

Flint Schools Get \$50,000 In Federal COVID Aid Per Student To Mostly Keep Classrooms Closed

BY TOM GANTERT

While Flint Community Schools will receive the most federal money in the state on a per-pupil basis to deal with the COVID pandemic, the troubled district has not kept its doors open for in-person learning.

The school district has had less than six months of classroom-based schooling since schools were shut down in March 2020, according to research done by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. In the 2020-21 school year, the district was closed until March 22.

The school district also closed schools in August 2021 because some of its buildings did not have air conditioning. The district also closed schools in what it called “an abundance of caution” after the school shooting in Oxford in November 2021. A school district spokesperson stated that Flint has had in-person classes from the beginning of August 2021 through December 2021.

The school district stated this week (Jan. 19) it is now closed to in-person learning until further notice.

Flint Community Schools will receive \$156 million in federal COVID aid, or

\$49,996 per pupil, by far the most in the state of Michigan on a per-pupil basis. By comparison, Grand Blanc Community Schools is 11 miles from the Flint school district, and it will get \$1,736 per pupil in federal COVID aid.

And Flint Community Schools has left parents in a daze with its constant updates and announcements on whether children will be taught in school or not.

For example, on Jan. 1, the district posted on Facebook that in-person classes would begin Jan. 3 and signed off with, “See you soon, Scholars!” Then on Jan. 2, the superintendent sent out a letter stating the district would be shut down completely on Jan. 3 and Jan. 4, without a remote option, before going virtual on Jan. 5-7.

However, on Jan. 6, the district announced that it would stay virtual for the next week starting on Jan. 10.

On Jan. 13, the district stated it would be virtual until Jan. 24.

And then Jan. 19, the district stated it would be virtual until further notice. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 20, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29463](https://www.michcapcon.com/29463).



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.



Jamie A. Hope is Assistant Managing Editor for Michigan Capitol Confidential. She may be reached at Hope@mackinac.org.

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NEWS BITES

Michigan's Households Pay Nation's 12th Highest Rates For Electricity

Michigan households paid the nation's 12th highest average electricity rates to the state's utilities in 2020, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Michigan's regulated utilities charged an average of 12.21 cents per kilowatt hour (kWh), which is 15% more than the national average retail rate of 10.59 cents. Households in this state paid substantially more than those in the bordering states of Indiana (9.92 cents), Ohio (9.44 cents) and Wisconsin (10.82 cents).

Hawaii led the nation in average electricity rates at 27.55 cents per kWh and Louisiana had the lowest costs at 7.51 cents per kWh.

Teacher Union's Legislative Laundry List Long On Members' Perks But Has Nothing For The Kids

Michigan's largest teachers union joined legislative Democrats and officials from other government employee unions at a Feb. 15 press conference to promote a 34-bill legislative package amending laws concerning government employees and their labor unions.

The package generally expands and enhances many of the often unique perks and privileges state laws grant to unionized public school and other government employees. A press release announced that the proposals were about "restoring organizing, collective bargaining and workers' rights."

After two years of lost learning, closed schools, and children being forced to wear face masks at school, not one proposed law in the 34-bill package addresses the well-being and academic progress of children who are students in unionized schools.

Detroit Schools To Children, Parents: Accept Weekly COVID Saliva Tests Or Stay Home

The Detroit Public Schools Community District has mandated weekly saliva testing of all students for COVID-19. Children whose parents are unwilling

to give consent for this ;have been prohibited from attending in-school classes.

A district Frequently Asked Questions document states, "Any students who do not have consent on file will be subject to the process of transitioning to the Virtual School for the remainder of the year."

"We are asking parents to provide consent for weekly testing," said Chrystal Wilson, spokeswoman for the school district. "However some parents have opted out. Their students will be transitioned to the virtual school. We have approximately 98% of students who have submitted consent forms."

Teacher Claimed Right-To-Work Would Make Workers Powerless, But He's Getting 42% More Since 2014

On Dec. 9, 2012, public school teacher Greg Talberg wrote a letter to the editor of the Detroit Free Press to criticize a right-to-work law that had just passed the state Legislature. The new law made it illegal for employers to require employees to pay union dues as a condition of employment.

Talberg wrote: "Without powerful unions, middle-class workers are powerless to demand fair wages and benefits. In a system driven by greed, the only way to get fair wages is to demand and bargain them collectively; they won't simply be given based on a sense of justice on the part of management."

Talberg is an activist and a teacher at Howell Public Schools who writes op-eds for various websites and has been appointed to an education commission by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. His gross pay as a teacher was \$57,804 in 2014, and it grew to \$81,834 in 2021, up 42% over seven years. The gross pay includes any extra money Talberg made while performing extra duties.

In the years since right-to-work became law here, the number of dues-paying members in the statewide teachers union to which Talberg belongs has plummeted 33%. The Michigan Education Association has lost some 40,000 members since the new law went into effect in 2013. The MEA's statewide membership ranks include teachers, education support staffers and some higher education employees.

Michigan Democratic Party: 'The Client Of The Public Schools Is Not The Parent'

Post on party's Facebook page echoes view of former Virginia Governor

BY TOM GANTERT

Editor's note: After this story was published, the Michigan Democratic Party retracted the post and issued this statement:

"We have deleted a post that ignored the important role parents play—and should play—in Michigan public schools. Parents need to have a say in their children's education, end of story. The post does not reflect the views of Michigan Democrats and should not be misinterpreted as a statement of support from our elected officials or candidates."

The Michigan Democratic Party posted a meme on its Facebook page Saturday, questioning whether parents who send their children to public schools have any right to control what is taught there.

"Not sure where this 'parents-should-control-what-is-taught-in-schools-because-they-are-our-kids' is originating, but parents do have the option to choose to send their kids to a hand-selected private school at their own expense if this is what

they desire," read the post (emphasis in the original).

The post appeared on what is called "The Official Facebook Page of the Michigan Democratic Party." The page states it is under the control of the Michigan Democratic State Central Committee.

The message continued: "The purpose of a public education in a public schools is not to teach kids only what parents want them to be taught. It is to teach them what society needs them to know. The client of the public schools is not the parent, but the entire community, the public" (emphasis in the original).

Michigan law contains language suggesting something different, however, which was pointed out in a user comment posted on the same Facebook page. Stephanie Buikema, an employee of Rockford Public Schools, cited Section 380.10 of the Michigan Revised School Code. It states:

"It is the natural, fundamental right of parents and legal guardians to determine

and direct the care, teaching, and education of their children. The public schools of this state serve the needs of the pupils by cooperating with the pupil's parents and legal guardians to develop the pupil's intellectual capabilities and vocational skills in a safe and positive manner."

"Michigan Democratic Party," Buikema wrote, "you should familiarize yourselves with the document."

The Michigan Democratic Party's Facebook post has similarities to the statement made by former Virginia Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe, who was running for a second nonconsecutive term in 2021. In a campaign debate, he made comments about schools that many political insiders say cost him the election.

"I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach," McAuliffe said. Republican Glenn Youngkin won the election. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 17, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29453](https://michcapcon.com/29453).



Billions In Federal COVID Bucks And Detroit Schools Can't Provide Some Pencils?

The story that teachers pay out-of-pocket for supplies even less plausible than usual

BY TOM GANTERT

Michigan law is clear about the state's duty to pay for basic classroom supplies in public schools. But this does not prevent some voices in the teaching profession and other school interests from repeating complaints that educators must purchase basic supplies out-of-pocket.

In one recent example, an individual claimed in a Facebook forum that her sister, who worked in an inner-city Detroit school, had 36 children in her class and had to beg for pencils. She could only, the individual claimed, scrap together 16.

As previously reported by Michigan Capitol Confidential:

"The Michigan Supreme Court and the Michigan Department of Education have both affirmed that the state constitution mandates that school districts, not school employees, are responsible for providing materials deemed essential for teaching."

"The Michigan Department of Education lists specific examples of what is considered 'essential,' including pencils, paper, crayons, scissors, glue sticks and text books."

In 2018, the Detroit Public Schools Community District reported on its website

what it was spending at businesses that sell school supplies. In one 24-day period in July and August of that year, the district spent \$397,430 at School Specialty Inc., Arrow Office Supply and Office Depot.

The claim that schools can't afford supplies has become far more dubious in the face of epidemic-related state and federal school aid packages. The Detroit Public Schools Community District is receiving an extra \$1.3 billion in federal COVID money. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 8, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29436](https://michcapcon.com/29436).



Michigan Backslides In Moving Company's 2021 Migration Data

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Michigan was the sixth from the bottom in a United Van Lines 2021 report ranking states on the percentage of inbound versus outbound migration. The moving company reports that 57.7% of its Michigan moves were outbound from the state. Only 42.3% were inbound.

In 2020, the inbound/outbound numbers were almost evenly split, which was a change from 2019, when 56.9% of its interstate moves involving Michigan were outbound.

The only states that had an even higher rate of outbound migration last year were

California, Connecticut, New York, Illinois and New Jersey.

The company said that in 2021, one-third (33.6%) of outbound moves from Michigan were due to jobs, while 28% of its customers cited family considerations. On the inbound side, 48% of those moving to Michigan cited family as the reason.

Other reasons customers gave for leaving the state were retirement (26.94%), lifestyle (16.44%), health (5.71%), and cost of living (1.83%). ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 6, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29433.



Parents Request School District's 'Critical Race' Records, Get Bill For \$409,000

BY TOM GANTERT

A group of parents filed a Freedom of Information Act request with Forest Hills Public Schools, seeking certain documents from March 1, 2021, to May 11, 2021. The parents asked for all writings that mentioned "critical race theory," "CRT," "anti-racist," "equity," and several related terms.

School district officials responded that due to the volume of data involved, the local parents would have to pay \$409,899.10 to see the documents.

Kyle Gilbert, a spokesman for Forest Hills Public Schools, said the district has turned over numerous email documents to parents at no charge. But this request, he said, was too voluminous.

"The original FOIA request from May 11, 2021 was composed of eight individual requested items. After investigation, the request generated 440,333 documents and emails and completing the request would have taken an estimated 9,800 hours of staff time. That's nearly five years of staff time and over 4,400 lbs of paper. Even if the entire Forest Hills Public Schools HR department worked on this eight hours a day, five days a week, it would have taken months to fill."

"We worked closely with the requester to cut the request down to what they were

looking for and minimize costs, eventually landing on 1,930 documents and emails. This request still took around a week of staff time and we discounted everything we could."

"To provide some context, between August 1st, 2020 and April 30, 2021 the District received 11 FOIA requests and did not charge for any of them. We do our best to work with requesters in order to provide what they're seeking while keeping costs minimal."

The FOIA request reveals a problem

with the state's open records law, including how it is making it too expensive to acquire public records.

The district provided a breakdown of the original \$409,899 bill. It included the cost of fringe benefits provided to the individual gathering the records, which represented half of the \$18.62 per hour the district spends to keep this person on the payroll.

District officials claimed also that it cost them \$244,540, or 60% of the total amount charged, to separate materials that state

law exempts from disclosure.

The school district did cooperate with the parents to lower costs by narrowing the scope of the request, as Gilbert mentioned above. Stefanie Boone, one of the Forest Hills parents who submitted the FOIA, said they did receive many documents they sought, for with they paid about \$2,000. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 5, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29430.





Monroe Battlefield Group Using Modern Social Justice Framing To Tell Story Of Native American Mistreatment

And millions of tax dollars heading their way

Photo taken by WalterPro, Wikimedia Commons

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Officials of the River Raisin National Battlefield Foundation in Monroe hope the \$100 million park project they've proposed at a site where American soldiers were slaughtered in the War of 1812 will draw as many visitors each year as Gettysburg.

The money will come from both taxpayers and private contributors. The project also includes a \$20 million educational center housed in a former sports complex facility.

To put the \$100 million price in perspective, from 1812, when that war began, until its end in 1815, the U.S. national debt grew from \$45.2 million to \$119.2 million, according to debt.org.

The state of Michigan has already contributed \$6.8 million to the Monroe

project. The federal government will add another \$2 million to \$4 million according to 13 ABC Action News. It is not known whether more state and federal dollars will follow.

The city of Monroe has approved spending nearly \$90,000 in local tax money on architectural plans for the project, according to the Monroe News. The Monroe City Council has not responded to questions Michigan Capitol Confidential emailed about other city spending related to the park.

The battle and massacre took place in 1813 at Frenchtown, which is now the city of Monroe. Almost 1,000 U.S. soldiers were killed or captured by the British and Canadian force and the Native Nation Confederation. The American dead could not be buried due to threats

from Native Americans, according to the foundation's website.

The foundation's website says the education center will teach, among other objectives, how to identify racism and propaganda, in an effort to prevent abuse of power, genocide, and forced assimilation. It will also educate visitors on "confronting humanity in the world today including unchecked power, colonization, refugees, and race-based societies."

Plans for a park include a recreation of Frenchtown with period houses, barns, a trading post, and vineyards from the time of the war.

Comparisons with the Battle of Gettysburg in July of 1863 appear to be a stretch. Coming 50 years after River Raisin, it was bloodiest battle of the

Civil War, and the spot where President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address, which has defined the meaning of that conflict ever since. The American Battlefields Trust reports Gettysburg has received between 1 million and 2 million visitors every year since the 1980s, and the local economy receives \$92 million annually in benefits.

Boosters say they anticipate the River Raisin National Battlefield will draw more than one million visitors annually. It had 239,000 visitors in 2017 according to Crain's Detroit Business.

The park is owned by the National Park Service, which gave it the national battlefield designation in 2011. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 20, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29444.

More People Working In Public Schools Since Claims Of Shortages Began

BY TOM GANTERT

In Michigan, the most recent claims of a statewide teacher shortage can be traced back to the 2016-17 school year. That's when a chorus of public school officials and news media started the narrative there was a shortage of teachers and other positions.

And yet the most recent official figures for overall employment by Michigan

school districts show larger payrolls and fewer students than when the original claims of a shortage started.

From 2016-17 to 2020-21, total employment in Michigan's public schools has increased from 319,829 to 338,078, a 5.7% increase in headcounts over that four-year period. At the same time, enrollment has declined 6.1%, from 1,532,335 students in 2016-17 to 1,437,612 in 2020-21.

The staffing data provided by the state of Michigan includes administrators, teachers, substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, teachers aides and non-instructional positions.

There has been a leveling off of employment in the last few years. Total employment increased to a peak of 348,793 people in 2019-20 and then dropped to 338,078 in 2020-21. The number of

"teachers" tracked by the state of Michigan has increased every year since 2016-17. There were 98,481 teachers in 2016-17 and 110,788 in 2020-21. However, the state's definition of "teacher" includes positions such as counselors, nurses, social workers and therapists. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 1, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29427.



Health News Site Searches For Doctors Who Are ‘Spreading COVID-19 Misinformation’

BY JAMIE A. HOPE
AND TOM GANTERT

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation had almost \$736 million in assets in 2019. For years, the nonprofit giant had a mission of publishing data and information on national health care issues.

Recently, the foundation has spent millions trying to be an arbiter of what is news and what is misinformation in health care. The organization started a news site called Kaiser Health News in 2009. Ten years later, Kaiser Health News teamed up with the left-leaning PolitiFact

of the Poynter Institute to investigate what the two organizations considered questionable claims about health issues.

During the COVID pandemic those fact-checking efforts were generally consistent with the perspectives promoted by national public health officials and Democrats in lockdown states.

Last August, a reporter for Kaiser Health News asked a Michigan licensing agency if it was investigating a cardiologist who appeared on the Joe Rogan podcast to criticize the public health establishment’s protocols for treating COVID-19.

The Kaiser reporter, Victoria Knight, asked the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs if it was investigating Dr. Peter McCullough, a cardiologist who once practiced in Michigan. McCullough has alleged that treatments such as hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin have been purposely suppressed so that people would get the COVID-19 vaccination.

In an August 20, 2021 letter to the department, Knight wrote that she “wanted to ask if you could share any information on whether you have complaints or are

conducting an investigation concerning Dr. Peter McCullough, who has spread misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic/vaccine.”

Knight added that she was contacting officials in all 50 states to see if they had received complaints about doctors or others “spreading COVID-19 misinformation.”

The agency said in reply it was not investigating McCullough. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 15, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29449](https://www.michcapcon.com/29449).

In Obscene Video, Ferris State Professor Tells Students Final Grades Assigned Randomly

BY TOM GANTERT

Editor's note: *Warning. This story contains many profanities. This story was altered to include more context on the video. One video that was online was made private. A longer version of a video had been added to this story that was available as of Jan. 13, 12:40 a.m.*

A Ferris State University professor sent a profanity-laced video to his students, calling them “c--ksuckers” and telling them their grades would be determined before they walked into the class. It was, he said, a system based on a particular Christian doctrine.

The professor said, “There is absolutely nothing you can do, you have no control over your grade. It doesn't matter how f----- hard you work or how good your grades are, my grading system is based on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. I figure if it was good enough for Americans, it was good enough for me.” Later in the longer video, the professor contradicts his profane rant and tells students that all the material they need to get an A grade is available to them online.

The professor's four-plus minute rant was uploaded to YouTube on Jan. 12. Another longer version was uploaded on Jan. 9.

In the video, the professor states some of his obscene monologue was taken from a scene from the TV show *Deadwood*, specifically use of the word “c--ksuckers” and then he inserts his own dialogue to it. He then asks if his adaptation of the scene is considered plagiarism. He then tells the students it could be considered plagiarism and they could be expelled if they committed plagiarism at Ferris State.

Ferris State University released a statement; it said it “is aware of a course video distributed to students, in early January, by a faculty member believed to be Professor Barry Mehler. The

faculty member has been placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an investigation.”

Ferris State's profile page for Mehler lists him as a history professor. It also lists him as the director of the Institute for the Study of Academic Racism and the director of the Shoah Institute.

FSU President David Eisler provided the following statement: “I was shocked and appalled by this video. It is profane, offensive and disturbing and in no way reflects our University or its values.”

In the video, Mehler said: “None of you c--ksuckers are good enough to earn an A in

my class. So I randomly assign grades before the first day of class. I don't want to know s--- about you. I don't even want to know your name. I just look at the number and I assign a grade. That is how predestination works. And don't come f----- complaining to me. Take your complaints to God. He ordained this system, not me.” He then goes on to talk about his attendance policy.

He also said as part of his *Deadwood* adaptation, “I work in a paid f----- union job and no limber-dick c--ksucker of an administrator is going to tell me how to teach my classes. Because I'm a f----- tenured professor.”

He then added this line to the end of what he describes as his soliloquy, which is not taken from *Deadwood*, “So if you want to go to complain to your dean, f--- you, go ahead, I'm retiring at the end of this year and I couldn't give a flying f--- any longer. You people are just vectors of disease to me and I don't want to be anywhere near you. So keep your f----- distance.”

Mehler didn't immediately respond to an email sent to his work email. ■



The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 12, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29447](https://michcapcon.com/29447).

Former Teachers Union Heads, Staff, Parlayed Big MEA Paychecks Into Jumbo Public Pensions

Ex-MEA presidents get state-constitution guaranteed six-figure pensions

BY TOM GANTERT

Julius Maddox was a junior high teacher in the Pontiac public school district in the 1980s. Today, Maddox is collecting an annual Michigan school pension of \$144,276.

The outsized public pension Maddox receives is due to a union scheme he took advantage of decades ago. And it's still available to a certain class of Michigan public school employees.

After those years as a teacher, Maddox served as president of the state's largest teachers union, the Michigan Education

Association, from 1983 to 1991. During his time on the union payroll, Maddox was allowed to claim that he was on leave from his public school employer. He could also use the six-figure MEA salary to generate a higher school pension payout after he retired.

Nothing in state law prohibits public school employees who struck a deal with their local school district in 1996 or earlier from applying the amount they collect in an MEA union salary toward getting a state pension today — a payment guaranteed by the state constitution. After 1996, any deals union officials have with

local school districts still let them claim time served working for the union as applying to their public school pension. But they can no longer apply their union salary to the pension calculation and must use their salary history as a public school employee instead.

The Pontiac school district that employed Maddox stated it no longer has any records on the arrangement it made when he went to work for the union. Maddox was succeeded as MEA president by Lu Battaglieri after a 1999 union election.

Many current and past MEA employees and officials have benefitted from the school

pension credit allowed to them by state law, collecting larger public pensions than they would have had otherwise. Former MEA President Iris Salters is collecting an annual Michigan public school pension of \$190,608. Battaglieri is getting \$117,180 annually. Former MEA President Steve Cook collected a pension of \$103,227 in 2018. Cook died in 2020.

Current MEA President Paula Herbart has a pension scheme set up with her former school district, Fraser Public Schools. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Feb. 2, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29460](https://michcapcon.com/29460).

Michigan Legislature Approves Taxpayer-Funded Subsidies For Affluent Home Buyers

Fiscal agency reports the money will flow to people who likely don't really need it

BY MICHIGAN CAPITOL
CONFIDENTIAL STAFF REPORTS

First-time home buyers could get a state income-tax exemption of up to \$10,000 for couples and \$5,000 for an individual — if they have that much to deposit in a special "first time home buyer" bank account — and they don't even have to really be a "first time" homeowner or buyer.

The so-called "first time home buyer" tax credit is available to anyone who has not bought a home within the past three years and does not currently own a home.

According to nonpartisan fiscal analysts who work for the legislature, the two bills authorizing the tax subsidies — which are now awaiting Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's signature after quickly attracting bipartisan majorities in the House and Senate — appear more designed to help affluent home buyers, not lower or middle income people.

For a limited time only, House Bill 4290 and Senate Bill 145 propose giving individuals who have not purchased a home in the last three years — dubbed "first time home buyers" — a state income tax credit worth up to \$5,000 per year, \$10,000 for joint filers for up to five years in a row. The tax break provision the bill would enact is also set to expire in five years time

The Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency described the legislation's likely effect on future state revenue as follows:

"The temporary nature of the deduction, which would be available only through tax years 2022 to 2026, also could reduce participation, especially for taxpayers that would require a longer period of time to save for a down payment.

"The short window for the deduction suggests that the majority of participants likely would be individuals who could afford, absent the bill, to make meaningful progress on saving for a down payment over a short period of time. Even if longer-term savers participated, the sunset on the deduction would reduce the tax incentive to participate in the program.

"For example, if a taxpayer intended to save for 10 years toward a \$20,000 down payment (roughly 10% of the average 2020 sale price) at \$2,000 per year, the sunset would halve the tax incentive from the program."

The two-bill package included Senate Bill 145, sponsored by Republican Sen. Ken Horn, and House Bill 4290, sponsored by Democratic Rep. Mari Manoogian. The House passed both bills 86-18, the Senate passed both unanimously.

In 2018 the House and Senate sent a version of this proposal to Republican Gov. Rick Snyder, who vetoed it. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 28, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29482.



Union Membership In US Stands At Lowest Level On Record; State Drops To 12th Nationally

BY JARRETT SKORUP

For all the talk about unions making a comeback, the numbers tell a different story. The most recent edition of the federal government's annual labor survey was just released, and it shows that in 2021, union membership declined to an all-time low.

The percentage of workers who are in a union spiked in 2020 because of a steep decline in overall employment, which has largely recovered. Only 10.3% of workers are in unions in 2021, tied for the lowest percentage on record.

Only 6.1% of private sector workers are in a union. By contrast, 33.9% of those who work for a public employer are in a union. Both numbers, however, are near all-time lows. The total number of unionized workers in the country is 14 million, which is almost evenly split between the private sector and the public sector. There were 7,030,000 private sector union members and 6,982,000 public sector workers.

According to the federal survey, 30% of all union members live in just two states

— California and New York — though only 17% of the total U.S. workforce lives there.

For its part, Michigan continued to see a drop in union membership. The birthplace of organized labor became a right-to-work state a decade ago. The law, which grants workers the choice of refraining from joining (or paying fees to) a union, has led to union membership dropping to 13.3% of the workforce in 2021. Michigan is now the 12th most unionized state in the nation, down from the second-most unionized in 2000.

The changing economy has helped drive a steady decline in union membership across the country. But these changes have been accelerated by states passing right-to-work laws in the past decade, including Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, West Virginia and Kentucky. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court's Janus decision effectively extended a right-to-work law to all public sector workers in the country. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 24, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29474.



State Budget Loaded With Local, Special Interest Earmarks

'Christmas-tree' budgets return to Lansing

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Michigan legislators doled out \$147 million for 175 spending earmarks in the state budget they passed in September, which they call enhancement grants.

The beneficiaries are chosen in a non-transparent process of lawmakers from both parties trying to add money for specific entities in their district or an area of personal interest. Such earmarks have been seen in past Michigan budgets when the state is flush with cash, appearing in year-end legislation that Lansing insiders label "Christmas tree" bills.

The number and magnitude of handouts have exploded in the wake of massive pandemic-inspired federal spending plans that include transferring money to state governments.

Michigan Capitol Confidential previously reported \$11.7 million given by Lansing to local governments, arts

centers, a closed hotel, and historical preservation schemes. Local spending of this nature is ordinarily covered by private contributions, local revenue from property tax and other receipts.

Among the additional special interest winners chosen to receive legislative earmarks are:

The Michigan Snowmobile and ORV Association received \$1.5 million in equipment and training.

An entity called the Amity Foundation received \$2 million, although official budget documents and analyses provided no explanation of what the grant is for. The entity's Facebook page says it will develop youth leaders. There are also numerous posts about raising money for relief efforts in Palestine.

The Calvin Prison Institute in Ionia was given \$1 million for prisoner education. It will allow 20 prisoners a year to obtain

a bachelor's degree, according to the institute's website. The site notes that 84 students are now enrolled, and 18 have received an associates degrees. There is no comparable data for bachelor's degrees.

The Dearborn Community and Performing Arts Center was given \$1.5 million for a new roof.

The Flint Social Club is getting \$375,000 for "food entrepreneur training and mentoring."

The Flint Food Market was given \$460,000 for "food access expansion."

The Grand Rapids African American Health Institute was given \$500,000 for research into a health equity index.

A senior living community called Presbyterian Village is getting \$1 million for renovation and construction of new units. There are several developments in Michigan under this name; which one is getting this money was not specified.

According to a website that tracks these facilities, the cost of a shared Presbyterian Village suite starts at \$5,347 a month.

The Motown Museum is getting \$1 million to expand and develop a "creative hub of entrepreneurship," according to The Detroit News.

Goudy Park Amphitheater in Wayne was earmarked \$500,000 for unspecified improvements.

Degage Ministries in Grand Rapids is getting \$500,000 for programming that appears unconnected to any specific purposes and outcomes.

Invest Detroit gets \$500,000 for a loan financing program. Its CEO made \$400,322 in total compensation in 2019.

The city of Flint was given \$1 million for blight removal and clean-up funds. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Jan. 14, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29446](https://michcapcon.com/29446).

State Human Services Department: Racism Guides Landlords

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services taught employees in required online training that racism guides landlords when they select tenants. Clay Powell, director of the Rental Property Owners Association, says the claim is not only false, but irrational.

The claim appears in a section of a training program that addresses the Housing Choice Voucher Program, most commonly known as Section 8 housing. The federal social welfare program is administered by the state and subsidizes the rent of low-income individuals who find their own housing in private dwellings, according to the State of Michigan.

The training notes, “Landlords use race as a criterion for determining which property, and where, they are likely to show homes to a prospective tenant.” It also says three steps lead to “residential sorting patterns” with racial implications.

- Selection, where landlords favor certain types of tenants
- A matching process, where landlords cherry-pick certain types of tenants for certain types of units
- The selective retention of tenants who do not have the means to leave

The department was asked to supply the data on which it bases the conclusion that Michigan landlords today are engaging in racist practices, perhaps in a systematic manner. Bob Wheaton, public information officer for the department, responded with a 2015 article by Eva Rosen for a group called the Poverty and Race Research Action Council, titled, “Reverse Selection: Landlords and the Sorting of HCV Renters.”

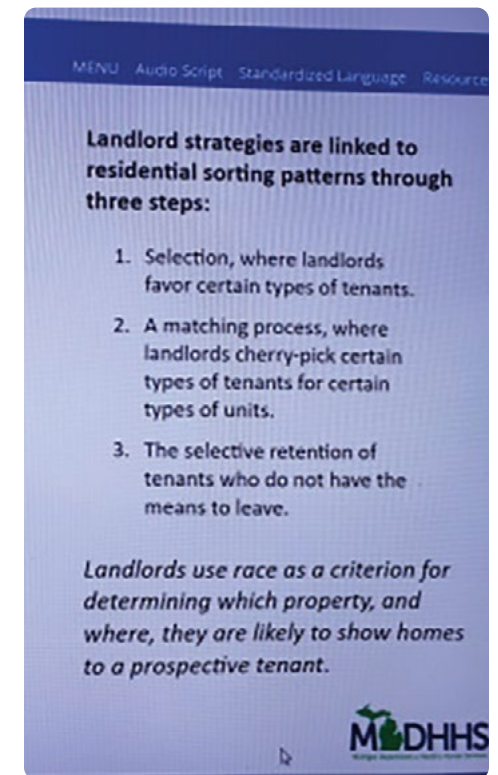
Wheaton writes, “This volume seeks to illustrate the urgent need for addressing implicit biases surrounding race and their connection to disparities we see related to criminal justice, poverty, education, and

many more to share strategies for helping personnel confront their own personal beliefs and biases in order to break unconscious ‘habits of prejudice’ that may be perpetuating disparities that we see.”

When asked to respond, Powell at the property owners association said in an email, “Communities often claim landlords use ‘I don’t participate in Section 8’ as a way to discriminate based upon race. This is a false belief and accusation not backed by any evidence. In short, this is simply a rationale used by communities to explain why some families find it more difficult to secure housing.”

Powell says there are several reasons why a tenant might not be able to secure housing, including insufficient income, a poor rental history, or past evictions. The association says it encourages its landlords to use the section 8 program. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Feb. 10, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29521.



Stabenow Slams Plan To Store Nuclear Waste Near Michigan, Earlier Opposed Remote Site

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Sen. Debbie Stabenow tweeted Feb. 16 that Canada’s plan to place a spent nuclear fuel waste facility near the Great Lakes is dangerous and makes no sense. But Stabenow voted no in 2002 on advancing a plan to remove radioactive spent nuclear fuel from U.S. nuclear plants, including those on the Great Lakes. The bill would have moved nuclear waste to a permanent underground storage site in Nevada. Before that vote, Stabenow had said she would support the move.

In 2002, then-Gov. John Engler issued a statement asking Stabenow to stick by her word and support moving the waste to Nevada’s Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository. Engler noted that after the U.S. secretary of energy recommended the site, the move got a favorable vote in the U.S. House of Representatives (306-11) supported by 13 members of Michigan’s congressional delegation.

In the Senate, Michigan’s other



Democratic senator, Carl Levin, voted to advance the proposal. Engler noted that Stabenow had previously sent a letter to the vice-chair of the Michigan House Energy Committee declaring her support for the repository and calling it the “most viable alternative for safely storing nuclear waste.”

Canada and the United States are in a dispute over a site proposed to permanently house Canada’s spent

nuclear fuel. The material would be placed in a storage facility 1,650 feet below ground near Lake Huron, according to Power magazine, at Huron-Kinloss/South Bruce in Bruce County, Ontario. The site is across Lake Huron from the Michigan Thumb area. There are worries that the waste could leak into the Great Lakes and affect up to 40 million Americans.

While Stabenow tweets her opposition to Canada’s proposed site, the U.S. stores

spent nuclear fuel on the shores of four of the five Great Lakes, according to a 2018 story in the Detroit Free Press. In the 20 years since Stabenow voted no on Yucca Mountain, spent nuclear fuel waste has remained stored near the Great Lakes.

Nuclear power is considered by some to be a safe and clean source of energy which creates no air pollution or carbon dioxide. It currently produces 26% of Michigan’s electricity, according to Jason Hayes, environmental policy director at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The state currently has four nuclear reactors operating at three generation plants.

Stabenow did not respond when asked if she supports nuclear energy or if she will work to find an alternative site for storing nuclear energy waste and work to remove it from the shores of the Great Lakes. ■

The original version of this story was posted online on Feb. 24, 2022 and is available at MichCapCon.com/29569.



Wind Energy Developer Compares Opponents To Hitler And The Holocaust

BY TOM GANTERT

Dan Paris is a Michigan agent for a company that works with a national wind farm developer. Recently, he wrote an op-ed comparing activists who help state residents trying to halt wind farm developments in their townships to Adolf Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust.

Paris was referring to the Energy & Environment Legal Institute and the Interstate Informed Citizens Coalition. The Interstate Informed Citizens Coalition has worked to halt wind farm developments promoted by Apex Clean Energy and other firms.

“History has well-recorded how Hitler used propaganda as a tool to persuade a

country of good people to do unspeakably bad things,” Paris wrote in an Jan. 8 op-ed in The Daily News, based in Montcalm County. “He was able to do this by using carefully crafted messages to incite and inflame existing biases among the greater group of citizens against small ethnic groups. Propaganda blamed these ethnic groups for causing any manner of inconvenience such as economic hardship, and slowly demonized these groups until otherwise good people were willing to threaten, intimidate and eventually kill innocent people.”

Paris is the lead land agent for a group called Montcalm Wind, which is working with Apex Clean Energy to secure official

approval for a proposed wind farm in Montcalm County. Montcalm Wind's senior project development manager Albert Jongewaard is an employee of Apex Clean Energy.

The Energy & Environment Legal Institute, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., opposes the agenda of many climate change activists. The Interstate Informed Citizens Coalition is a Michigan-based nonprofit led by Kevon Martis, a Lenawee County resident who has opposed many wind projects in Michigan and the Midwest.

Apex Clean Energy develops industrial-scale solar and wind systems that utilities use to meet government renewable energy

mandates and related requirements. The corporation has about 200 employees and annual sales of around \$25 million, according Dun and Bradstreet

Apex Clean Energy, a private firm based in Virginia, manages wind farms in Isabella County for DTE Energy. Apex Clean Energy is pressing to place wind turbine developments in Ingham and Montcalm counties.

Neither Paris nor Apex Clean Energy responded to emails seeking comment. Apex Clean Energy states on its website that one of its core values is professionalism. ■

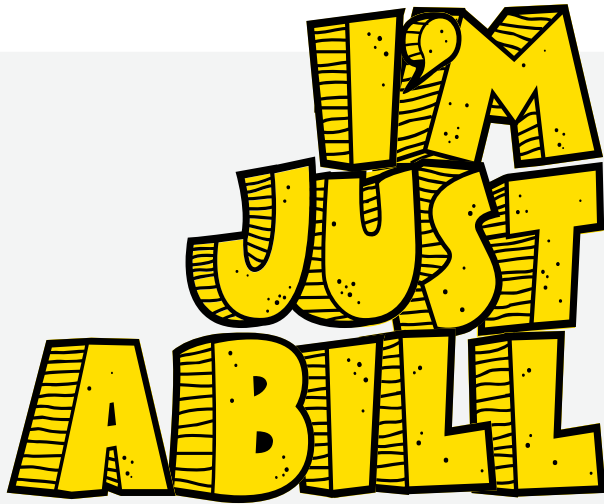
The original version of this story was posted online on Feb. 19, 2022 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29563](https://www.MichCapCon.com/29563).



Managing Editor: Tom Gantert **Designer:** Dixon Anderson

Michigan Capitol Confidential is published quarterly by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt research and educational institute devoted to analyzing Michigan public policy issues. Michigan Capitol Confidential is distributed to Michigan residents who have expressed an interest in public policy matters, as well as members of the media and lawmakers and policy staff in the Michigan House, Michigan Senate and Office of the Governor. All rights reserved. Permission to excerpt or reprint is hereby granted provided that Michigan Capitol Confidential, the author and the Mackinac Center for Public Policy are properly cited.

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MichiganVotes.org

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

2021 Senate Bill 682

Expand agriculture department duties to giving corporate subsidies

Introduced by Sen. Ed McBroom (R)

To expand the state Department of Agriculture and Rural Development by adding an “Office of Rural Development,” the focus of which would be promoting various government “economic development” schemes and subsidies.

2021 Senate Bill 725

Eliminate food stamps eligibility asset cap

Introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D)

To eliminate an asset test from food stamp eligibility determinations, meaning the benefit would no longer be limited to beneficiaries who have few or no assets. Under current law and rules food stamp recipients may not have assets worth more than \$15,000.

2021 Senate Bill 762

Revise animal cruelty law to accommodate sled dogs

Introduced by Sen. Wayne Schmidt (R)

To amend the definition of “working dog” in state law to include sled dogs. The current definition includes trained leader dogs, guard dogs, farm dogs and hunting dogs.

2021 House Bill 5521

Permit taxing Airbnb rentals in UP

Introduced by Rep. Sara Cambensy (D)

To extend to Airbnb-type rentals a law that permits local governments in the Upper Peninsula to impose excise taxes on lodging facility revenues.

2021 Senate Bill 675

Define toy helium balloons as litter if released

Introduced by Sen. Mallory McMorrow (D)

To define a toy helium balloon released into the atmosphere as litter, with releases subject to a \$250 fine for littering.

2021 Senate Bill 746

Authorize taxpayer-funded “green” subsidies

Introduced by Sen. Stephanie Chang (D)

To create a government “climate resiliency corps.” Among other things this would spend money to create “bioswales, wetlands, plant trees” and address stormwater runoff; produce “community education about rain gardens and rain barrels;” pay for “projects designed to combat high temperatures, flooding, or power outages caused by climate change;” and more, in addition to activities like “monthly training and professional development to corps members on climate resiliency topics.” The bill would authorize grants to pay “members” at least \$15 per hour.

2021 House Bill 5359

Impose licensure mandates on hunting and fishing guides

Introduced by Rep. John Cherry (D)

To impose licensure and detailed annual reporting mandates on individuals who act as a commercial “sport fishing guide” on inland waters, with a \$150 license fee (\$300 for nonresidents). Among its many detailed requirements the bill would specify the first aid kit contents a guide would be required to bring.

2021 House Bill 5468

Mandate funeral homes have dead body refrigerators

Introduced by Rep. Mark Tisdell (R)

To mandate that funeral home facilities must have refrigeration on site suitable for housing dead human bodies, and require bodies to be embalmed or refrigerated within 24 hours.

2021 House Bill 5058

Exempt industrial hemp from food adulterant list

Introduced by Rep. TC Clements (R)

To amend a section of the state food law that deals with adulterated food, so as to declare that its prohibitions do not apply to food that contains or has added to it any quantity of industrial hemp.