



## Will Wild Rice Really Save The Great Lakes?

BY TOM GANTERT

A federal grant program called the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been portrayed by politicians and the media as vital for improving the quality of the Great Lakes.

The program has spent more than \$762 million, giving grants for 880 projects across Michigan since 2010. In total, it has spent \$2.4 billion on grants for 4,700 projects in seven states in the Great Lakes region.

When President Donald Trump recommended greatly reducing the program to just 10 percent of the \$300 million authorized in recent annual federal budgets, media reports talked about its various benefits.

For example, The Detroit News stated, "The cleanup program's funding is used to toward fighting invasive species, cleaning up pollution and toxic substances, and restoring habitats and species in the lakes."

See "Wild Rice," Page 6

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PAGE 5

## Ann Arbor Teacher Doesn't Like Betsy DeVos, Or School Choice

Gets \$97k in salary and wrote a musical  
satirizing secretary of education

## MEET THE STAFF



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# NEWS BITES

The personal income of Michigan residents rose faster last spring than nearby states according to a new release from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis.

**Michigan Personal Income was up 5.1 percent in the second quarter of 2019.** Nearby states also saw gains: Indiana (3.9%), Illinois (4.2%) Ohio (4.5%) and Wisconsin (4.4%).

76,702 people submitted a claim for unemployment insurance during the week of Jan. 10, 2009, in the middle of the Great Recession. **Last month, the state set a record for the lowest number of claims for unemployment insurance.** During the week of Aug. 24, only 3,791 claims were filed.

In 2000-01, Wayne State University received \$253.0 million in state dollars from the state of Michigan and another \$123.9 million in tuition and fees. Those numbers are not adjusted for inflation.

By 2018-19, Wayne State University's state appropriation was \$199.2 million **while its tuition and fees had grown to \$387.6 million, a 148% increase above inflation.**

Democrat Sen. Curtis Hertel **has introduced a bill that would allow residents to get a new birth certificate based on gender identity claims.**

Hertel introduced Senate Bill 503 on Sept. 10.

According to Michigan Votes, the bill will "permit an individual who asserts a gender identity different than the one on their birth certificate to get a new birth certificate that reflects this." In one part of bill this is referred to as a "correction."

The bill also allows a minor to change their birth certificate if the request is signed a parent or legal guardian, and is accompanied by an affidavit from a health professional treating the minor.

Hertel's bill was referred to the Health Policy and Human Services Committee.

Democratic State Rep. Rachel Hood introduced a similar proposal in June, House Bill 4720. Hood's bill was referred to the Committee on Families, Children and Seniors.

**Union picketers in Swartz Creek are breaking the law by blocking delivery trucks from entering GM facilities.**

Videos show the picketers standing in front of the trucks, refusing to move and claiming to be injured as drivers try to enter the plant. Police report that when they have responded no one was seeking medical attention.

Despite their own lawbreaking, the union picketers are asking for police reports. Local police acknowledge the UAW picketers are violating the law, but no arrests have been reported.

Metro Police Authority Lt. Joel Grahn told MLive that there are local ordinances regarding "interfering in an ingress or egress of a driveway for business use to not disrupt normal business, but we understand the bigger picture here."

Mike Addonizio, a professor of education economics and policy at Wayne State University, had an op-ed published in Bridge Magazine titled, "Fix the damn schools, Michigan."

Addonizio wrote: "Our stunning state decline in K-12 education has been well-documented. As a notable MSU report recently revealed, between 1995 and 2015 Michigan was dead last nationwide in K-12 revenue growth and 48th in per-pupil terms."

State funding for Michigan's K-12 schools has grown every year since the state began climbing out its economic "lost decade" and the nation's "Great Recession" after 2009-10. **Since then, school funding has risen for nine consecutive years.** The number of state dollars flowing into Michigan's K-12 schools reached a record-high of \$13.1 billion in 2018-19, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency. Adjusted for inflation, K-12 schools received \$840 million more state dollars in 2018-19 than in 2010-11, a real increase of about 7%.

In 2000-01, Oakland University received \$51.5 million in state dollars from the state of Michigan and another \$56.8 million in tuition and fees. Those numbers are not adjusted for inflation.

By 2018-19, Oakland University's state appropriation was \$51.2 million **while its tuition and fees had grown to \$268.0 million, a 226% increase above inflation.** ■



## A DTE Push Poll? Utility Cagery About Ratepayer Survey

*Refusing to release questions could allow cherry-picking responses for misleading PR*



BY MADELINE PELTZER

DTE Energy recently sent an online survey to residential ratepayers asking how they view the electric utility company and whether they approve of its actions and plans related to the environment.

Eric Younan, senior communications strategist for DTE, told Michigan Capitol Confidential that the survey was meant to gauge customers' opinions on the "environmental progress of the company." It would also help the company "understand the effectiveness of our customer communications."

But when Michigan Capitol Confidential asked DTE for a copy of the full survey, the company said it was unable to supply one. Requests to Emicity, the market research firm which created the survey, were not answered.

Michigan Capitol Confidential has obtained parts of the survey from other sources. One question read, "Changes in global or regional climate pattern in the mid to late 20th century onwards that have been attributed largely to the increased levels of

atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels' is often referred to both as 'global warming' and 'climate change.' Which term is probably the one you would prefer that DTE use in its communications with you?"

Response choices included "Climate change," "Global warming," "Doesn't matter—both terms are clear to me," and "Neither—I don't believe it's a thing."

Jason Hayes, environmental policy director for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, said that DTE's unwillingness to share the survey raises questions about its real purpose. The company, he said, could cherry-pick the results and only publicize responses that serve its interests. Hayes recommends the utility release all the questions. "That way people can look at the questions and say, 'that was actually pretty leading' or 'that was pretty fair,'" he said. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 16, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26782](http://MichCapCon.com/26782).*

## Teachers Union Opposed State Pension Reforms, Now Doing Same

*Retired employees call union's changes 'disaster,' 'radical,' 'extreme'*

BY SANDY MALONE

Membership is down for the Michigan Education Association, but that hasn't prevented sharp cost increases for the state's largest teachers union. The MEA's costs for providing health insurance benefits to its own retirees have gone up, and a group that represents them is pushing back against the union's attempts to bring those costs under control.

The number of school employees paying dues to the MEA has steadily declined since 2011, when the number was 120,616. By 2018 the number of dues-paying members had fallen to 84,872, a 29.6% drop. The figures come from a report, called the LM-2, that the MEA files with the U.S. Department of Labor each year.

Annual revenue from dues and fees paid by unionized workers has fallen apace with these declines, dropping from \$145.4 million in 2011 to \$113.3 million in 2018.

On the positive side, the union's unfunded pension liabilities have declined. In 2011 the union's pension plan had

\$109.0 million in unfunded liabilities. By 2018 this unfunded liability had fallen to \$81.6 million.

But the MEA has also promised to give its employees health insurance after they retire, and the liabilities in this account are increasing. In 2011 the union projected it had \$54.9 million less than the amount it should have to cover these benefits going forward. By 2018 this unfunded liability had grown to \$134.5 million.

This summer the MEA management decided it had to make changes. It proposed higher copays and reduced benefits for retirees, according to MIRS News. This is reportedly getting push back from the union's Retired Staff Association.

Retired members were "shocked, disappointed, and angry" at MEA Executive Director Mike Shoudy's recommendations, according to an internal memo reported by MIRS. It is said to describe the proposal as a "disaster, radical changes that the Employer's plan to unilaterally implement within months . . . more extreme than most of us even imagined."

**MEA**  
Michigan Education Association

MEA spokesman Doug Pratt defended the proposal and said there was an "urgent need for action" caused by rising medical and prescriptions costs for retirees.

"These updates to retiree health insurance will ensure benefits are available for current and future retirees when they need them most," Pratt said.

The union's position stands in stark contrast to its reaction when similar cost pressures forced the Michigan Legislature to increase employee cost-sharing in the taxpayer-funded health insurance benefits given to public school retirees.

The MEA fought hard against the change, saying that public employees were

under attack by a Republican governor and Legislature.

The retirees group has hired an attorney to take on the MEA, according to MIRS.

"We were shocked by the lack of understanding of the trauma this letter and the imposed charges will cause (and) they are forcing us into an advisories position," the retirees' internal memo said.

The MEA didn't respond to emails seeking comment. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 27, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26802](http://MichCapCon.com/26802).*



# 90 Hours A Week, 52 Weeks A Year: Detroit Cop Claims 2,617 Overtime Hours

BY TOM GANTERT

The Detroit Police Department said it has started an investigation into a police officer who reported having 2,617.2 hours of overtime in fiscal year 2018. That much overtime, as revealed in city records, translates into an average of 90.3 hours worked every week of the year, and it includes overtime and regular shifts.

To accrue 2,617 hours of overtime, an employee would have to put in 7.16 hours of overtime a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Those hours boosted this one officer's annual pay by \$100,737 in 2018. Altogether, he collected \$159,387 from the city that year.

"We have some concern, and we've launched an internal investigation to look more into this matter," said Detroit Police Department Sgt. Nicole Kirkwood in an email to Michigan Capitol Confidential. "We take misuse of overtime very seriously and if we determine during the course of our investigation that a violation has occurred, then we will take appropriate actions."

The Detroit police department listed in an email the different categories of overtime used by the officer who claimed 2,614 hours. The analysis was from July 1, 2017, to June 30, 2018.

His 2,614 hours included 1,912 hours of regular overtime pay for putting in hours beyond regular shifts. The officer also claimed 242 hours of overtime for taking care of a police dog in his own home. The officer also claimed 66 overtime hours when he was recalled to duty and another 696 hours of overtime for being on standby.

Six Detroit police employees claimed more than 2,000 hours of overtime last year. A police lieutenant claimed 2,008.1 hours of overtime, for which he received \$117,451, boosting his total salary, not counting fringe benefits, to \$202,163.

Not all these employees took their overtime compensation in extra cash. Many Michigan police departments allow officers to save, or bank, their overtime credits and use them later to take extra time off. Some departments let officers accrue their banked time for years until they use it to retire early or collect a big final paycheck upon retirement. Some departments also cap the amount of banked time an employee can accrue.

A Detroit police corporal claimed 2,471 overtime hours for which he collected \$32,150. It is very likely that he banked some overtime credits. This individual's total salary for the year was \$94,542, not counting fringe benefits. To earn 2,471 hours of overtime, that employee would have had to work 87 hours a week, 52 weeks a year.

Overall, Detroit Police employees claimed 973,227 hours of overtime in 2018, for which they collected \$38.3 million. That number does not include the value of banked time. The city of Detroit reported having 2,965 full-time positions in the police department in 2018, and the figures in this article came from the city's response to an open records law request. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 23, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26794](http://MichCapCon.com/26794).*



## Ann Arbor Teacher Doesn't Like Betsy DeVos, Or School Choice

### *Gets \$97k in salary and wrote a musical satirizing secretary of education*

BY TOM GANTERT

An Ann Arbor Public Schools teacher is so upset with Betsy DeVos that he has written a satirical musical attacking the U.S. secretary of education.

Quinn Strassel, an Ann Arbor Community High School teacher, was quoted in a MLive story saying he wrote the musical to tell people about “the negative impact she’s had on schools.”

But if the standard for negative impact is school finance, it doesn’t apply to the school districts he mentioned in the MLive story, or even to his own compensation.

Strassel’s total salary in 2015-16 (the year before DeVos was appointed) was \$82,343, and it rose to \$97,259 in 2017-18. That’s an 18% pay hike over two years. His salary includes extra money for acting as a program director.

MLive reported: “Strassel laments that Ypsilanti High doesn’t have the same type of drama program it used to have. Education funding cuts have left schools suffering, he said, and many parents in places like Ypsilanti now send their children to other school districts.”

“Hundreds of kids from Ypsilanti and millions of dollars now come to Ann Arbor



Public Schools,’ he said. ‘My paycheck is bolstered on the demise of the school system that gave us an incredible education.’”

But if parents in the Ypsilanti school district’s jurisdiction took advantage of a state law that lets them send their children to a nearby district, it’s not because Ypsilanti schools lack funding. Both Ypsilanti and Strassel’s own school district have experienced increases in state funding.

Across the state, Michigan’s school districts are getting more state funding than ever before. State financial support for K-12 public schools has increased every year since 2011-12, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Ypsilanti and Willow Run school districts merged in 2013, and state funding to the combined district has increased, not gone down.

After adjusting for inflation, Ypsilanti Community Schools received \$568 more per pupil in 2018-19 than in 2013-14, the first year for the combined district. Ann Arbor Public Schools’ state funding has also increased, from \$6,488 per pupil (adjusted for inflation) in 2015-16 (the year before DeVos was appointed) to \$6,844 in 2018-19.

DeVos is the U.S. secretary of education, holding an office that has no say on state education taxes and state funding for public schools.

Strassel has been an outspoken critic of the Schools of Choice law that lets parents place their children in nearby districts that have space, with state school aid dollars following the student. He appeared in a podcast hosted by the Washington Post and said allowing parents to exercise this choice is harmful to education.

From The Washington Post podcast:

STRASSEL: “I’m really proud to have grown up in Ypsilanti and to have attended school there. But school choice is sort of advertised as this thing that empowers communities. But what’s happened is the entire school system in Ypsilanti has fallen apart. There were two school districts that were forced to consolidate because as

Ann Arbor engaged in school choice we took a lot of the best students away from Ypsilanti. So my paycheck is bolstered at the demise of my hometown.”

Ypsilanti Community Schools has five elementary and junior high schools, and two high schools. On a Mackinac Center report card that adjusts schools’ performance to reflect the socioeconomic status of their student bodies, the Ypsilanti primary schools received grades of A, C, C, D and D. The two high schools received a C and an F.

Ann Arbor Public Schools has 25 elementary and junior high schools that received six A’s on the Mackinac Center report card, 11 B’s, six C’s and two D’s. Ann Arbor’s Pioneer, Huron and Skyline high schools all received A’s.

Of the students who live within the Ypsilanti Community School District’s jurisdiction, 1,032 were sent by their parents to Ann Arbor schools in 2018-19. Ypsilanti Community Schools enrolled 3,840 students that year.

Strassel didn’t respond to an email seeking comment. ■

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## Unionization Campaign Roils Royal Oak Hospital

BY DAWSON BELL

A union organizing effort by the Michigan Nurses Association at Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak has become “divisive and angry” and threatens the hospital’s reputation for giving quality patient care, according to a nurse involved in efforts to thwart the drive.

Lorie Hall, a nurse practitioner with 30 years of experience who has been at Beaumont since 2005, said the organizing effort, launched in April, has met widespread resistance among 3,200 nurses. Resistance, she said, that has been ignored by the media and suppressed by heavy-handed union tactics.

“My impression is that there are a lot of people out there who don’t support (unionization), but they’re afraid to say anything,” Hall said.

Opponents of the union drive believe a successful campaign will add expense and another layer of bureaucracy to an overburdened system, Hall said. She added

they have faced online intimidation as they try to provide anti-union materials to their colleagues. “I think it’s a money grab,” she said. “If they get (certified), the union would be taking \$2.2 million a year (in dues) out of here.”

The union claims it has the support of 1,900 Beaumont nurses. In July it successfully lobbied the Oakland County Board of Commissioners to approve a resolution urging Beaumont not to interfere by propagandizing against the union to employees.

That resolution has no practical effect.

But the union has also filed an unfair labor practice claim with the National Labor Relations Board over hospital-sponsored education forums for nurses. The union claims the forums were mandatory and had an anti-union bias; the hospital has denied the charge.

Less well reported, Hall said, is a parallel complaint to the NLRB, filed by one of her colleagues at the hospital. The colleague



alleges that union officials and their allies engaged in intimidating behavior when she was distributing anti-union informational material in the hospital cafeteria.

Hall said the push for unionization is wrongheaded on multiple levels.

The union won’t be able, because of the realities of the health care marketplace, to deliver on its promises, she said. It is, she said, damaging Beaumont’s reputation as a provider of quality care by blaring protests about “Patients over Profit.”

Hall said that, in her experience, Beaumont

is a decent employer that pays competitive wages and provides decent working conditions. Complaints about either can be addressed without a union, she said.

Hall said 350 nurses had signed an online petition opposing the unionization effort.

Further, she said she believes the claims of support for the union are exaggerated. Beaumont’s nurses have so far not been asked to sign cards calling for a vote on unionization, she said, although the support of only 30% of eligible employees is required to force a vote.

Interestingly, in a survey released in April by WalletHub, salaries for Michigan nurses ranked second-highest in the nation when adjusted for the cost of living.

Jessica Newman, a spokeswoman for the nurses union, said none of its prospective members at Beaumont was immediately available for comment. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 30, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26813](http://MichCapCon.com/26813).*



## WILD RICE

from Page One

While all that is true, it is difficult to conclude that any particular expenditure is more vital than another in improving the Great Lakes. As a result, many more worthwhile projects may not get funded at all.

Nevertheless, politicians, including Michigan lawmakers, continue to praise GLRI spending and call for extending and expanding the program.

For example, U.S. Rep. Bill Huizenga, a Republican from Zeeland, is a co-chair of the House Great Lakes Task Force. He said the program has addressed the “cleanup of legacy pollution, taking greater action against invasive species, and increasing habitat restoration.”

Without a process for determining the relative value of each project, however, many of the activities funded by the GLRI may benefit favored interests but do little to improve the environment.

One potential example is the millions of dollars spent on wild rice in Michigan and surrounding states. GLRI funds have supported work to expand wild rice cultivation, and some advocates of that spending have stressed the cultural connection between wild rice and Native American tribes.

In 2016, Sandra Lewis of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians spoke at a subcommittee hearing.

“This food is critical to our people; it is known as wild rice,” Lewis told the committee. Then she requested that an earmark under the GLRI for restoring wild rice in the region be increased from \$3 million to \$10 million.

The website of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration echoed this argument. In supporting a \$400,000 federal grant to wild rice seeding efforts, it said, “Coastal wetlands are the ecological engines of the Great Lakes, but few natural resources have a stronger cultural connection than wild rice (manoomin).”

That may be true, but a prioritization process might show that other expenditures of \$400,000 could do even more to improve wetlands.

The federal program also gave \$666,332 to the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in Manistee from 2013 through 2017, as part of its wild rice program. A report from the tribe gave three reasons why wild rice is important: It provides a habitat for a variety of organisms; it supports other native plant species; and it has high nutrient uptake. Still, it is not possible to judge the value of this grant without considering other, potentially more effective uses for those dollars.

The same can be said about an argument posted by the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community on its website. Speaking of wild rice, the posting said, “It can also help to maintain water quality by securing loose soil, tying up nutrients, and slowing winds across shallow wetlands.”

But Jason Hayes, director of environmental policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, said that whenever someone questions the value of a particular project, the immediate response of GLRI defenders is that the money must be spent, or the Great Lakes will be irrevocably damaged.

“The challenge we face when deciding how to focus Great Lakes Restoration Initiative spending isn’t this effort to restore wild rice stands on the banks of the Great Lakes,” Hayes said in an email. “Those projects may be very effective at meeting their objective. The problem we face is the lack of transparent oversight and the general refusal to prioritize the most important and effective projects.”

The EPA said it would comment on this story. Despite repeated follow-ups, however, it did not. John Rodwan, director of the environmental department of the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi, didn’t respond to an email seeking comment. ■

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## Michigan 'Teacher Shortage' Claims Not Factual

BY TOM GANTERT

The Center for Michigan made an assertion in an interview with State Superintendent Michael Rice that isn't factual.

Bridge Magazine asked Rice this question: Bridge: "There's a growing teacher shortage in Michigan that is leading to a vast increase in the number of long-term substitutes, who often have no teaching background, leading classrooms. Is that a concern to you?"

According to a report published by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, however, the available research does not support claims of a teacher shortage in this state.

"The simple fact is that anecdotal and media reporting is not sufficient to establish that a statewide crisis exists," the report concluded. "To do so requires a broader examination of the teacher pipeline, something that has not garnered as much attention or analysis by stakeholders, either at the local or state level. ... The research does not show that Michigan is currently facing a statewide teacher shortage, but it does



document some troubling trends along the teacher pipeline that are likely contributors to the challenges local schools face filling certain classroom vacancies."

The claim that a shortage exists is routinely challenged by the large number of individuals who apply for teacher positions posted by school districts around the state. For example, there were an average of

72 applicants for every teacher opening in the Grand Rapids Public Schools in 2016-17. And that year, the Troy School District received 2,045 applicants for one K-5 teacher opening.

Schools do appear to have difficulty attracting applicants for certain specialized positions, such as foreign language instructors and special education teachers.

But the teaching profession is popular, if judged by the number of people responding to job openings.

What may be causing an increase in the use of substitute teachers is the number of days full-time teachers are out of the classroom.

For example, teachers in the Plymouth-Canton school district were not in class for an average of 15.54 days in the 2018-19 school year. That's according to documents acquired in response to a Freedom of Information Act request. Teachers at Warren Public Schools missed an average of 15 days in the last school year. Livonia Public Schools teachers missed 13.77 days of class.

Teachers miss class for many reasons, including absences for illness, family leave, personal days, field trips, school conferences and training.

Teachers work a schedule that generally has 180 class days in a calendar year. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 19, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26790](http://MichCapCon.com/26790).*

## Road Workers Oppose Strike, Bail On Union

*'I think it's a money grab,' says one nurse*

BY DAWSON BELL

A strike by heavy equipment operators at one of Michigan's largest road contractors has slowed work at the height of construction season on dozens of projects, most of them on the state's west side.

And at least some of the workers ordered off the job think the strike is a colossal mistake. "The union is using us as pawns in a power play to get their way," said one of the operators at Rieth-Riley, who resigned his union membership and returned to work early in the strike that commenced July 31.

"The union (Operating Engineers Local 324) has characterized Rieth-Riley as tyrants. That's baloney," said the operator, who declined to be identified publicly for fear of retaliation.

"The bottom line is that Rieth-Riley has gone above and beyond to take care of their employees. They're the best employer I've ever worked for," he said.

The equipment operator has been with Rieth-Riley and a member of the union for

more than a decade. He said a majority of employees at the company opposed the strike but were not given an opportunity, at a union meeting July 25, to vote on it.

The union's strike authorization against Rieth-Riley stems from a 2018 vote by members of the entire local, and it is targeted at virtually all of the state's road contractors.

Rieth-Riley's operators were told July 25 by union officials that no new vote specific to Rieth-Riley would be taken, he said.

That meant, he said, "essentially all of the east side of the state guys (who remain on the job) voted for me to go on strike."

Local 324 officials claimed the strike targeting Rieth-Riley is the result of a failure to resolve several allegations, lodged in 2018, that the company engaged in unfair labor practices. Rieth-Riley is one of the two major road construction contractors in the state (Michigan Paving and Materials is the other) that have not agreed to a new contract with the union. In 2018 there was a standoff, which resulted in a September work stoppage when dozens



of contractors deployed what they called a defensive lockout.

Rieth-Riley officials said they are abiding by essentially all of the provisions of the new contracts agreed to by the other companies. They went on to say that the company does not, however, abide by a requirement that it use only union subcontractors or agree to pay an extra \$29 per hour into a union retirement fund for every hour worked by a nonunion member.

"This amounts to a \$29.05 per hour taxpayer extortion fee as part of an effort to pad the union's struggling pension fund," Rieth-Riley said in a news release at the

strike's outset. Company attorney Chad Loney said the pension fund contribution is the "whole reason" the union called the strike.

Loney said the union pension fund contribution for nonunion members is completely unrealistic in the areas of the state (west and northern Michigan) where the company does most of its work. Many subcontractors in those areas are nonunion. The company estimates the requirement would add an additional \$100 million a year to construction costs, with no benefit to taxpayers.

Local 324 officials did not respond to a request for comment.

The ex-union member at Rieth-Riley said the pension fund issue "isn't a hill worth dying on." He added, "There is no benefit to the (nonunion) subcontractor or their employees at all. I don't see where it benefits anybody except the union." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 28, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26809](http://MichCapCon.com/26809).*



## Data Shows Michigan Economy Doing Well, AP Calls It 'Only Slight Growth'

BY TOM GANTERT

A recent Associated Press story casting doubt on the strength of the Michigan economy was carried the title "Trump touts economy, but not everyone in Michigan feeling it."

The article put the spotlight on the city of Saginaw, quoting residents there who associated terms like "felt better" with the years when Barack Obama was president.

Since the election of President Donald Trump, there has been "only slight manufacturing growth," according to the AP article. It read, "Manufacturing is up slightly, but now accounts for only about 20% of the state's jobs, down from half in the 1960s."

It also stated, "However, Michigan's poverty rate is 14.2%, higher than the national mark of 12.3%. And it still ranks in the bottom half of states in percentage of residents with college degrees."

Here is some relevant information and context about Michigan's economy since 2011.

Jobs in manufacturing, still a key employment sector in the state, have increased from 483,600 in January 2011 to 635,500 in June 2019, a 31% increase.

For seven years in a row, Michigan's poverty rate has fallen, down from 17.5% in 2011 to 14.2% in 2017.

Median household income in Michigan has increased from \$50,106 in 2011 (adjusted for inflation) to \$54,909 in 2017 (the most recent data available). That's a 9.6 percent increase even after inflation.

The state's unemployment rate has fallen from 11.0% in January 2011 to 4.2% in June 2019, while the number of people who are unemployed dropped from 517,801 to 209,922.

Michigan doesn't fare as well when comparisons over time include the state's "lost decade" and "one-state recession" of the 2000s.

"But how long are you going to keep complaining about the 2000s?" asked James Hohman, the director of fiscal policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "Michigan median household income increased above inflation every year since 2012, and 2018 data isn't out yet." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 7, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26767](http://MichCapCon.com/26767).*



## Renewables Get Far More Federal Subsidies Than Coal

*Taxpayers paid \$3.5 billion to wind and solar, \$1.26 billion to coal*

BY MADELINE PELTZER

Coal may not be the politically correct choice of energy for progressive activists, but recent U.S. government data challenges one part of the anti-coal narrative, which is that the coal industry is heavily subsidized by taxpayers.

Coal does get federal subsidies, according to a government report, but far less than wind and solar. Coal received \$1.26 billion in federal subsidies in 2016. Renewable energy interests, in contrast, received \$6.7 billion. That amount included \$1.27 billion for wind producers and \$2.23 billion for solar power interests.

The figures come from the U.S. Energy Information Administration's report on 2016 federal subsidies. "Subsidy" is defined in the report as direct payments, tax breaks, loan subsidies, and research and development assistance.

Yet despite receiving less taxpayer support than wind or solar, coal far outpaced them for electricity production in 2016. Coal provided 29.6% of the electricity generated



in the United States that year, compared to 6.6% for wind and solar combined.

A 2018 study by the EIA found that in 2016, coal received 8% of direct federal subsidies and produced about 30% of the electricity

we use. "Direct subsidy" means a cash outlay or its equivalent from the government.

Nuclear power producers received 2% of direct federal subsidies and produced about 20% of the nation's electricity. Natural

gas-fired generators provided 35% of the electricity we use, and the companies that produced it received a direct subsidy of -5%, meaning they paid more in taxes and royalties than any amounts they received directly.

Renewables, a category that includes biomass, geothermal, hydroelectric, wind and solar, received 45% of federal energy subsidies while producing 15% of U.S. electricity (mostly with hydropower).

Jason Hayes, director of environmental policy for the Mackinac Center for Policy, pointed to the solar company Suniva, which received direct subsidies, including three federal grants worth \$8.8 million from 2014 to 2016. It also received an earlier \$5.7 million tax credit to develop and produce solar cells and accompanying technologies in Michigan.

Hayes said he believes subsidies should be eliminated for renewables and fossil fuel research alike. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 6, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26759](http://MichCapCon.com/26759).*



## Report: Michigan Police Kept \$15 Million Taken Mostly From 'Little Guys' In 2018

BY DAWSON BELL

Over 6,000 persons had more than \$15 million worth of property and cash seized and kept by Michigan law enforcement agencies in 2018. Many of them were never convicted of a crime or even prosecuted. Those are some of the findings of a report released June 30 by the Michigan State Police on the practice of civil asset forfeiture.

Most of the seized property was cash (\$13,481,835), according to the report, was then used by police agencies to supplement their own budgets.

Michigan's civil asset forfeiture law was adopted in 1978 with the intent of depriving criminals, especially drug dealers, of the proceeds from illegal activity. But critics say the practice too often tramples on the property rights of low-level drug users, some of whom are never prosecuted for the underlying alleged crime. In April, the Michigan Legislature enacted reforms to the law. Starting in August, there must be a criminal conviction, in most situations, before officials can retain seized assets.

According to the report, property was seized from more than 6,000 persons in



Michigan in 2018. Of these individuals, only 2,810 were convicted of the crime for which the property was seized, and 514 were never charged at all.

Jarrett Skorup, the director of marketing and communications for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, has written extensively on civil asset forfeiture. He said of the report, "It's disturbing ... that hundreds of people never charged with illegal activity are losing their property. Forfeiture should be used only on those

convicted of a crime in which someone actually gained money or property from that illegal activity."

Skorup said research by advocates for reform found many instances in which the target of forfeiture was not a drug kingpin. Instead, it was a low-income petty drug user whose \$2,500 car was seized by police. Many such individuals are never charged, and they surrender ownership rather than contest the seizure in court, Skorup said.

To address the concerns of law enforcement officials, the new law requiring a conviction for forfeiture does not apply to property worth more than \$50,000 if it may be associated with illegal drug trafficking. This property will still be subject to forfeiture even if its owner is not convicted of a crime.

In June, the Institute for Justice, a leading national advocate for forfeiture reform, released a study analyzing the effects of federal forfeiture practices on crime and drug use. It found them to be negligible. The study added that civil asset forfeiture is most intensely used in communities in financial duress.

"Forfeiture doesn't help police to fight crime," said Lee McGrath, IJ's lead legislative counsel, "but police do use it to raise revenue."

McGrath said Michigan's new forfeiture law "is an important step in reform ... but the important question is how it will affect state law enforcement and property owners (targeted by forfeitures) in the future." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on July 10, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26690](http://MichCapCon.com/26690).*

## School Superintendent Gets Raises And Funding Hikes, Complains Funding 'Broken'

BY TOM GANTERT

Newaygo County public school official Lori Tubbergen Clark recently wrote a commentary for Bridge Magazine, saying that Michigan's approach to funding education was "broken."

"Under Michigan's broken school funding approach, our kids will only continue falling behind," wrote Clark, who is the superintendent of the county Regional Education Service Agency. "There is no one-size-fits-all approach to educating our kids, and it's time for a new,

fairer approach that recognizes every child is a winner."

There are three regular school districts that serve more than 1,000 students within Clark's intermediate school district: Grant Public Schools, Fremont Public Schools and Newaygo Public Schools. Even after adjusting for inflation, all three have seen significant state funding growth from 2011-12 to 2018-19.

In the 2011-12 school year, Grant Public Schools received the per-pupil equivalent of \$7,892 in 2018 dollars, when adjusted for inflation. By 2018-19 this had risen to

\$8,557 per student, an 8.4% increase, or \$665 more for every student.

Newaygo Public Schools' inflation-adjusted per-pupil funding increased from \$6,691 to \$7,388 over that seven-year span. That \$697 more per student represent a real 10.4% funding increase.

Fremont Public Schools' per-pupil funding increased from \$7,197 to \$8,112 over that seven-year period. That's a real gain of 12.7%, or \$915 more per pupil after adjusting for inflation.

And Clark has personally benefitted from the rise of school funding over

several years. In 2013-14, her total salary was \$149,357. Over the next four years, annual increases brought her gross salary to \$151,426; \$154,098; \$171,231; and \$157,283, respectively. The salary figures are what the county education agency reported to the Office of Retirement Services. In addition to being eligible for a Michigan school pension, Clark benefitted from a \$26,069 contribution her employer made to her annuity in 2018. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 22, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26797](http://MichCapCon.com/26797).*

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# Michigan Marijuana Offenders Languishing In Prison? Bills Would Change That

BY DAWSON BELL

On July 29, the state of New York became the latest jurisdiction in the country to decriminalize the possession and use of marijuana.

The statute signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo also clears the record of those convicted under previous marijuana laws.

Decriminalization is clearly a national trend; according to the National Council of State Legislatures, 26 states (including Michigan) and the District of Columbia no longer treat pot possession as a criminal offense. But the legal rehabilitation of previous offenders is moving more slowly.

In Michigan, where voters approved recreational possession and use in 2018, thousands of individuals are in jail or live with criminal records for offenses that would be legal today. And it's not clear when that situation will change.

State sens. Sylvia Santana, D-Detroit; Jeff Irwin, D-Ann Arbor; and Curt VanderWall, R-Ludington; have introduced legislation (Senate bills 262-265) to require courts to review the sentences of those currently incarcerated or on parole or probation for



low-level marijuana offenses. Courts would then “terminate” these sentences, subject to some limited exceptions.

“After the passage of Proposal 1, it's time we rethink drug sentencing laws in Michigan, so let's start with marijuana offenses, since those are no longer considered crimes under current law,” Santana stated in a news release.

Jarad Moffat of the Marijuana Policy Project called on legislators to move forward. “Michigan voters collectively decided that adults who consume marijuana responsibly shouldn't be treated as lawbreakers. If your only offense was doing something that is now legal, you deserve a clean slate. We're calling on Michigan lawmakers to do the

right thing and stop delaying expungement for low-level marijuana offenses.”

Lawmakers may consider going further than that, under legislation Irwin just introduced. The text of Senate Bill 416 will not be posted online until the Senate returns from a summer break. But a statement on Irwin's Senate webpage says, “The bill also extends additional opportunities for people convicted of growing or ‘possession with intent to distribute.’”

If adopted, Irwin's bill could make an additional 25,000 people who were convicted of higher-level marijuana crimes able to seek expungement in court, according to the statement.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said she supports the idea of rehabilitating those affected by historic marijuana laws. Opposition, even from law enforcement officials, has been muted.

But to date, no hearings on the rehabilitation have been scheduled. ■

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## Teachers Union: Yes to Reparations, No to Impeachment, Yes to Abortion

*NEA's annual conference resolutions are revealing*

BY JARRETT SKORUP

At its annual conference, the National Education Association voted on a series of business resolutions, establishing positions for the entity. While it is mostly a union of education employees, the NEA took stances on a host of issues, including abortion, reparations, global warming and Black Lives Matter.

The NEA is the largest union in the United States, with around 3 million members. Here is a summary of the positions taken, several as previously reported by Michigan Capitol Confidential.

### Abortion

“[T]he NEA will include an assertion of our defense of a person's right to control their own body, especially for women, youth, and sexually marginalized people. The NEA vigorously opposes all attacks on the right to choose and stands on the fundamental right to abortion under *Roe v. Wade*.”

### Gender pronouns

“The National Education Association will create space in all individuals' name tags, badges, and IDs for the individuals' pronouns. The individuals' pronouns will only be left off at the individual's request. ... This NBI supports the LGBTQ+ community by normalizing gender pronouns.”

### Immigrant “concentration camps”

“The NEA will publicize our vigorous defense of immigrants' rights, defending the right to asylum, ending the criminalization of border crossings, opposing child separation, the construction of a border wall, and immediately shutting down immigrant concentration camps.”

### Hair discrimination

The National Education Association resolved at its recent annual conference to educate its members about the negative impact of excluding students from school activities due to their natural hairstyles. The resolution aims

to halt students' natural hairstyles from “being modified by any school officials, school staff, referees or any other individuals in a public school or higher education environment.”

“The practice of hair discrimination impacts students' well-being, self-image, and social interactions,” the NEA resolution stated. “We should support and respect all people regardless of their differences.”

### U.S. to blame for border crisis

The National Education Association, which is the nation's largest teachers union, has resolved to call on the government of the United States to accept responsibility for the destabilization of Central American countries, including, but not limited to, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. At its recent annual meeting the NEA formally adopted the viewpoint that this destabilization was caused by the U.S. government and is a root cause of the recent increase of people seeking asylum at the border.

### Climate change/global warming

“We must embrace the imminent crisis of climate change. Every student must be exposed to the threat their generation faces. They must also be told of the real solutions and how they can make a difference.”

The union also passed resolutions supporting Black Lives Matter, mandatory paid leave time, forgiving 100% of college loans and reparations for descendants of slaves.

Not all resolutions passed. A resolution against antisemitism was not immediately passed, but referred to another committee since it would cost an estimated \$1,000. A resolution supporting the impeachment of President Donald Trump also went down to defeat. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Aug. 3, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26754](http://MichCapCon.com/26754).*





## Michigan Utility Customers Subsidizing High-End Electric Cars

*State's big utilities giving subsidies for plug-in charging stations*

BY MADELINE PELTZER

In a push to encourage drivers to shift from gas-powered cars to plug-in electric vehicles, Consumers Energy recently announced a program to subsidize the installation of charging stations. Dubbed the PowerMIDrive program, the Jackson-based gas and electric utility's initiative pays EV owners \$400 subsidies to install car chargers at home. It also provides businesses amounts ranging from \$5,000 to \$70,000 to put chargers in their parking lots.

Most of the payments so far have gone to individuals and companies in nine counties, subsidizing some 50 charging stations altogether. They are: Charlevoix, Muskegon, Kent, Allegan, Kalamazoo, Calhoun, Jackson, Saginaw and Midland counties.

DTE, Michigan's other big utility company, has introduced a similar program in its territory, giving individuals \$500 rebates for installing home EV chargers. Businesses can receive \$2,500 per charging port and \$20,000 per commercial charger.

Earlier this year, the Michigan Public Service Commission allowed the companies to cover the cost of the subsidies with a portion of the bills paid by all customers. This could raise fairness issues, since, with their limited range, plug-in EVs are generally regarded as beyond the means of most poor and working-class households.

Plug-in electric vehicles rely solely on rechargeable batteries for power. When their batteries are depleted, recharging can take anywhere between 30 minutes to 12 hours, making the cars impractical for longer trips. A survey by CarMax found that 42% of EV owners use a second car that they own for trips beyond the range of their EV — presumably, a second car powered by gasoline.

The same survey discovered that 65% of EV owners are older than 40, over 70% are college-educated, and almost 70% make more than \$75,000 per year. A 2013 study by the University of California-Davis found that nearly half (46%) of the households that bought plug-in electric vehicles in California had incomes

of higher than \$150,000 (the highest category in the survey).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median household income in Jackson County from 2013 to 2017 was \$31,118, and only 16% of its residents had a bachelor's degree or higher. Yet eight individuals and businesses there are receiving subsidies for eight charging stations. In Muskegon county, where four persons are getting charger subsidies, the median household income was \$46,000 during the same period, and a mere 18% of residents had a bachelor's degree. In Saginaw County, the median household income was \$46,000 and just 21% of residents had a bachelor's degree, yet five persons there are getting charger subsidies.

"It's reverse Robin Hood: stealing from the poor to give to the rich," said Jason Hayes, director of environmental policy at the Mackinac Center.

Consumers Energy said that the program is a preemptive strategy, and it anticipates increased EV use in the next decade. Katie Carey, director of media relations for Consumers Energy, cited a study by the Edison Electric Institute, which predicts that over 18 million EVs will be on the road by 2030.

"When I read that research, I can see pretty clearly that the demand for EVs by the public will increase," Carey told Michigan Capitol Confidential. "Therefore, we, as their electric utility, will need to ensure the electric grid is prepared to capture the benefits for our customers from the growing electric vehicle market."

Hayes has a different perspective.

"Go ahead and prepare," he said, "but use your own money to do it. Consumers Energy shouldn't rate base this unless they also want to rate base gasoline and diesel fuel facilities for all the other customers."

Hayes added that he has no problem if the company wants to invest its private funds into EV infrastructure, "but when they use the force of the government to push me, an unwilling participant, into funding their business exploits, that's a totally different thing." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on July 30, 2019 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/26733](http://MichCapCon.com/26733).*



## MichiganVotes.org

A sampling of proposed state laws, as described on [MichiganVotes.org](https://MichiganVotes.org).

### House Bill 4810

#### Ban police use of facial recognition technology

Introduced by Rep. Isaac Robinson (D)

To prohibit law enforcement officials obtaining, accessing, or using any face recognition technology or any information obtained from it to enforce the law. The ban would last at least five years, and among other things would apply to “face recognition technology used in connection with surveillance cameras, unmanned aircraft, body cameras, streetlights, and traffic lights.” Evidence obtained by such means would be inadmissible in court and more.

### Senate Bill 459

#### Impose graduated income tax

Introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D)

To replace Michigan’s flat-rate income tax with a graduated income tax, starting with a 3% rate on individual income up to \$20,000, 4% on income between \$20,000 and \$40,000, 5% on income between \$40,000 and \$80,000; 6% up to \$125,000; 7% up to \$200,000; 8% up to \$500,000; 9% up to a \$1 million; and 10% on higher amounts. This is contingent on two-thirds of the state House and Senate voting to place Senate Joint Resolution D on the ballot, and a 50%-plus-one vote of the people voting to adopt it. SJR D would repeal the current prohibition in Michigan’s state constitution against a graduated income tax.

### House Bill 4821

#### Let teachers school district deduct union dues from pay

Introduced by Rep. Christine Greig (D)

To repeal a 2012 law that prohibits school districts from using taxpayer resources (including their payroll processing systems) to deduct union dues or fees from employees’ pay, and then sending the money to a union.

### Senate Bill 434

#### Impose extensive cosmetology regulatory regime on “mobile salons”

Introduced by Sen. Aric Nesbitt (R)

To expand the extensive state regulatory and licensure regimes imposed on cosmetology services so they also apply to “mobile salons” or mobile cosmetology equipment used by different salons.

### House Bill 4838

#### Create government “office of small business director”

Introduced by Rep. Donna Lasinski (D)

To create a government “office of small business director” that would create a website with instructions on the “governmental requirements of how to start and operate a business,” provide information on potential subsidies and tax breaks, assist in mediating disputes between small businesses and state agencies and more.

### Senate Bill 457

#### Repeal FDA approved drug lawsuit ban

Introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D)

To allow product liability lawsuits against drug companies for drugs that have been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The bill would repeal a tort reform law that went into effect in 1996, under which such lawsuits are prohibited in Michigan courts unless the company intentionally withheld information or misled the FDA about the drug, or used bribery to gain approval.

### House Bill 4884

#### Require union “prevailing wage” rates on government contracts

Introduced by Rep. Brian Elder (D)

To impose a “prevailing wage” mandate that would prohibit state agencies and local governments from awarding contracts to the lowest bidder unless the contractor pays wages based on pay scales that local union officials represent as prevalent in a particular area. This policy was repealed by an initiated law in 2018.

### House Bill 4895

#### Increase unemployment benefits

Introduced by Rep. Terry Sabo (D)

To increase from 20 weeks to 26 weeks the maximum period a person is eligible for state unemployment benefits, add a new \$20 per week benefit for dependents, and more.