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Michigan film credits could cost state \$2B over a decade

Extra credits given to women and minority-owned businesses

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

A Michigan House committee heard testimony in February on two bills that together would revive film production credits, which have been defunct since 2015. The tax credit could take up to \$2.075 billion from state coffers over a decade.

The legislation in question, House bills 4907 and 4908, would create a 30% tax credit for eligible film productions shot in Michigan. The credits are spelled out in House Bill 4908. They would cover up to 30% of “qualified spending.” Another 5% credit would apply if the production

company or qualified personnel are women or minorities, per the House Fiscal Agency analysis.

The tax credits could cost Michigan at least nine figures a year for the next decade.

“For qualified productions that are at least 20 minutes in duration, the annual cap would be \$100.0 million for the first three years, \$150.0 million for the next three years, and \$200.0 million for the final four years,” explains the House Fiscal Agency. No one production could receive more than 20% of the available credits in a year “unless the (Michigan film office)

decides that a greater amount would be in the best economic interest of the state.”

James Hohman, director of fiscal policy at the Mackinac Center, testified against the bills before the House Economic Development and Small Business Committee. “This is not going to be successful,” Hohman told lawmakers, citing the earlier iteration of the film credits.

“When you look at the economic performance of the state of Michigan, you can see that this expenditure did result in a gain of a couple of hundred jobs in the film industry,” Hohman testified. “In

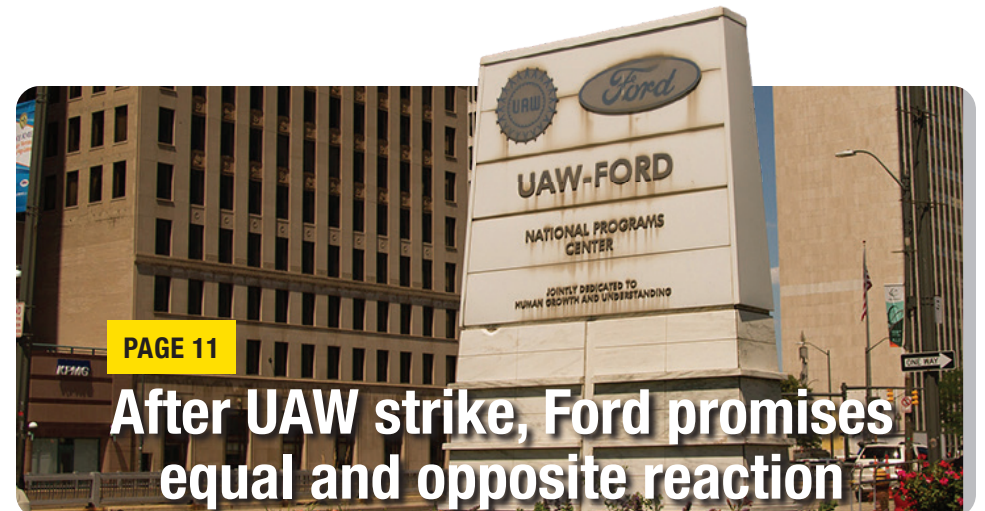
exchange for \$500 million, that’s a terrible cost-benefit. But more importantly, when you look at both the creation and the dissolution of the program, it resulted in no change in Michigan’s overall job trends, which is something lawmakers ought to care a lot about.”

Lawmakers took no vote Tuesday. House bills 4907 and 4908 are tie-barred. Both bills must pass for either to be enacted into law. ■

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After UAW strike, Ford promises equal and opposite reaction

MEET THE STAFF



James David Dickson is the managing editor of Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be reached at Dickson@mackinac.org



Jamie A. Hope is the assistant managing editor for Michigan Capitol Confidential. She may be reached at Hope@mackinac.org

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Michigan must untether itself from UAW

The state is hand-in-glove with a union that has a wandering eye

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

Both automakers and the union that represents autoworkers are preparing for a future beyond Michigan.

Lansing leadership picked a bad time to tie Michigan to the UAW by repealing right-to-work protections for the private sector.

Michigan autoworkers are again forced, as a condition of employment, to join the union.

That means the fate of the Michigan auto industry is tethered to a union with wandering eyes. No sooner than right-to-work repeal took effect did the UAW announce plans to spend \$40 million over three years to unionize automakers elsewhere, “particularly in the South.”

Meanwhile, Ford CEO Jim Farley says the Dearborn automaker will reconsider its manufacturing footprint.

In both cases, the talk of a southern exodus owes to the UAW’s Stand Up Strike last year, which targeted automakers’ most profitable facilities.

Those historic contracts won by UAW President Shawn Fain came at a great cost. A bond of trust was broken in negotiations where union officials swore reputational damage to automakers.

South of the border and regions south of Michigan offer workforces without the UAW default.

“Until the UAW acts like a modern institution seeking win-win situations for both management and members, it will continue to be a liability to the companies and to the states that have UAW members,” said James Hohman, the Mackinac Center’s director of fiscal policy.

During the strike, Ford Chairman Bill Ford issued a warning about the future of the American auto industry. Ford’s history is in Michigan, but its future might not be, the scion said.

“Many of our competitors move jobs to Mexico, as we added jobs here in the U.S.,” Ford said in

October. “These are choices we made, and it’s added cost to our business in an industry that is extraordinarily competitive.”

Farley estimated Ford’s cost disadvantage at \$7 billion per year relative to General Motors and Stellantis for hiring a higher proportion of UAW members.

Michigan’s repeal of right-to-work places workers in the shaky hands of a union whose leadership struggles to stay on the right side of either the law or common sense.

The Detroit Three’s partner in Michigan is a union president who calls for the workers of America to unite in walking off their jobs.

“Shawn Fain’s New Year’s Resolution Is to Lay the Ground for a National Strike,” read a December 2023 headline in *The Nation*.

“By having contracts with all the Big Three automakers expire on May Day, 2028, the UAW president also issued a challenge to the labor movement,” the story continued. “Will his union be ready to meet it?”

In the 2020s, the labor movement has oddly little interest in working. Is it a shock that automakers would seek out people eager to work, however far south they may be?

Hohman notes that Michigan has only 52% of the number of auto jobs it had in 2000. A similar contraction is coming today.

While the UAW is building a future beyond Michigan, Michigan has tied itself to the UAW. That’s a bad move for a state that wants to grow.

We have seen this movie before, during the days of our one-state recession. This sequel won’t end any better. ■

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How far will a Michigan homeschool registry go?

Different factions of Lansing Democrats have different visions for the extent and reach of homeschool regulation

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

The debate over a homeschool registry in Michigan is heating up, but the Democrats who run Lansing do not have a cohesive plan on how to proceed. Some say a registry is all that's sought; others want full-blown regulation.

There is no documented problem with the homeschool community in Michigan to justify plans for a registry. Lawmakers have presented a disjointed vision on how to solve the supposed problem of the unregistered homeschooler.

Michigan is one of eleven states that currently do not require homeschool students to register with the state.

CapCon previously reached out to lawmakers Rep. Matt Koleszar, D-Plymouth and Sen. Dayna Polehanki D-Livonia, who are pushing for a registry, to request what facts and data they used to determine the need for a new law. Neither wrote back.

A week ago, Polehanki told reporters that the homeschool bill was coming soon, but wouldn't say who would sponsor it. As of March 7, it had yet to materialize.

The facts show that homeschool students fare better academically than their public-school counterparts. Based on the crime rates at public schools, homeschool students are likely much safer at home, as previously reported by CapCon.

Bridge Magazine recently published a story providing a Connecticut homeschool study. It reported:

A 2018 study by Connecticut's Office of the Child Advocate found that 36% of children removed from school to be homeschooled lived with families with a history of reported child abuse or neglect. Connecticut is also a no-registration, low-regulation homeschool state.

However, the study is so limited in scope that it is a stretch to draw conclusions from it, according to Michael Van Beek, director of research at Mackinac Center.

Van Beek notes that researchers looked at 380 student withdrawals from six school districts in Connecticut from 2013-2016. He says five districts were unidentified, and the criteria for why they were chosen is vague.

Of the 380 students who left the districts, 139 belonged to families that had at least one report for suspected abuse or neglect. He says that 75% of families who withdrew had some kind of accepted report against them, so this is not a random selection of homeschooling families.

Many of the reports of neglect were of students with prolonged absences. Van Beek says if these were families who decided to start homeschooling without formally notifying the district, they would likely be reported. He notes that most homeschool families will not usually just withdraw their children from a public school midyear.

If they do, it is usually for extenuating circumstances.

The Democrats have presented a disjointed vision of their push for new homeschool laws. Polehanki is chair of the Senate Education Committee. She said creating a homeschool registry is as

far as it will go on her watch, according to Bridge Magazine.

But what happens when it is no longer her watch?

"Implementing monitoring mechanisms is crucial to ensure that all children, including those homeschooled, receive necessary protections," stated Dana Nessel, Michigan's attorney general.

Polehanki says a registry will suffice to ensure kids are actually in school. But the attorney general says all children, including homeschoolers, should be "monitored" and "receive necessary protections."

The state does not monitor children from birth to Kindergarten. Some children do not interact with the government or other institutions such as daycare until they start school at four or five years of age. Will the state move to monitor or "register" these children as well, under the guise of protecting them from their parents?

Tom McMillin, a member of the Michigan Department of Education, voiced his concerns during a meeting captured on video. He says in the video that Nessel wants the list so she can have unwarranted entry into families' homes.

The push for the registry came after Nessel announced an investigation into two homes where parents who homeschool their children are accused of abuse. The children had previously been in foster care and were monitored by the state.

When the state failed to protect children, its response was not to fix the foster care system. It was to register and monitor homeschool families.

Lansing should focus on known and documented problems. Homeschoolers are not one of them. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on March 10, 2024 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/31788](https://michcapcon.com/31788).



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Michigan's renewable energy report card

Even by the most optimistic green-energy standards, our state doesn't make the grade

BY DR. MICHAEL E. HEBERLING

Michigan is making big wagers while playing a very weak hand in the renewable energy game. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer last year signed legislation making Michigan one of the 23 states that will attempt to achieve a net-zero carbon dioxide emission goal through legislative fiat.

But Michigan's hope to join the 100% clean energy club, with Nirvana scheduled to begin in 2040, ignores realities of the state's natural environment. We can see how unrealistic the goal is by comparing Michigan's carbon neutrality baseline with that of California, the state that has gone furthest in its energy transition.

The Golden State set its 100% renewable goal in 2018, with a target date of 2045. That at least gives the state 27 years to prepare, as opposed to Michigan's far more aggressive 17-year deadline.

In 2022, according to the Energy Information Administration, 49% of California's in-state energy generation came from renewable energy—mostly solar, wind, and geothermal. That sounds impressive, but the figure doesn't include the rapidly growing percentage of power California imports from out of state — and it is notable that the state already has the highest average retail electricity prices in the lower 48. In Michigan, renewables — mostly wind and biomass — supplied a mere 12% of the state's energy needs.

While California has a massive head start, the real issue going forward is the potential for growth among the five leading types of renewable energy: geothermal, solar, hydro, biomass and wind. How does Michigan measure up?

Geothermal: Grade: F

This requires a heat source near the surface to power the generators. The top geothermal energy states are all in the West: California, Nevada, Utah, Hawaii, and Oregon. Since Michigan does not currently have any volcanoes, lava, or geysers near the surface, the potential for any large-scale geothermal electricity generation by 2040 is remote.

Solar: Grade: F

While all states have an average of 12 hours of daylight (nine hours in December and 15 in June), the critical issue is the number of cloudy days per year. The states with the fewest cloudy days are, not surprisingly, in the Southwest: California, New Mexico, Arizona, Texas and Nevada. In contrast, Michigan is the seventh-cloudiest state in the country.

"No matter where you live in Michigan," explained the Farmer's Almanac last September, "you're only likely to see between 65 and 75 clear days each year." Potential snow cover on solar panels only exacerbates this poor condition. "In 2022, utility-scale ... solar installations generated less than 1% of Michigan's ... electricity."

Hydro: Grade: F

The best states for hydroelectric dams have big rivers and mountains. The top five hydro states are Washington, Oregon, New York, California and Alabama. Two-thirds of Washington's entire electricity production comes from hydro. Michigan is a relatively flat state without any large rivers. This helps to explain why only 1% of Michigan's electricity comes from hydro.

Biomass: Grade: D

If the goal is to have carbon-free energy, is there much difference between burning old

plant material (coal) or new plant material (wood) to generate electricity? There's an ongoing debate over whether biomass can reasonably count as carbon neutral. Despite that debate, strictly limited types of biomass, which currently provide 2% of Michigan's electricity, were allowed as a "renewable energy resource" in Michigan's recently passed net-zero energy bill.

Wind: Grade: D

How do you minimize the unreliability of an unreliable energy source like wind? You place your wind turbines in America's "Wind Belt" (the Great Plains). In Iowa, 58% of electricity production comes from wind. For Kansas, the percentage is 43%, for Oklahoma 35%, for North Dakota 31%, and for Nebraska 24%. While Great Plains states are excellent locations for wind power, Michigan's location is average at best. Only portions of the Thumb are above average.

It is very hard to get straight answers about Michigan's wind power. The cost of wind-powered electricity is usually buried in the total cost of electricity from all sources. The state also fudges the question of how much electricity wind produces by citing "Wind Energy Installed Capacity," which is the amount of electricity that could be generated in optimal wind conditions. Michigan does not have those conditions. The state's Wind Energy Installed Capacity (megawatts hours) is 3,231K MWh, compared to 3,519K MWh for Nebraska. While Nebraska has 8% more capacity, it outproduces Michigan by 43% (12,477K MWh vs. 8,701K MWh) in wind-generated electricity because of its better location.

Carbon Sequestration: Grade: A

Michigan is already doing its part in the

War on Carbon. Michigan has 20 million acres of forests (half of the state). Through photosynthesis, Michigan trees remove 300 million tons of carbon dioxide each year. That means Michigan's forests removed five times more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than Michigan's electric power industry emitted into the atmosphere (58 million tons).

While Michigan has serious natural disadvantages in its carbon neutrality effort, it is more than keeping pace with other states in driving up energy costs. Politicians here mandated in 2021 that 15% of the state's electricity must come from unreliable and expensive renewable energy.

Ramping up this mandate to 60% renewables by 2035 and 100% clean energy by 2040 will cause utility bills to skyrocket. To pursue such an unrealistic goal is a fool's errand, and those politicians who support this are either disingenuous or naïve.

These mandates are eroding the state's energy grid and hurting low-income consumers. If Iowa, Washington and California are blessed with abundant renewable energy, we should wish them well in their quest to reduce carbon emissions. But when a state's renewable energy cupboard is bare, as Michigan's is, it only makes sense to revisit the use of natural gas and nuclear power to generate electricity. ■

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If you seek a pleasant peninsula, U-Haul will take you to Florida

Growing Michigan Together Council did not seek ideas for growing Michigan

BY MICHAEL D. LAFAIVE

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer created the Growing Michigan Together Council last summer. It was charged with recommending reforms to grow Michigan's population.

Populations rise and fall across states over time. There are only a few factors that impact the rate of change of a state's population, but inbound migration from other states is a big one. For a number of reasons, people choose to move to or from particular states. Michigan's population has been, at best, stagnant when it comes to this type of migration.

Consider some interesting statistics from residential mover U-Haul. In 2023, U-Haul clients' top destinations among the 48 contiguous states were Texas, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Four out of the five top population growth states listed in annual Census Bureau data released last December also appear in U-Haul's list of the top destination states for its customers. There appears to be a connection between state-to-state migration patterns and overall population growth.

Michigan-specific price data from U-Haul sheds light on the revealed preferences of Michigan movers. According to the firm's website, it would cost 57% more to rent a 26-foot truck to move from Grand Rapids or Lansing to Miami than to move from Miami to either city. For a Detroit-to-Miami move with the same pick-up day, the price difference is 37%. There are wide gulfs in price between other Michigan and Florida cities, too. These differences demonstrate the higher demand from Michigan citizens trying to get out of Dodge.

States like South Carolina and Florida have long attracted in-migrants from states like Michigan. The Anderson Economic Group used Internal Revenue Service data to calculate that from mid-2020 to mid-2021 Florida was "the most notable recipient of Michigan migration, netting 7,800 former tax-paying residents" who took their \$1.4 billion in taxable income to the Sunshine State.

Top Migration States as a Percent of Growth, 2022-2023

South Carolina	1.7%
Florida	1.6%
Texas	1.6%
Idaho	1.3%
North Carolina	1.3%

www.mackinac.org

Source: United States Census Bureau

Only days after Whitmer's population council released its report last December, the Census Bureau announced that Michigan had microscopic population gains of 0.04% from 2022 to 2023. South Carolina and Florida saw increases of 1.6% and 1.7%, respectively, more than 40 times the growth rate of the Great Lake State.

What drives population growth and interstate migration? Why are Southern and Southeast states popular destinations while Michigan is not? The governor could have asked the council to look into this. Instead, her executive order assumed certain causes drive population growth. For instance, Whitmer's order told the council to find ways to improve educational outcomes, attract talent and build infrastructure, which are simply assumed to have a positive impact on population growth. It's as if the governor already knew which solutions she wanted the council to identify.

The order also mandated the council to "define the gap between Michigan and the best performing states on the goals

identified by the Council." But those goals were effectively pre-determined to fall within the parameters mandated in the order, which covered jobs, infrastructure and education.

The council did seek information about Michigan's performance gaps on different measures compared to other states. The consultant, Guidehouse, identified six peer states. Despite listing lots of data to help choose these particular states (Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina and Washington), Guidehouse's selection criteria seem inconsistent, and the consultant warned in its own publication, "While this report attempts to identify patterns, it does not imply a causal relationship between state and local revenues and between state and local revenues and expenditures and population growth rates."

In other words, the governor's executive order dictated limitations on finding what works to grow a population. The council then turned to a consultant to help find states with which Michigan had performance gaps that allegedly needed to be filled by this or that government expenditure or program. This is the wrong way to go about finding solutions to Michigan's stagnant population growth.

That is why the Mackinac Center turns to academic scholarship. It is produced by college professors and others who work to isolate policy choices that drive population growth or interstate migration. Policies that promote economic liberty facilitate economic growth, drive interstate migration and spur population growth, a sweep of the academic literature indicates. These policies can include reasonable tax burdens and structures, effective labor market regulation and quality public services.

There is more than ample evidence about where people choose to move and why. Instead of wasting millions of dollars on a new council, Whitmer could simply have turned to academic explanations. Instead, she wasted millions on a report with conclusions that seemed as though they were largely pre-determined, offering little more than a call to bigger and more expensive government. ■

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In Ottawa County, vote against DEI puts Latina commissioner in recall jeopardy

*Undergirding the recall effort:
Opponents see Lucy Ebel as vulnerable*

BY CHRISTINE JACQUES

Ottawa County's first Latina county commissioner, Lucy Ebel, faces a recall vote in May. Among her alleged misdeeds, according to critics: Voting to abolish the county's Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Ebel's relatively slim margin of victory in the November 2022 election makes her position more precarious.

Diversity advocates should be "jumping up and down at the election of a Hispanic woman to the County Board," Ebel told Michigan Capitol Confidential.

Instead, they are seeking to remove Ebel from her seat.

Ebel is facing a special recall election May 7, 2024, in Ottawa County after a successful petition effort, which gathered about 2,600 valid signatures.

Ebel is being targeted for removal by Ottawa Integrity PAC and the Democratic Party through donations to ActBlue. This owes in part to her vote in January 2023 as commissioner to abolish Ottawa County's Department of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

As The Holland Sentinel wrote in October 2023:

Since taking office, Ebel and other Ottawa Impact-linked commissioners have pushed through a series of controversial decisions, including firing the previous county administrator and former corporation counsel, attempting to demote the county health officer and eliminating the county's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office.

The website of Ottawa Integrity says that Ebel is seen as the most vulnerable of the group of new commissioners elected in 2022.

The Department of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Ottawa County was established at the end of 2018 by then-County Administrator Al Vanderberg. He described meetings he had with employers in Ottawa County as an impetus to the

creation of the department.

In an April 2023 article published by Simply American, Vanderberg said that large employers threatened to relocate elsewhere unless Ottawa County became more welcoming to ethnic minorities, accusing the residents of Ottawa County of prejudicial behavior that was scaring away the best talent.

The Department of DEI would address that perception, Vanderberg said.

In the 2022 election, a group of outsiders named Ottawa Impact, including Ebel, won a 6-5 majority on the board. In January 2023, the new board's first order of business was to eliminate the DEI department and terminate its director.

Why make that move?

"As I knocked on doors, and I knocked on many doors, the voters spoke loudly," Ebel told Michigan Advance in January 2023. "I heard stories of people applying for jobs and they told them they couldn't get hired because they're white, and that is hiring based on color and that is not equality. I saw a lot of tears, and they told me, 'If you win, we want you to keep your promise,' and I made a promise to the voters, and now I'm honoring their votes and desires."

Ebel won in November 2022 by six percentage points. Her opponent in that election, Joe Spaulding, led the signature-gathering effort for Ebel's recall.

"Why Aren't We Recalling all Impact Commissioners?" the Ottawa Integrity website asks.

The answer: "The margin for success. Recalls are expensive and extremely time-consuming. Successful recalls are rare and only work in districts where the original vote margin was close enough to indicate the possibility of flipping the seat. Ebel won her seat by just 578 votes." ■

The original version of this story was posted online on March 6, 2024 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/31779](https://michcapcon.com/31779).



Photo by Adobe Stock

Whitmer supports opt-out system for state park passes

Only 36% of vehicle owners in Michigan buy \$10 park passes. So lawmakers want to make it mandatory.

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signaled her support in her 2025 budget recommendations for legislation that would automatically charge vehicle owners a fee for entry to state parks. CapCon previously reported on House Bill 5428, which would automatically charge vehicle owners a \$10 entry fee for the recreation passport, regardless of whether they visit state parks. Vehicle owners who do not want to pay the fee would have to request a refund from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, within 30 days of the charge.

The budget recommendation has this to say about the fee:

The Michigan Recreation Passport program has played a crucial role in funding and maintaining state parks, recreation areas, and boating access sites. Residents opt into the program during vehicle

registration, paying an annual fee that allows them access to these natural treasures. While the program has achieved notable success, the opt-in structure presents some challenges.

The recommendation cites a backlog of maintenance projects in state parks. It also notes that only 36% of vehicle owners opt to buy the pass.

There are 8.6 million registered vehicles in Michigan, according to the Michigan Department of Transportation. If all registered vehicles were automatically charged \$10 for a recreation pass, the state-mandated fee would collect approximately \$86 million from taxpayers.

The 2024 executive budget shows the state is expected to collect \$14.5 million from the recreation pass this year under the current opt-in law. It collected \$10.2 million in 2019 and \$13.4 million in 2021. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on February 28, 2024 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/31767](https://michcapcon.com/31767).

Bill would give Michigan public schools veto power over competitors

Some school districts tear down buildings rather than sell to would-be competition

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Charter schools and other alternative educators could have a more difficult time securing buildings if Michigan enacts House Bill 5025, which was the subject of a Feb. 27 hearing of the House Education Committee.

The bill would repeal Public Act 98 of 2017, the educational instruction access act. That measure prohibits school districts from using deed restrictions to control what happens to buildings they sell.

Lawmakers enacted it after the Detroit school district used a restriction in an attempt to keep a charter school, Detroit Achievement Academy, from purchasing one of its vacant buildings. The academy prevailed and moved to the building, but only after a significant political effort.

Detroit Achievement Academy founder Kyle Smitley told legislators at a Feb. 27 hearing that in 2018, her school desperately needed a larger building. She found a 100-year-old building, once sold by Detroit Public Schools, that had sat empty and in disrepair for 10 years. A developer that bought the building wanted to sell it to Smitley's charter school, but a deed restriction placed by the district stood in the way.

Smitley asked the Mackinac Center for Public Policy for help. The Center approached legislators with information about charter schools and the effect of the law. The Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder stripped districts of their ability to use deed restrictions.

The effort to repeal the current law is led by Rep. Noah Arbit, D-West Bloomfield.

Speaking at the hearing, Arbit said the

current law is essentially the educational equivalent of banning non-competes. Arbit also shared that districts are choosing to demolish buildings instead of selling them to competitors. Rather than sell buildings and bring in more money to the district, public school officials are tearing down buildings so that charter or parochial schools can't purchase them.

The current law does not force districts to tear down buildings, Michael Van Beek of the Mackinac Center argued in a recent commentary. Districts, he said, "tear down buildings to prevent local residents from having the option of sending their children to an alternative provider."

Smitley told CapCon that repealing the access law will increase neighborhood blight.

"It will allow school districts to place restrictions on buildings that will have

the effect of forcing them to sit empty, rotting," Smitley said in an email.

She contrasted that with her school's neighborhood, which has seen increased home values. The charter school won second place for the Yass Prize, which came with a \$500,000 award.

"Communities across Michigan shouldn't be punished because the West Bloomfield School District is misleading the public into thinking the choice is between demolishing a school and repealing a state law," Smitley said.

Arbit did not respond to an email seeking comment. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on March 1, 2024 and is available at MichCapCon.com/31778.

UAW invests \$40M to expand footprint in South

Autoworkers union looks beyond Big Three for growth

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

The UAW will spend \$40 million through 2026 in an effort to double its membership, "particularly in the South," the union announced this week.

"In the next few years, the electric vehicle battery industry is slated to add tens of

thousands of jobs across the country, and new standards are being set as the industry comes online," the union said. "These jobs will supplement, and in some cases largely replace, existing powertrain jobs in the auto industry."

Most estimates find that a switch to

electric vehicles will cost one-third of current auto jobs, as EVs are easier to make than gas-powered vehicles. Even if Michigan captured every electric vehicle job in America, the transition would ensure a smaller auto industry.

"Non-union autoworkers are being left behind," reads the UAW's recruiting website. "Are you ready to stand up and win your fair share?"

The pitch continues: "It's time for non-union autoworkers to join the UAW and win economic justice at Toyota, Honda, Hyundai, Tesla, Nissan, BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Subaru, Volkswagen, Mazda, Rivian, Lucid, Volvo and beyond."

The site speaks of the "30-50-70" approach to come at targeted automakers.

"When 30% of us sign cards in our plant, our Volunteer Organizing Committee will publicly announce that we are forming a union," the recruiting site explains. "When 50% have signed cards, we will hold a big rally with our co-workers, UAW President

Shawn Fain, community leaders, and other allies showing that a majority of us are willing to fight for our union. When 70% of us have signed cards, and we have a (Volunteer Organizing Committee) from every department, line and shift, we will demand the company recognize our union – or take it to a vote, and win."

Last year, Fain led the UAW to a targeted strike against all Big Three automakers: Ford, General Motors and Stellantis. Ford Motor Co. CEO Jim Farley said this month that the strike has Ford rethinking its manufacturing footprint and how many of its jobs would go to UAW members.

Of the UAW's 146,000 members who are automakers, 57,000 work for Ford, the most of any company. Yet Ford's most profitable plants, including the Kentucky Truck Plant, were targeted during the strike. ■

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Photo by Craig Adderley - Pexels

Why do West Bloomfield schools fear competition?

Oakland County school district has drifted from its A+ ways



Photo by Adobe Stock

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

In admitting it would rather tear down a 104-year-old building than sell it to a possible competitor, the West Bloomfield School District's honesty was refreshing.

The neighborly spirit? Not so much.

Carol Finkelstein, treasurer of the West Bloomfield School Board, said the quiet part out loud when testifying in favor of House Bill 5025, which would repeal a Snyder-era law that denies school districts the right to put restrictive covenants in their deeds. These legal instruments prevent future owners from using a former school building to house another school.

"Roosevelt is a beautiful 104-year-old historic building that is facing demolition because we simply cannot afford to have it become a competing school," Finkelstein said of Roosevelt Elementary School in Keego Harbor, the building at issue.

Despite winning many a school-choice battle with rival districts, West Bloomfield

fears charter school competition so much it would demolish literal beauty and history to prevent it.

My journey with West Bloomfield School District began when I became a student in 1999.

My family had just moved from Inkster to Detroit's west side. We were too late in arriving to take placement exams for Cass, King or Renaissance High Schools. And the neighborhood option, Detroit Mumford, was a non-starter.

As I pondered a return to John Glenn High School in Westland, my dad came home with another idea, many miles north: West Bloomfield High School. Dad was studying for his master's degree and took classes at Wayne State with a man named George Fornero, who was the principal of West Bloomfield High.

My sister and I didn't know anything about the school, other than it sounded rich. Perhaps too rich for our blood. At first glance it looked like an airport, and inside

it felt like the school on Clueless.

But soon it became home.

Commuting from Detroit every day, sometimes requiring multiple round trips, was not easy. What awaited us at the end of those drives made it worthwhile: the education of a lifetime.

West Bloomfield's superintendent at the time, the late Seymour Gretchko, was a three-decade veteran of Detroit Public Schools. He knew what we were fleeing, and he knew what West Bloomfield had to offer. He built it into the A+ school district it was at the turn of the century.

Gretchko's biography reads: "He is dearly remembered for moving West Bloomfield School District from a mediocre school district to one of the best in the country. Dr. Gretchko was soft hearted, compassionate, demanding of excellence and a leader of unparalleled competence."

His motto: "If I must err, let me err on the side of the child."

Years later, I would learn from a former

teacher the instruction Gretchko gave regarding school-choice students: Treat them like any other kid. Because they are.

In my three years at West Bloomfield and my sister's four years, we never encountered anything but teachers, coaches and leaders who wanted to help.

When unrivaled competence is your calling card, what do you have to fear from competition? And if competition is good for Detroit schools and Pontiac schools, why is it bad for West Bloomfield schools?

These days, with one-third of students coming from other districts, West Bloomfield is more reliant on school choice than ever.

The district should stop talking about tearing down buildings. And get back to erring on the side of the child. ■

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Degrowth and decarbonization will harm people

Michigan is caught up in an energy transition frenzy, and 10 million people stand to suffer

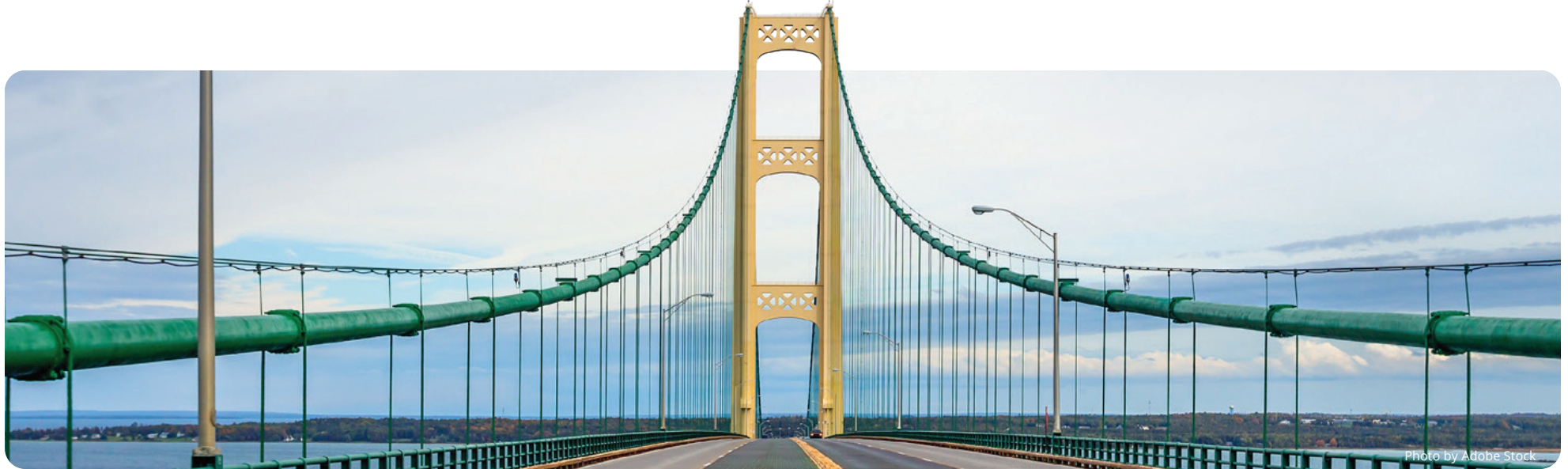


Photo by Adobe Stock

BY JASON HAYES

Michigan is caught up in a transition frenzy, and its people will suffer as a result.

Elected officials, utility executives, regulators, and environmental groups across the state are advocating decarbonization.

This entails a move from the reliable and affordable energy we obtain from fossil fuels to intermittent forms of energy, such as wind and solar. Michiganders are told we must transition our transportation sector from reliable and safe internal combustion engine vehicles to more expensive and unreliable electric vehicles.

“Degrowth” is an unknown concept to many.

But it increasingly influences other, better-known, ideas such as climate change, decarbonization and the energy transition.

“From a degrowth perspective,” explains an Earth.org article, “the current fixation on economic growth is inconsistent with the goal of reducing carbon emissions, resource use and social inequity. Instead, degrowth advocates call for an ‘equitable downscaling of throughput, with a concomitant securing of wellbeing.’”

But the claim that degrowth will necessarily lead to a “concomitant securing of wellbeing” is questionable. At best.

To the average Michigander (or

American), who will suffer through increasing costs and decreasing reliability for electricity service, as well as higher costs and range anxiety while traveling, it’s reasonable to assume that personal well-being would be better served with reliable and affordable vehicles and energy.

Extreme ideas typify the burgeoning link between degrowth and the decarbonization/climate mitigation push. For example, “Exhaled human breath can contain small, elevated concentrations of methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O), both of which contribute to global warming,” noted Nicholas Cowan, an atmospheric physicist at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. “We would urge caution in the assumption that emissions from humans are negligible,” he added.

Breathing is being characterized as dangerous for the climate, but having kids is, too, according to Travis Rieder, a research scholar at the Berman Institute of Bioethics.

In a 2017 NBC Think piece Rieder argued that “a child is a major contributor to climate change.” This led to Rieder’s conclusion that “everyone on Earth ought to consider having fewer children.” The provocative headline of Rieder’s article takes that suggestion even further. “Science proves kids are bad for Earth. Morality suggests we stop having them.”

Breathing and procreating harm the climate, and now, even dying is causing

climate concerns. The Huffington Post worriedly asks, “What are the environmental impacts of our deaths — and how can we reduce them?” HuffPo writers complain that standard burial and cremation techniques mean that now “death has a climate change problem.”

The Mackinac Center study, “Conflict to Cooperation,” described how differing worldviews play into this situation.

On the one hand, notable conservationists like Teddy Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot recognized humans as a part of the natural environment. They focused on a mix of stewardship and responsibility, a balance that allows for the protection and what they called the “wise use” of natural resources.

On the other hand, ideas like degrowth are based in a preservationist worldview.

This perception often views humans as separate from the natural environment and believes our activities are inherently intrusive and destructive. Extreme versions of that worldview go so far as to consider humans an infestation on the earth and advocate for our removal.

This skewed perception of humanity’s place in the natural environment was amply demonstrated in David Graber’s 1989 review of Bill McKibben’s book “The End of Nature.”

Graber argued, “It is too late. Global warming is already entrained; we are in for the ride, ready or not, and so are our

innocent fellow travelers. Of course, as bad as things are, we always can make them worse. Nature may be finished, but there is still our own goose to cook. ...We contaminated the planet with atmospheric hydrocarbons and metals beginning with the Industrial Revolution. The atomic age wrote another indelible signature in radioisotopes on every bit of Earth’s surface.”

Graber’s thought process is unmistakable: humans destroy. He longs to implement a decisive corrective measure.

Whether proponents realize it or not, the degrowth mindset and the narrative that “humans destroy” underlie actions like the energy legislation that requires us to phase out fossil fuels.

These fuels have driven significant improvements in human health and well-being since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The proposed replacements do not protect the environment or provide the reliable energy we need to power our society.

Despite the clear benefits of fossil fuels, green activists demand that we “leave (them) in the ground and learn to live without them.”

That’s the language of degrowth. Learn to notice it when you hear it. ■

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Nessel says her energy advocacy saved \$3B in 2023

Attorney General neglects to mention her push to shut down the Line 5 pipeline

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Attorney General Dana Nessel this month issued a press release saying she saved Michiganders \$3 billion in energy costs last year.

Nessel says her energy advocacy was responsible.

Her announcement, which came on the heels of Consumer Protection Week, reads, in part:

It should be noted that the complaint area Gasoline/Fuel/Energy, which previously occupied the number 3 spot on the top 10 complaints list with 1,015 complaints in 2022, fell to number 7 in 2023 with only 591 complaints. This fall can inarguably be attributed to

Nessel's energy advocacy, which saw her intervening in utility cases before the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). The result was Michigan consumers saving nearly \$3 billion in energy costs.

Michael Van Beek, director of research at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, questions how Nessel's energy advocacy led to fewer complaints.

"That \$3 billion might surprise consumers who are still paying more year-over-year for electricity and other energy needs," Van Beek told CapCon.

Michigan residents, who already pay some of the highest energy rates in the nation, will soon face steep increases, says Jason Hayes, the

Mackinac Center's director of energy and environmental policy.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's green energy plan for Michigan is self-destructive, Hayes wrote in an article published by National Review.

If Whitmer gets her wish to transition the state to wind and solar, Hayes said, Michiganders will pay an additional \$206 billion for energy over the next 25 years.

"That would translate to an extra \$1,500 in energy costs per household per year," Hayes wrote. This, he noted, would come under a more optimistic version of the governor's plan.

Under a more likely outcome, Hayes wrote, Michiganders will face an additional cost of \$386 billion by 2050.

Nessel has supported the move away

from natural gas and nuclear in favor of solar and wind power. One high-profile effort is her work to shut down Line 5, a pipeline that transports petroleum into the state, as CapCon has reported.

Line 5, which runs under the Great Lakes, provides the equivalent of 540,000 barrels of fuel daily. Much of it fuels the Lower Peninsula.

As a state website explains: "Some of the natural gas liquids are refined into propane and used in the Upper Peninsula, while other products are routed for processing at oil refineries in Detroit and Toledo, Ohio. The remainder crosses the St. Clair River for processing in Sarnia." ■

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Slippery slope: State board members warn against homeschool registry

Two members offer pushback at plan, warn of unstated dangers



Photo by Shutterstock

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Two State Board of Education members spoke out recently against the Michigan Department of Education's plans to seek a homeschool registry.

"This whole homeschool thing is quite disturbing," said one of the trustees, Tom McMillin, a Republican, at the board's Feb. 13 meeting. An eight-minute clip of the meeting, posted on X by

@WallStreetApes, went viral.

McMillin believes the homeschool registry discussion has been disingenuous. He believes the registry is not the end game, but the beginning of a regulatory regime. At best it will check and approve homeschool curriculums. At

worst, it will seek

"unwarranted home entry" into homeschool families' homes, and failing that, will "barge in and bust the door down," he said

Michael Rice, the state superintendent, reiterated his January letter to lawmakers at the board table.

"There is a history in Michigan and across the nation that some students get no education," Rice said. In the letter and

at the table, Rice offered no statistics as to the scope of the problem, whether nationally or in Michigan.

Rice said every child in Michigan needs an "identified educational setting."

"It's going to go beyond registration," McMillin said. "They're either going to want to know exactly what's being taught or want entry into the house. ... Registration is the next step and is not the only step."

Molly Macek, education policy director at the Mackinac Center, agreed.

"A simple list of names with their form of schooling will do nothing to protect kids," Macek told CapCon. "If safety is the goal, then a registry is just the first step in regulating homeschooling. Whether these regulations include curriculum verifications, home checks or other requirements, they restrict the parents' right to 'determine and direct the care, teaching, and education of their children.'"

That language is from section 10 of the Revised School Code.

"Simply put, a homeschool registry and any additional regulations would restrict families' educational freedom," Macek said. "When parents choose to remove their kids from government schools to be educated outside the system, these kids are no longer under the government's care."

Nikki Snyder, also a Republican, echoed McMillin's concerns.

Snyder called it oppressive to ask students and families who left the Michigan education system to register with the state.

"Students have a constitutional right and reasonable expectation of privacy," Snyder added.

Snyder echoed McMillin in calling the early attempts at a registry disingenuous, calling the registry the beginning of an attempt to "audit the educational choices of every family in this state." ■

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Feds fund 98% of the Office of Global Michigan

Money and ideas driving refugee resettlement in Michigan come from Washington

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

The Office of Global Michigan, which was created to facilitate the resettlement of refugees to Michigan, is a federally funded venture. In 2024, federal money covers 98% of the office's budget.

In the 2024 budget, Michigan lawmakers approved \$39,127,500 for the Office of Global Michigan. Only \$758,000 of that came from the general fund.

The lion's share, 98%, or \$38,369,000, came from the federal government.

Michigan is a top-10 state for refugees, according to the Office of Global Michigan. The state brought in about 7,500 refugees last year, according to the office's annual report. A plurality of them, about 3,500, hailed from Ukraine and were displaced by Russia's invasion.



Photo by Shutterstock

Michigan has chosen to follow the private sponsorship model of refugee resettlement. That, too, came from the federal government.

Earlier this week the Office of Global Michigan published its inaugural monthly newsletter. Under accomplishments, one section reads:

Private sponsorship model:

Demonstrated state leadership for the federal private sponsorship model, providing additional state supports for Welcome Corp and other federal sponsorship programs.

The Welcome Corps are the people who open their homes to refugees. But the responsibilities don't end there. Sponsors are expected to help refugee children find schooling and help the adults find housing and jobs.

"Sponsors are expected to provide support to newly arrived refugees for 90 days through acts such as greeting refugee newcomers at the airport, securing and preparing initial housing, enrolling children in school and helping adults find employment," the Office of Global Michigan said when asking for Welcome Corps volunteers.

"You already have the most important skill you need to succeed," the Welcome Corps website assures would-be volunteers. "an understanding of daily life in your community and a desire to lend a hand." ■

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After UAW strike, Ford promises equal and opposite reaction

2023 strike was a watershed moment, automaker says



Photo by MCPP

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

Five months after the start of a strike that UAW President Shawn Fain said would cause reputational damage to Ford Motor Co., the Dearborn automaker's future in Michigan appears shaky.

Last week at an auto conference in New York City, Ford CEO Jim Farley teased the someday arrival of a small, more affordable electric vehicle. But it's not clear the opportunity to build it will come to Michigan, or anywhere in America.

"We have to think carefully about our (manufacturing) footprint," Farley told the conference, as quoted by an Associated Press account.

"Our reliance on the UAW turned out to be we were the first truck plant to be shut down," Farley added. "Really our relationship has changed. It's been a watershed moment for the company.

Does this have business impact? Yes."

Ford has more UAW members than any American automaker, with 57,000.

While Farley has described this as the "right kind of cost," Ford also starts the year at a \$7 billion cost disadvantage relative to its competitors.

During the strike, UAW President Fain pushed for a 32-hour workweek. Since the strike ended, Fain has spoken of the need for a general strike in America.

Meanwhile, Ford is thinking about the future of its labor force.

It's a future where Michigan does not necessarily get the benefit of hometown loyalty. In 2021, Ford bypassed Michigan to create 11,000 new EV jobs in Kentucky and Tennessee. ■

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Managing Editor: James David Dickson **Designer:** Mick McArt, Hannah Golab

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Michigan bill would exempt EV chargers from property tax

Exemption tries to boost EV demand, even though the chargers would be installed 'with or without' it

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

A bill in the Michigan House would make electric vehicle chargers exempt from

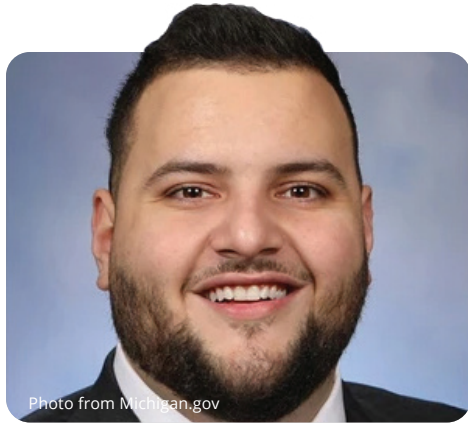


Photo from Michigan.gov

property taxes, but the House Fiscal Agency says most EV chargers would be installed even without such a selective benefit.

On Wednesday the House Tax Policy Committee considered but did not vote on House Bill 4708. The bill was submitted by first-term Rep. Alabas Farhat, D-Dearborn.

“For taxes levied after December 31, 2023, all real and personal property constituting a qualified charging station is exempt from the collection of taxes under this act,” the 21-page bill reads.

Property tax assessors would be forbidden from factoring in “any increase in true cash value that is a result of installing,

replacing, or repairing 1 or more qualified charging stations in determining the true cash value of property for assessment purposes until the property is sold.”

Electric vehicles have benefited from favoritism and attempts at favoritism in both Lansing and Washington. Right now most EVs are eligible for a \$7,500 federal rebate; in the 2025 Michigan budget, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has proposed a rebate of up to \$2,500 for buyers of new EVs.

The federal government has also subsidized charging stations nationwide; Michigan was given \$110 million to install just 127 chargers through 2026.

Though news headlines have touted public charging stations and electrified

roads, the U.S. Department of Energy admits that if EV adoption does take off, most owners will want home chargers. If Michigan does indeed get the 2 million EVs on the road that Whitmer wants by 2030, 95% of the 1.6 million chargers needed would be privately owned.

And it's those chargers House Bill 4708 would exempt from property taxes. The House Fiscal Agency estimates the exemption would cost Michigan governments less than \$1 million annually, “due to the relatively low number of EV chargers statewide.” ■

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Senate bills would ban sanctuary cities in Michigan

Senator says EV transition is good business, but admits the driver is government regulation

BY JAMES DAVID DICKSON

The Michigan Senate in October approved a bill to create a MichiganWorks-style office for autoworkers, construction workers, and energy workers displaced by the transition to electric vehicles, solar power and wind power. Senate Bill 519 passed 20-18 on a party-line vote.

Supporters of the bill argue that the electric vehicle transition is market-driven. Critics note the role of government regulators in disfavoring the internal combustion engine. Various government programs give low-interest loans to EV battery projects, subsidize EV buyers, or underwrite charging resources.

Before the vote, senators debated on the Senate floor.

“Anybody who is trying to convince you that it is a mandated transition is lying,” Sen. Mallory McMorrow, D-Royal Oak, said to close her speech.

But McMorrow started her remarks by admitting the role of governments in

the transition.

“The reality is that more than a dozen countries around the world, including the population of most industrialized nations, have already determined that they will be phasing out internal combustion vehicles within a few years. Maybe within the next five years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years.” McMorrow said.

“If we do not position our state, our workers and our signature industry to respond to this transition that we are living in, we will get left behind,” McMorrow added. “Because if every country has determined that they will no longer be allowing the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles, what prosperity exists if there are no customers left to sell your products to?”

McMorrow did not respond to a request for comment.

Jason Hayes, the Mackinac Center's director of energy and environmental policy, spotted a contradiction in McMorrow's speech.

“McMorrow's claims that the transition to EVs is market-driven are, at best, specious,” Hayes told CapCon. “Auto manufacturers are openly admitting that EV demand is dropping rapidly. People just don't want them at any price.”

“Ford dropped the price of its F-150 Lightning by \$10,000 in July and then slowed production of that vehicle in October. Mary Barra at GM stated in a third-quarter earnings call this week that lagging demand is forcing them to drop their targets to build 100,000 EVs in the second half of 2023 and 400,000 in the first half of next year. Media reports about the call indicated that GM can't predict when they'll hit those targets. Even Elon Musk has hinted that growing debt and inflationary pressures could impact Tesla sales.”

The Senate Fiscal Agency analysis operates on the market-driven theory.

“The market is driving a transition away from energy like coal and cars with internal combustion engines to renewable

energies and electric vehicles,” reads an analysis of the bill. “This creates an education and skills gap for workers in the energy and automotive industries. Some people believe that the state should have a plan to help workers and communities transition during this significant industrial shift, and so it has been suggested that the office develop a plan.”

The bill singles out three industries as potential losers in the transition: energy, autos and construction.

If enacted into law, Senate Bill 519 would create the Community and Worker Economic Transition Office within the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity.

The office would have to “develop a community and worker economic transition plan,” due on Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's desk by Dec. 31, 2025, one year to the day before her last day in office. ■

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