



Governments, Officials, Media Making People, Not Virus, The Enemy

BY TOM GANTERT

In 2008, the American Civil Liberties Union released a report critical of plans created by the George W. Bush administration for handling a nationwide epidemic.

The ACLU emphasized 12 years ago “the disastrous consequences of public health policies built around a vision of sick people as the enemy.”

“Rather than focusing on how government can work with individuals and their communities to be healthy, public health policymakers now often emphasize the need to take tough, coercive actions against the very people they are charged to help,” the ACLU wrote in 2008. “This approach not only

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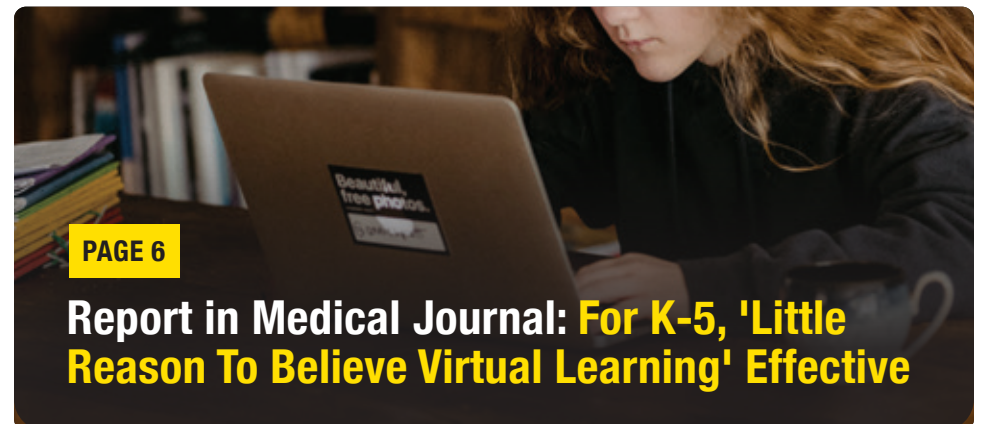


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Report in Medical Journal: For K-5, 'Little Reason To Believe Virtual Learning' Effective



MEET THE STAFF



Tom Gantert is the managing editor for Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be reached at Gantert@mackinac.org.



Jack McHugh is Senior Legislative Analyst for Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be reached at McHugh@mackinac.org.

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NEWS BITES

Michigan Businesses Nation's Hardest Hit By Government Lockdowns

Small businesses closures mandated by government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have hit Michigan harder than any other state, according to a survey done by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Michigan saw 32.04% of its private sector businesses closed by the government-ordered lockdowns.

The second-highest state was Pennsylvania, at 30.43%.

South Dakota had the lowest percentage of businesses affected by a lockdown, at 5.83%. The U.S. average was 18.74%.

The survey asked businesses about their experiences under the pandemic in 2020.

Whitmer Says 'Don't Travel,' State Agency Spends Tax Dollars Encouraging It

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is going to start a Pure Michigan tourism campaign this winter. The campaign is expected to start this month.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer advised the state's residents not to travel for Christmas and beyond.

"We all know the next two months are going to be hard," Whitmer said at her press conference. "Too many people traveled for Thanksgiving and we will see our numbers increase very likely because of it and that'll coincide with the next big holiday, Christmas, and too many people are considering traveling and I'm reiterating please don't. About four weeks after that, we will see the impact of that."

Pure Michigan is a taxpayer-funded government marketing program that benefits the tourism industry. The Michigan Legislature authorized \$15 million for it in the current fiscal year.

Michigan Taxpayers Still On Hook For \$5.3 Billion To Corporations In Next 10 Years

One of the state of Michigan's primary methods of delivering taxpayer-funded subsidies to select private businesses was a law and program called the Michigan Economic Growth Authority.

The law is still on the books, but the program has been suspended since 2011, with no new deals for MEGA tax credits granted to corporations and developers.

Yet state officials anticipate they will be handing out refundable tax credits to businesses as far out as 2031, according to the its most recent report. "Refundable"

means a good portion of the benefits will go to recipients in the form of cash, not just reduced tax bills. The exact amount is a government secret, however.

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is the state agency that manages all this, and it projects the state still has \$5.3 billion more in previously promised MEGA tax credits to give out over the next 10 years.

Whitmer Tells Scary COVID Story Thursday; State Warns Against Panic Friday

In a Nov. 19 press conference on the latest state COVID-19 orders, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said, "We are in the worst weeks of our experience with COVID over the last nine months. We are in it right now."

Whitmer also cited a recent MLive story describing 11 family members and friends who gathered to play cards, all of whom contracted COVID-19.

"Their story is not unique," the governor said.

A day later, the state of Michigan issued a press release urging residents not to panic, following reports of people hoarding toilet paper and paper towels.

"Michigan has an ample supply of food products and other items. But, when shoppers panic buy products like toilet paper, paper towel and other items, it creates a ripple effect within the supply chain," said Gary McDowell, director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, in a press release. "Buying what your household will use for the week keeps the supply chain moving, ensures everyone has access to what they need and allows the stores to replenish shelves for your next shopping trip."

State's Chief Medic: Be Smart And Loved Ones May Not Be Dead Next Thanksgiving

Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, chief medical executive for the state of Michigan, has offered guidance on how people should conduct themselves for the Thanksgiving holiday.

"This is not the time to travel for the holidays," Khaldun said in the Nov. 12 press conference. "You also should not be leaving your home unless you absolutely must for 14 days before you intend to travel."

"You should not have physical contact with people who you don't already live with. I know you may want to hug your extended family, but you could have the virus and you could spread it to them."

Khaldun added: "If you are smart now, you may be able to have a nice holiday with your loved ones alive at this time next year."

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Thank you for your consideration, and **happy holidays** from all of us at Michigan Capitol Confidential.

Sincerely,



Tom Gantert

Managing Editor, Michigan Capitol Confidential



989.631.0900

MiCapCon@Mackinac.org

www.MichCapCon.com

Leading Scientists Condemn Lockdowns, Call For ‘Focused Protection’

25% of adults 18-24 have considered suicide during the pandemic

BY TOM GANTERT

Nearly 12,000 medical and public health scientists and 34,000 medical practitioners have signed onto an online declaration that advocates for a COVID-19 strategy that reopens schools and ends government lockdowns of business and the economy.

The Great Barrington Declaration has been endorsed by 11,797 medical and public health scientists and 33,938 medical practitioners in the 35 days since it was launched Oct. 4.

The proposal is garnering ever more endorsements even as Michigan experiences record numbers of daily new cases. The increases have come despite a new statewide face mask mandate and a barrage of pronouncements from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer that the public needs to do more.

Michigan reported a record 6,494 new cases on Saturday, Nov. 7, according to worldometers.info.

“Basic epidemiological theory indicates that lockdowns do not reduce the total number of cases in the long run and have never in history led to the eradication of a disease,” the Barrington Declaration’s FAQ states. “At best, lockdowns delay the increase of cases for a finite period and at great cost.”



The Great Barrington Declaration states that the damage from lockdowns will be seen in the form of increased deaths from other illnesses. These excess deaths will not appear in the current year’s mortality statistics, and will happen because large numbers of people have been prevented or discouraged by lockdowns from obtaining cancer screenings, vaccinations and other preventive measures and therapies.

The declaration also points to the mental health impacts generated by the constant messaging by government officials of the

risk of dying of contracting COVID-19.

The Great Barrington Declaration cites a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that stated one in four people ages 18 to 24 have seriously considered suicide during the pandemic.

The declaration’s signatories advocate for what it calls “focused protection.” They define this approach as minimizing the risks faced by older people and other high-risk groups while letting children and young adults live without restrictions imposed by government lockdowns.

The Great Barrington Declaration also states that older people who are deemed to “essential workers” but cannot afford to stop working are being put at unnecessary risk by staying in the workforce. Those workers should get funding for a three-to-six month sabbatical from work, according to the declaration.

Eventually, the Great Barrington Declaration says, herd immunity will take place, no matter what governments and politicians say or do.

“Sooner or later, herd immunity will be reached either through natural infection or through a combination of vaccinations and natural infection,” the declaration stated.

The Great Barrington Declaration was written by three medical experts. They were Dr. Martin Kulldroff, a professor of medicine at Harvard University; Dr. Sunetra Gupta, a professor at Oxford University with expertise in immunology, vaccine development and mathematical modeling of infectious diseases; and Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, an epidemiologist and professor at Stanford University.

There were 43 other co-signers that were medical or academic experts. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 9, 2020 and is available at MichCapCon.com/28249.

State Board Of Education Vice President Repeats Erroneous Charter School Slam

No, they can’t pick and choose from students

BY TOM GANTERT

The vice president of the Michigan Board of Education echoed oft-repeated erroneous claims about the state’s charter schools during a recent Zoom meeting.

State board member Pamela Pugh, a Democrat from Saginaw, said that charter schools can pick and choose which students they will accept.

“We know that there issue of special needs children — in this case, many times, traditional districts, in general, are serving more special needs children than the charter schools. They have the opportunity to select in that way. I could go on and on,” Pugh said at a Nov. 23 discussion held on Zoom by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

According to the Michigan Department of Education, however, charter schools cannot be selective in who they accept as students.

The department asks on its website: “May a charter school be selective in its admissions policy?”

It answers: “Except as prescribed in law, a charter school may not be selective in its enrollment process. It may not screen out students based on disability, race, religion, gender, test scores, etc. It may predetermine the ages, grades, and a number of students it will serve. A random selection process must be used if the number of applicants exceeds the school’s enrollment capacity.”

Pugh didn’t respond to an email seeking comment. The Michigan Department of Education referred to its website statement.

Pugh was elected to the state school board in 2014. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 11, 2020 and is available at MichCapCon.com/28342.



MDOT Spokesman: Rebel Drivers, Libertarians Spiking Traffic Deaths

BY TOM GANTERT

A spokesman for the Michigan Department of Transportation said that the increase in fatal crashes so far this year stems from people “driving recklessly to rebel against police and coronavirus restrictions.”

“There’s this libertarian spirit that says: ‘Quit telling me what to do. Quit telling me to wear a mask. Quit telling me to wear a seatbelt. I’m not going to do anything that the government tells me I have to do.’ And all of these things are very disturbing,” MDOT spokesman Jeff Cranson said.

Cranson made his comments in a recent story published by the MIRS news site.

There were 837 fatal vehicle crashes in Michigan for the year as of Nov. 10, according to unofficial state police reports. At the same time in 2019, there had been 800 fatal car crashes, according to MIRS. So this year’s number is a 4.6% increase.

Fatal crashes vary significantly from year to year. For example, from 2014 to 2015, there was an 10.8% increase in fatal crashes. From 2009 to 2010, there was a 7.7% drop in fatal crashes.

“My comments were based on input from MSP [Michigan State Police], who were represented in the same conversation. They investigate the causes of crashes and keep the statistics,” Cranson said in an email. “But none of the years you cite [above] involved a steep decline in vehicle miles traveled because of a once-in-a-century pandemic. The fact that traffic was down as much as 60% in the weeks following the outbreak and was still down as much as 20% recently makes an increase in traffic deaths very troubling.”

Michigan State Police officials say they have not determined why there has been an increase in fatal crashes.

“We don’t yet know the factors behind the increase in traffic fatalities,” said Shanon Banner, spokeswoman for the Michigan State Police. “There is some preliminary data that points to some higher speeds and also more unbelted motorists, but once the year’s data is in and finalized, the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning will review it more closely to attempt to determine trends and possible causes.” ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 27, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28294](https://michcapcon.com/28294).



CDC Says Make Schools Last To Close, First To Reopen; Teachers Union Says That's Immoral

How dare parents 'hoard' opportunity for their children, fumes East Lansing union local

BY TOM GANTERT

To address current high COVID-19 transmission rates, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states in a "Summary of Guidance" published Dec. 4, "Because of ... the disproportionate impact that school closures can have on those with the least economic means, kindergarten through grade 12 schools should be the last settings to close after all other mitigation measures have been employed and the first to reopen when they can do so safely."

The teachers union in East Lansing has a different view, however. It posted a meme on a Facebook page claiming it is immoral to want to keep schools open during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Parents need to give up the fantasy that their kids making incredible academic progress this year is more important than people dying," the meme stated. "This is opportunity hoarding & a vision that your

own kid deserves to excel academically right now more than others deserve to live, have housing, eat. It's immoral and ignores the fact that we live in community with others." The East Lansing Education Association then removed the message posted with an explanation:

"A meme was posted earlier this week that has caused a good deal of controversy," the explanation stated. "As it does not reflect the sentiment of the membership of the ELEA as a whole, it has since been removed and the issue has been addressed."

Michigan Capitol Confidential reported earlier that the Journal of the American Medical Association published a report in November showing that school closures in the U.S. may be leading to a decrease in children's life expectancy. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 8, 2020 and is available at MichCapCon.com/28332.



Report in Medical Journal: For K-5, 'Little Reason To Believe Virtual Learning' Effective

Report finds teachers union's preferred COVID response will shorten children's lives

BY TOM GANTERT

While the Michigan Education Association has pressed to keep school buildings closed, one study suggests that suspending in-person instruction could be more deadly than keeping classrooms open.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a report this month showing that school closures in the U.S. may be leading to a decrease in children's life expectancy.

The findings "suggest that the attempt to save lives by closing schools may not have resulted in a net savings when considering the potential harms associated with this intervention."

The JAMA article stated, "There is little reason to believe that virtual learning environments can be effective for primary school-aged children," those between kindergarten and fifth grade.

The authors state, "We believe that restoring access to in-person primary school education should be an immediate national priority, even while the country awaits a vaccine."

But Michigan's largest teachers union continues to press for keeping schools closed.

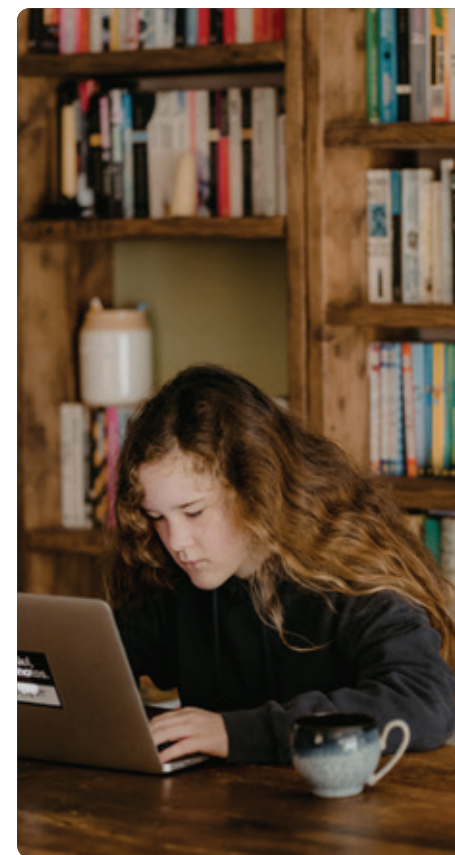
"Safety must come first," MEA President Paula Herbart wrote in a Nov. 18 op-ed. "That means pausing in-person learning at all levels while cases are skyrocketing, and delaying decisions to transition to greater levels of in-person learning until infection rates are under control."

Other research has documented the negative effects of stopping face-to-face instruction.

Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) performed a study of lost learning in 19 states, including Michigan. It found that the school shutdown from March through June cost children the equivalent of up to 232 days of learning in math and 183 days in reading.

Recovering the learning lost over that time could take years, according to CREDO.

The World Bank warned in a June report that as many as 24 million students



worldwide may drop out of school altogether due to the impact of lockdowns on family incomes.

Another World Bank report estimated school closures could cost this generation of students \$10 trillion in lifetime earnings, worldwide.

In Michigan, the decision whether to teach remotely or allow students to attend classes in person has been made on a district-by-district basis. School districts in Detroit and Ann Arbor, for example, have not allowed in-school teaching. On Nov. 15, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services ordered all high schools in the state closed due to the rise in COVID-19 cases. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 23, 2020 and is available at MichCapCon.com/28286.

Average Michigan Corrections Department Employee Took 28.5 Days Off With Pay Last Year

BY TOM GANTERT

Employees of the Michigan Department of Corrections had the highest use of annual and sick leave among state workers in the 2019-20 fiscal year that ended Oct. 1.

Prison guards and others on the departmental payroll used 11.8 sick leave days and 16.7 annual leave days, on average, for a combined 28.5 days off. The figures come from an annual report on state employees released by the Michigan Civil Service Commission.

All state employees, by comparison, used

an average of 14.8 annual leave days and 9.1 sick days in the fiscal year. Annual leave days include paid vacation days.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has informed state employees that those who are “detailed to work from home” won’t return to their regular work locations until at least March 1, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whitmer made the announcement in a letter sent to state employees. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 28, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28295](https://michcapcon.com/28295).



‘The Science’ Revolts: Social, Health Costs Of Lockdowns And School Closures Exceed Benefits

Top-tier epidemiologists warn of ‘irreparable damage, with the underprivileged disproportionately harmed’

BY TOM GANTERT

A declaration endorsed by dozens of doctors and epidemiologists, calling for the end to state-ordered COVID-19 lockdowns, has garnered 239,479 signatures in the eight days since it was launched Oct. 4. The statement says that lockdowns have a number of social and health costs, including the “grave injustice” of keeping children out of school, with “the underprivileged disproportionately harmed” as a result.

The website for the Great Barrington Declaration summarizes the statement this way: “As infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists we have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies and recommend an approach we call Focused Protection.”

The declaration itself says, in part: “The most compassionate approach that balances the risks and benefits of reaching herd immunity, is to allow those who are at minimal risk of death to live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk.”

It also states:

“Those who are not vulnerable should immediately be allowed to resume life as normal. Simple hygiene measures, such as hand washing and staying home when sick should be practiced by everyone to reduce



the herd immunity threshold. Schools and universities should be open for in-person teaching. Extracurricular activities, such as sports, should be resumed. Young low-risk adults should work normally, rather than from home. Restaurants and other businesses should open. Arts, music, sport and other cultural activities should resume. People who are more at risk may participate if they wish, while society as a whole enjoys the protection conferred upon the vulnerable by those who have built up herd immunity.”

The declaration undermines claims made by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer that her ongoing restrictions, mandates and COVID-19

lockdowns are based on science.

The Great Barrington Declaration’s organizers and authors include epidemiologists Martin Kulldorff, a professor of medicine at Harvard University; Sunetra Gupta, a professor at Oxford University; and Jay Bhattacharya, a professor at Stanford University Medical School.

The website lists more than 30 other doctors and infectious disease experts as co-signers. The website claims that 6,802 medical and public health scientists as well as 14,880 medical practitioners have also signed on.

The site apparently took down the names

of the people who signed it over the weekend.

The website now says, “Signatures will be made public after approval.” There were numerous people who signed the declaration from Michigan before their names were taken down.

One of the signers of the declaration was William Atchison, a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at Michigan State University.

“My views are probably in line with most signers,” Atchison said in an email. “First, the three branches of government should each act within their own limitations: legislative branch makes law, executive branch carries it out, and judicial branch makes sure that the laws and practices are consistent with the State Constitution. Second, the Governor’s continuing edicts smack of tyranny, and disproportionately affect people in the State — small business owners, those in the medical field who provide important but non-emergency services: elective surgery, non-critical (joint replacement or back surgery, for example.”

“Third, the basis on which she continues to issue edicts is not based on realistic measures: a plateau level of positive test results, and reduction in hospitalizations. There are others, but these are the principal reasons for my signing,” Atchison said. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Oct 12, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28144](https://michcapcon.com/28144).

Michigan Cities Want To Collect Income Tax From Nonresidents Working At Home

Opponents push back, citing closed and canceled facilities and services during epidemic

BY DAWSON BELL

Some local governments in Michigan could see a decline in their income tax collections as thousands of employees who normally work within their jurisdictions instead work from homes, located elsewhere, during the coronavirus pandemic. Under current law, those individuals' income is not subject to a local income tax.

The Michigan Municipal League wants a temporary change to that law, given estimates that the 24 municipalities with local income taxes will collect up to \$160 million less in the current fiscal year due to the surge in remote work.

The league wants legislators to amend the local income tax law to let cities collect from nonresidents who ordinarily work within their boundaries but now work from homes outside the city.

The proposal is part of a package of several tax measures announced by the

local government lobbying group at a news conference. The league has called for the lame-duck Legislature to enact the changes before Dec. 31.

Leon Drolet, a former state lawmaker, newly elected treasurer of Macomb Township and head of the Michigan Taxpayers Alliance, said the proposal has it backward.

"I think if anyone needs to be made whole (from COVID-related financial setbacks) it's the citizens not the cities," Drolet said. "They're the ones who are being forced to pay taxes for services — like closed parks and community centers — that aren't being delivered."

Twenty-four cities in Michigan impose income taxes on residents, as well as nonresidents who are employed within their boundaries. The rates range from 0.5% (the most common rate for nonresidents) to 2.4% (for residents of Detroit). Nonresidents generally pay tax only on income earned

when they are physically present in the taxing jurisdiction.

COVID abatement efforts, some enforced by government edict, have dramatically increased the amount of work being done from home.

Chris Hackbarth, director of state and federal affairs at the municipal league, said the group's proposal to change the income tax law would be temporary and apply only to those whose remote work is a direct result of COVID.

"It all happened so abruptly ... and has lasted so long ... that communities didn't have time to adjust," Hackbarth said.

Although some congressional COVID bailout plans have promised aid to local governments, there is no guarantee that federal dollars will be forthcoming, he said.

"The buildings (where nonresident taxpayers worked) are still there. The infrastructure is still there," he said. "They're all just waiting for the people to come back."

The group is also seeking changes in law to allow cities to increase property tax levies.

Prospects for a state legislative solution in the near term are not robust, however.

Sen. Jim Runestad, R-White Lake, is chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. A spokesman for the senator said the lame-duck agenda includes a multitude of urgent concerns.

"I'm not sure it is something that will be immediately acted upon ... or a policy we will give more examination after the first of the year," he said.

Drolet said that's a good idea.

"I can't believe the audacity it takes to believe the cities should be made whole at the expense of citizens who have endured all kinds of suffering," Drolet said. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 3, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28306](https://michcapcon.com/28306).



THE ENEMY

from Page One

targets people as the enemy instead of the disease, but also encourages health officials to believe that government cannot do much to help people in an epidemic.”

“In effect, individuals are viewed as personally responsible for the spread of illness,” according to the report. “This law enforcement/national security strategy shifts the focus of preparedness from preventing and mitigating an emergency to punishing people who fail to follow orders and stay healthy.”

In Michigan, a second statewide lockdown order that began Nov. 18 has not slowed an increase in new cases. Nor have complaints from public officials, who are seen by many residents as chastising them for not observing government mandates with sufficient rigor.

Yet the state’s surge in COVID-19 cases appears to be no different from what is happening elsewhere in the U.S., or across the world. Russia, Germany, Poland and other countries have seen a similar acceleration in new cases since late September.

The broad geographic scope of the current surge hasn’t prevented Michigan pundits and politicians from blaming people here for the spike in new cases. A column by Lansing State Journal sportswriter Graham Couch illustrates the pattern of shaming:

“We also need to look at ourselves, even those of us who think we’re doing it right,” Couch wrote in a Nov. 17 column. “Have you let too many people inside your bubble? Had five or six friends in your living room lately? Been swept up in the excitement of a political victory, celebrating in close proximity with hundreds of strangers? Have you ordered your meal from a waiter without your mask on, just because you were seated at your table and were allowed to?”

Couch encouraged the shaming of people: “Whether it’s your own brother or the state senate majority leader, it’s time to stop shrugging off foolish and dangerous behavior. They’re not an opposing opinion. It’s all bull. It’s either based in callousness or ignorance and it deserves to be countered and shamed relentlessly until even those without shame begin to feel it. We’re beyond toleration.”

He’s not the only one to express this sentiment. Others, including public health officials, also have blamed allegedly irresponsible behavior for the spread of the virus.

An example at the national level could be seen at the news site Politico, which reported that a White House task force concluded the new surge can only be minimized by a “significant behavior change of all Americans.”

Back in Michigan, three weeks ago, the state’s senior medical executive, Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, said, “We are potentially looking at some of the deadliest most grim days of

this entire pandemic ahead of us if we don’t collectively change our behaviors.”

According to WILX, on Oct. 29, Marcus Cheatham, health officer of the Mid-Michigan Health Department said, “We’ve had weeks and weeks of messaging on that subject and we haven’t seen the behavior change. I’m really at my wits end as a public health official.”

Some of the harshest critics of the alleged irresponsible behavior have made themselves notorious by violating their own mandates.

On the other side of the Detroit River, in Windsor, Ontario, the government announced it was going “from a position of potential education to one of definite enforcement,” according to CTV News Windsor. The city began directing law enforcement agents to issue citations to businesses and individuals seen not following COVID-19 safety plans.

Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens called on Nov. 19 for a zero tolerance approach to those breaking COVID-19 rules. But a photo published by the media showed that just hours earlier, Dilkens was one of seven people gathered at a restaurant table, even though the maximum number allowed under Ontario’s COVID-19 regulations was six.

As Windsor promotes a zero tolerance approach, Michigan’s state government has urged residents to report neighbors and others who may be violating its mandates. In press releases, officials have advised them on how to report alleged violations so authorities can investigate.

These are just the government policies and behaviors the ACLU warned against in 2008. From that report:

“On the other hand, effective, preventive strategies that rely on voluntary participation do work,” the ACLU wrote then. “Simply put, people do not want to contract smallpox, influenza or other dangerous diseases. They want positive government help in avoiding and treating disease. As long as public officials are working to help people rather than to punish them, people are likely to engage willingly in any and all efforts to keep their families and communities healthy.”

“Too often, fears aroused by disease and epidemics have justified abuses of state power. Highly discriminatory and forcible vaccination and quarantine measures adopted in response to outbreaks of the plague and smallpox over the past century have consistently accelerated rather than slowed the spread of disease, while fomenting public distrust and, in some cases, riots.”

The report from the civil liberties group stated, “As a result, instead of helping individuals and communities through education and provision of health care, today’s pandemic prevention focuses on taking aggressive, coercive actions against those who are sick. People, rather than the disease, become the enemy.” ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 30, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28296](https://michcapcon.com/28296).

Remember That Promise About Fixing Roads? Michigan Is Spending Less On Them Under Whitmer

BY TOM GANTERT

The COVID-19 pandemic has grabbed the spotlight from what had been a hot topic in Michigan — more funding for road repairs.

In 2018 candidate Gretchen Whitmer made “fix the damned roads” the centerpiece of her campaign for governor. After the first two annual budgets she has signed as governor, state transportation spending is stagnant.

In fact, Whitmer has found less for road repairs in each of her first two budgets than her predecessor, former Gov. Rick Snyder, approved in his last budget.

The last budget Snyder signed was for the 2018-19 fiscal year, and it spent \$3.64 billion on transportation.

In the 2019-20 fiscal year that followed, Whitmer approved just \$3.59 billion in state transportation spending. And the budget she recently signed for the current 2020-21 fiscal year authorizes \$3.60 billion in spending.

The figures refer to state spending from state resources only, not federal revenue, over which state lawmakers have no control. Without an influx of more federal dollars or a change in future budgets, Michigan would be spending far less on transportation in the Whitmer era.

In 2018-19, the federal government distributed \$1.31 billion to Michigan for transportation.

That increased to \$1.70 billion in 2019-20

and is projected to come in at \$1.42 billion in 2020-21.

Overall, the state of Michigan is projecting \$5.11 billion in transportation spending for 2020-21, down from \$5.34 billion the previous year.

The Michigan Department of Transportation has plans to borrow \$3.5 billion in new road repair debt that is not included in the state budget. However, that won’t be cheap. It is estimated that taxpayers will pay \$565 million on just the first \$800 million of the \$3.5 billion. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 20, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28202](https://michcapcon.com/28202).



No Lockdown On Taxpayer-Funded Tourism Spending

BY DAWSON BELL

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is proceeding with a relaunch of its Pure Michigan advertising campaign, promoting winter tourism even as other state agencies are ordering COVID-related restrictions on leisure activities.

In fact, the state's COVID website contains a warning (posted since June) that "long distance travel is discouraged (and) travel into Michigan from out of state is not recommended."

Pure Michigan is supported by a \$15 million appropriation in the 2020-21 state budget. Its funding was recently restored after a \$35 million subsidy for 2019-20 was cancelled in a budget standoff between Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Legislature.

When the fiscal year 2021 budget was adopted this fall, Travel Michigan executive David Lorenz said the "bulk of the dollars will be used and invested to support the spring and summer marketing campaign as spring and especially summer are our big travel months."

But on Nov. 14, the MEDC's top executive, Mark Burton, told the Detroit Free Press that promotional work would get underway sooner as part of a COVID economic recovery agenda.

"The restoration of Pure Michigan funding is certainly an important step towards recovery for our industry and the communities and people who depend upon it. We will do all we can to support our industry by encouraging residents across our state to continue to travel safely through winter," Burton said.

The following day, Whitmer announced a new round of mandates aimed at stemming a steep rise in reported COVID infections.

"The situation has never been more dire," she said.

Among the activities curtailed until at least Dec. 8 are those involving entertainment venues, skating rinks (indoor and outdoor) and water parks. Indoor dining at bars and restaurants is also prohibited. Museums and swimming pools can remain open with capacity



limits of 30% and 25% respectively. Ski areas (which have often been featured in Pure Michigan ads) are allowed to remain open, but their indoor dining facilities are shuttered, along with saunas and hot tubs.

Indoor gatherings are subject to limits of 10 people from no more than two different households.

MEDC spokesman Otie McKinley confirmed in an email on December 1 that the campaign will be formally relaunched "in the coming weeks focusing on in-state and regional travel advertising."

"We are focusing our advertising on getting

people to travel safely and enjoy the great outdoors," McKinley said.

Even when Pure Michigan advertising was suspended, the agency "continued to market our state" and promote small business, McKinley said. He cited the publication of a Pure Michigan Travel Guide and the launch of the Support Local campaign "to encourage Michiganders to safely support small businesses."

Michael LaFaive, the senior fiscal policy analyst at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, said, "It doesn't make sense to relaunch in the winter when we have increasing COVID cases and businesses are being ordered to shut down."

LaFaive, who has written several analyses of Pure Michigan spending, said, "It doesn't work. But on its face it would make sense if you're going to do it you would wait until May 2021 when (travel activity) could be returning to normal." ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 2, 2020 and is available at MichCapCon.com/28301.

Michigan, National, Worldwide COVID Trends Look Similar

BY TOM GANTERT

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has repeatedly cited Oct. 2 as the start of a spike in COVID-19 cases in Michigan. That's the day the Michigan Supreme Court ruled her pandemic executive orders were unlawful and unconstitutional.

The governor has also implied that the increase in new cases was due to state residents not following orders from the state health department.

Whitmer made reference to that when the Michigan Department of Health and Human

Services banned restaurants and bars from offering in-service seating, effective Nov. 18.

"That's why these next three weeks are so crucial," Whitmer said Nov. 19. "We flattened the curve in the spring by listening to our public health and medical experts. We can do this again. You have the power to help us push this curve down. Every one of us has the power to make choices that will contribute to that. It's going to take all of us working together."

But this account has been challenged by similar spikes in COVID-19 numbers

nationally and all across the world, according to Worldometers.info.

The similarities across many political jurisdictions and societies raises question about how much impact government policies and leaders, or individual behaviors, have on the spread of the virus.

Canada saw 2,124 new COVID-19 cases on Oct. 2. On Nov. 29 that number had grown to 5,468.

Like Michigan, Canada experienced a spike of cases in April that flattened during the summer and skyrocketed in the fall.

Many countries have seen the same pattern of confirmed case increases since Oct. 2.

Russia had 9,412 new COVID-19 cases on Oct. 2 and 26,683 on Nov. 29.

Italy had 2,498 new coronavirus cases on Oct. 2 and 20,647 on Nov. 29.

In the **U.S.**, the national rate of infection looks very much like Michigan's.

The U.S. had 52,381 new COVID-19 cases on Oct. 2 and 144,727 on Nov. 29. ■

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Managing Editor: Tom Gantert **Designers:** Jonathan VanDerhoof

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30% of State Workers Flee Their Unions

More than 9,000 in Michigan have canceled memberships and dues payments

BY DAWSON BELL



More than 9,000 state workers — or nearly 30% of those covered by a collective bargaining agreement — have now withdrawn from or not renewed their union membership. These numbers come days after a new rule went into effect that prohibits state employee unions from collecting dues from workers who do not authorize it on an annual basis.

Unions representing nearly 32,000 state employees had sought an injunction to prevent the rule from going into effect this month. They claimed that the rule adopted by the Michigan Civil Service Commission in July would impair contractual agreements and deny workers the right to express themselves through their unions. The rule represents the state government's response to a 2018 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that bars government employee unions from collecting dues without affirmative consent from individual employees. The high court had suggested that a rule calling for annual reauthorizations of paycheck deductions by employees would likely not

violate constitutional rights to free speech and contract.

U.S. District Court Judge George Steeh denied the request for an injunction on Oct. 1. The state can no longer deduct union dues from the paychecks of employees who have not specifically authorized it for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

According to figures supplied to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy by civil service commission staff, 3,275 employees (about 10.3% of employees represented by the five unions which brought the lawsuit) did not submit a reauthorization notice by Oct. 4. Additionally, the commission said only 22,406 had filed authorizations for dues or fee collection in 2020-21, out of 31,680 state workers covered by union contracts. Consequently, nearly 30% of covered state employees have opted out of union membership since the state's 2013 right-to-work law made payments to unions optional.

The unions issued a joint statement when the federal lawsuit was filed, decrying the

July change. The commission's requirement, it said, was "part of a long running campaign against working families in Michigan and across the country, pushed by billionaire-backed anti-worker groups."

But as Steeh noted in his decision to deny the injunction, appellate courts have found that government employers don't have a constitutional duty to collect union dues in the first place.

The unions "do not explain ... why union members should have a First Amendment right to pay dues through payroll deduction, when the unions do not have a First Amendment right to collect dues in the same manner," he wrote.

Steeh also rejected the unions' claim that the process for reauthorization placed an undue burden on would-be dues payers.

The fact that a majority of covered employees had reauthorized payments, and that the option to submit a renewal is open-ended, shows that the requirement is not "so burdensome as to rise to the level of irreparable harm," he wrote.

In adopting the new rule, the Civil Service Commission said it was compelled by the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME*, strengthening the rights of public employees to opt out of union membership. The commission said the rule was needed to ensure that authorization for dues deduction were "not stale, (but) current, knowing and voluntary."

Representatives of UAW Local 6000, the lead plaintiff in the case, could not be reached Tuesday. The UAW's attorney did not respond to a request for comment.

There are six unions representing state unions. The information here does not include the 1,751 troops and sergeants in the Michigan State Police, which was treated differently by Michigan's right-to-work law. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 7, 2020 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/28132](https://michcapcon.com/28132).



MichiganVotes.org

A sampling of proposed state laws, as described on MichiganVotes.org.

Senate Bill 909

End going to the polls, do elections by mail

Introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D)

To end the institution of going to polls and voting on election day, and replace it with mail-in elections at all levels.

Senate Bill 965

Let Medicaid pay for “doula”

Introduced by Sen. Erika Geiss (D)

To include “doula” services among the things that Medicaid and other state social welfare medical programs can pay for. The bill defines this as “a professional trained in childbirth who provides continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to an expectant mother.”

Senate Bill 1073

Authorize governor to appoint four official state ‘poet laureates’

Introduced by Sen. Paul Wojno (D)

To authorize the appointment of four regional state “poet laureates,” who would serve at the pleasure of the governor. The bill authorizes no compensation, but does allow taxpayer dollars to be used to reimburse these individuals’ travel expenses.

Senate Bill 1034

Create government commission on “African, Caribbean, and Diaspora Affairs”

Introduced by Sen. Erika Geiss (D)

To create a new government commission on “African, Caribbean, and Diaspora Affairs,” with 15 political appointees and a paid staff maintained on the payroll of the state Department of Civil Rights, and intended to “stimulate and encourage the study and review of the status of African, Caribbean, and diaspora residents;” “develop a unified policy and plan of action to serve (their) needs;” “make recommendations to the governor and legislature regarding changes in state programs, statutes, and policies;” and more.

House Bill 5949

Give Public Service Commission power to impose broadband price controls

Introduced by Rep. Darrin Camilleri (D)

To give the Michigan Public Service Commission the power to regulate all providers of broadband service and the rates they charge, in the same manner that it regulates regional electric and gas monopolies. The bill specifies that regulations could extend “but not be limited to” matters including “billing transparency, pricing, service quality, dispute resolution, nondiscriminatory treatment, service for vulnerable populations, discontinuance of service” and more. The commission would have the power to impose price controls, service mandates, suspend providers’ licenses and more.

House Bill 5953

End most teacher quality assessments

Introduced by Rep. Lori Stone (D)

To repeal a requirement that the individual performance of all public school teachers be assessed each year with “evidence of student growth” the predominant factor. Instead, teachers would only be assessed every three years, except that those categorized as “needing support” would receive annual assessments. This would replace current requirements all teachers be rated each year and deemed as either highly effective, effective, minimally effective or ineffective.

House Bill 5970

Ban “volunteer” police officers

Introduced by Rep. Sarah Anthony (D)

To prohibit law enforcement agencies from using volunteer law enforcement officers.

House Bill 6000

Mandate employers give time off to vote

Introduced by Rep. Vanessa Guerra (D)

To mandate that employers give up to two hours’ time off for voting on election days to an employee who does not have three or more consecutive nonworking hours during the time that polls are open.