earnest friends is a gift in a consumeristic information age. The Mackinac Center fosters these opportunities all over the state by creating a forum for dialogue on a newly published study or a policy of pressing interest.

At a recent panel discussion in Lansing about barriers to work, participants were asked how often they use the state Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to check a doctor's medical license before seeking an appointment. The question stimulated a discussion on the idea that people rely on licenses as a guarantee of competency or safety. We concluded that most of us rely instead on recommendations from people we know or seek out online reviews when selecting a doctor or other licensed professional.

The Mackinac Center recently hosted an event at Northwood University, generating a crowd of more than 100 people spanning multiple generations. Attendees leaned in to understand the connection between economic prosperity and economic freedom. Florida and Texas top the charts for population growth. It's no surprise that neither has a personal income tax, but both have right-to-work laws that protect workers' freedom to work without paying a union. Michigan's self-imposed backsliding through an income tax hike this year (challenged by an active Mackinac Center lawsuit) and the repeal of right-to-work in 2023 makes its middling ranking no surprise. As Michael LaFaive, Mackinac Center's senior director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative, said, "If you artificially raise the price of living in Michigan, you will get less of it."





“Thank you for your educational seminar. I really enjoyed it and I always learn something when I come to your events.”

At a third recent forum, a researcher, a college professor, and a former lawmaker invited participants to ponder why Michigan taxpayers are spending more than ever on higher education, while fewer and fewer students are signing up. As one panelist noted, “The challenge before us is whether the state Legislature will use the \$2.7 billion appropriations to foster competition among the public universities, or should we be considering a system of public universities that not only collaborate, but cooperate?”

One community leader who attended a recent Mackinac Center event said, “Thank you for your educational seminar. I really enjoyed it and I always learn something when I come to your events.”

Uninterrupted interconnectedness makes these gatherings special. It’s just one more way the Mackinac Center seeks to have an impact, helping ordinary citizens learn about key issues from a free-market perspective so that together, we can unleash Michigan’s potential. ■



By Jennifer Majorana
Senior Director of Advancement



Donor Privacy, Free Speech Go Hand-in-Hand

“Liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one’s thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist,” Frederick Douglass said a few days after Boston thugs shut down a public forum at the Tremont Temple Baptist Church. In today’s parlance, the hecklers canceled the 19th-century public intellectual.

Mob violence is not the only means by which people seek to squelch the speech of those they disagree with. Another tactic is to release the names and contact information of donors to disfavored causes, also known as “doxing.” During the Civil Rights era, Alabama officials sought to force the NAACP to reveal its donor list.

Fortunately for the cause of free speech, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the danger of

uncovering the identity of anonymous donors and sided with the NAACP. It reinforced that 1958 decision in 2021 by striking down a California forced-disclosure law.

Despite these protections, attacks on free speech continue, and its defenders must be diligent. We continue to educate lawmakers on the importance of defending donor privacy. The partisan identity of those who undermine donor privacy does not matter to us. The Mackinac Center stands firmly on the side of donors, and we will continue to do so. ■



By Ryan Rickel

Director of Strategic Partnerships

