



## Consumers Energy Analyst: Renewables Plan Could Mean Significant Periods With No Power

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

In public testimony, a Consumers Energy employee admitted that relying too much on intermittent renewable energy sources could mean the company won't generate enough electric power to meet customer demand at times. Among other things, this could mean the company imposes "demand response" on customers. Such measures often include charging higher prices during peak use periods, but the definition also extends to rolling blackouts and involuntary rationing.

Consumers Energy says that under its renewable energy action plan, it will stop using more reliable conventional energy sources by 2040.

Sara T. Walz, an engineering analyst for Consumer's Energy, submitted testimony to the Michigan Public Service Commission about the company's integrated resource plan, which outlines its future. Under the Integrated Resource Plan, Consumers Energy would replace most electricity generated by coal, gas and nuclear plants with intermittent renewable sources, including wind and solar. Walz stated:



"The results of the electric supply reliability studies show that dependence on so many intermittent sources of generation results in significant periods of time for which the potential loss of load may occur," Walz said.

"Loss of load" is an industry term for

when a company cannot produce enough electricity to meet customer demands.

Jason Hayes, director of environmental policy at Mackinac Center for Public Policy said, "They're admitting that closing reliable energy sources, like coal and nuclear — which they plan to do by 2025 — and

building solar will ensure customer demand regularly pushes their fragile, renewable-heavy system to the brink of failure."

Katie Carey, director of media relations at the utility's parent company, CMS Energy, said a combination of these power sources and demand response measures will lower peak customer demand and "comprise 90% of electric capacity by 2040." She said the company also plans to buy four existing natural gas-fired power plants to supply power when solar and other renewable sources are not producing.

But Hayes notes that under the utility company's 2021 Clean Energy Plan, Consumers Energy intends to stop using these four additional plants by 2040. He says this will significantly increase electricity rates, further reduce reliability and inevitably lead to outages and blackouts similar to recent events in Texas, California and Great Britain. In these and other places, he said, governments have ordered a phaseout of reliable fossil fuel and nuclear-powered electricity production. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 14, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29259](https://www.michcapcon.com/29259).*

PRESORTED STANDARD  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
GREENVILLE, MI  
48838  
PERMIT # 338  
NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

**Capitol Confidential**  
Mackinac Center for Public Policy  
140 West Main Street  
P.O. Box 568  
Midland, Michigan 48640



PAGE 4

State Spending Up Huge, With Or  
Without Federal COVID-Bucks

## MEET THE STAFF



**Tom Gantert** is the managing editor for Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be reached at [Gantert@mackinac.org](mailto:Gantert@mackinac.org).



**Jack McHugh** is Senior Legislative Analyst for Michigan Capitol Confidential. He may be reached at [McHugh@mackinac.org](mailto:McHugh@mackinac.org).

**CAPCON**

Michigan news you won't  
find anywhere else.

**MICH  
CAPCON  
.COM**



Facebook.com/MichCapCon



Twitter.com/MichCapCon

# NEWS BITES

## Under Michigan's Road-Fixing Governor, More Roads Are in Poor Condition

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer says she is proud to be known as the “fix-the-damn-roads governor,” even though Michigan’s roads are in worse condition now than when she took office.

“I’m proud to be known as the fix-the-damn-roads governor ... and I am proud to be working with an administration that has got the same values,” Whitmer stated at an appearance by President Joe Biden in Howell, according to a tweet from Jonathan Oosting of Bridge Michigan.

State funding has increased from \$3.6 billion to \$3.7 billion since Whitmer entered office. In the 2017-18 year, 40.5% of roads eligible for federal aid were in poor condition. That number increased to 42.4% in the most recent assessment in 2019-20, according to the Michigan Transportation Asset Management Council.

## Students All Created Equal, But Some State Universities Get Much More From Taxpayers

Michigan taxpayers are contributing the equivalent \$13,071 to the University of Michigan for every full-time student it enrolls on its Ann Arbor campus who is a Michigan resident. Michigan State University is collecting the equivalent of \$7,547 each for the state residents it has enrolled this year.

Grand Valley State University is getting the equivalent of \$3,707, and Oakland University \$3,287, for each state resident they enroll, putting them at the bottom among Michigan’s 15 state universities in terms how much they get on this basis.

Overall, the state legislature approved \$1.5 billion for state universities in the 2021-22 budget.

## Michigan Teachers Union Head Gives The Chop To Braves Fans

David Hecker, president of the American Federation of Teachers-Michigan union took time to share his opinions about the Atlanta Braves’ victory in the World Series in the lead item in a Nov. 1 email to union members.

“It has been quite the scene the last few nights at Truist Park, the home of the Atlanta Braves, with 40,000 people doing the ‘tomahawk chop’ to rally their team in the World Series,” Hecker wrote. “Frankly, it is appalling. As is having a tomahawk on their uniforms. And the name of the team itself, which equates Native Americans with Red Sox, White Sox, and assorted animals. As we celebrate the indigenous people of the Americas this month, we all need to think long and hard about how society caricatures Native Americans, be it in major league baseball or at our schools and colleges. And we need to correct what is wrong.”

## Ready For Your Annual Inflation-Indexed Michigan Gas Tax Hike?

Michigan motorists should be prepared to see the state gasoline and diesel fuel tax increase by about 3.3% on Jan. 1, thanks to a change in the law added by the Legislature to a tax hike imposed in 2015.

The tax rate on both gasoline and diesel fuel will increase from 26.3 cents per gallon to 27.2 cents per gallon.

The calculations used to set each year’s index are based on lagging indicators, which means if inflation persists or picks up further, tax hikes in the future could become more painful.

## Agency Praised For Subsidizing 40 Jobs; In 2019 State Gained More Than 800,000

The Michigan Economic Development Corporation is the state agency delegated by the Legislature to distribute selective subsidies and tax breaks to a relative handful of corporations and developers.

A Dec. 2 press release issued by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's office extolled a decision by MEDC officials to give \$240,000 to a company called Auto Supplier TÜV SÜD America to set up a battery testing facility it says will create 40 jobs in Auburn Hills.

In 2019, Michigan’s economy lost 805,976 jobs. In the same year, the state gained 820,173 jobs, in an economy with 4.4 million jobs. As of October 2021, there were 4.2 million jobs in this state.



Dear Reader,

We could not do this without you.

For 11 years now, Capitol Confidential has served citizens as Michigan's **reliable and trusted source of news** that includes the free-market point of view.

And we can't think of a year when it's been more important to provide independent scrutiny of the claims and narratives that we are hearing from politicians and mainstream media. As our state and nation grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are committed to going beyond what's said in the news releases and press conferences and bringing you the facts and data you need to stay informed.

**Today I want to thank you** for your readership and ask for your continued support.

**Will you make a tax-deductible gift** to Michigan Capitol Confidential during this holiday season? You can send a gift in the enclosed envelope or make a donation online at [www.MichCapCon.com](http://www.MichCapCon.com).

Your gift will help **safeguard our liberties** through investigative journalism that keeps citizens informed.

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

Sincerely,

**Tom Gantert**

*Managing Editor, Michigan Capitol Confidential*

[www.MichCapCon.com](http://www.MichCapCon.com)

989.631.0900

[MiCapCon@Mackinac.org](mailto:MiCapCon@Mackinac.org)





# State Spending Up Huge, With Or Without Federal COVID-Bucks

*Time to revisit a cancelled state income tax rollback?*

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

It's time to roll-back the "temporary" income tax increase that was implemented under Gov. Jennifer Granholm now that Lansing has a surge in revenue, according to James Hohman, director of fiscal policy at Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

The income tax was increased in 2007 from 3.9 percent to 4.35 percent, an 11.5 percent increase, to avoid a government shutdown and spending cuts. It was supposed to roll back to 3.9 percent starting in 2011, but Gov. Rick Snyder and the Legislature agreed to limit the roll-back to a mere one-tenth of one percentage point.

"Lawmakers can afford to lower the tax burdens on a public that's struggled through the pandemic," says Hohman. He notes income taxes discourage income which affects job growth.

If the legislature and governor cut the state income tax increase back to 3.9 percent as promised, taxpayers would

save around \$1 billion for a full fiscal year according to a Senate Fiscal Agency report. State revenue would also decrease by \$1 billion but revenue is currently up by \$3.6 billion, a 10.4 percent increase.

And that does not include the flood of pandemic-related federal dollars law flowing into the state — \$30.3 billion in the current budget compared to \$23.6 billion last year — with yet more that hasn't been allocated yet. Even without that federal money, state spending increased from \$34.4 billion in the year before the pandemic to \$38.0 billion in the budget that was just adopted in September.

Even though revenue is up, employment is down 241,333 since the beginning of the pandemic, a 5.1 percent decline. Reducing the income rate would also create 15k jobs according to a 2018 State Tax Analysis Modeling Program. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 12, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29254](https://michcapcon.com/29254).*



## Giving Taxpayer Dollars to Some Corporations A Lucrative Business For These Nonprofits

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

The head of a regional agency involved in getting government subsidies for particular businesses saw his total pay increase from \$337,000 in 2017 to \$573,000 in 2019.

Paul Krutko's gross pay as president and CEO of Ann Arbor Spark has attracted the attention of at least one elected official in the counties where it is active.

Wes Nakagiri was the sole dissenter in an 8-1 vote of Livingston County commissioners when they decided to give Ann Arbor Spark \$175,000 in each of the next three years. He pointed to the chief executive officer's pay as one reason.

"It looks like Ann Arbor Spark is transitioning from corporate welfare to

CEO welfare," Nakagiri said, referring to the salary. "I am opposed to using taxpayer dollars to fund corporate welfare. Government should not be in the business of picking winners and losers."

Ann Arbor Spark is not the only organization in the state that spends taxpayer money in the name of economic development, promoting taxpayer-funded government subsidies for particular developers and corporations.

This entity received \$1.23 million from taxpayers in 2019, with total revenue of \$7.14 million that year.

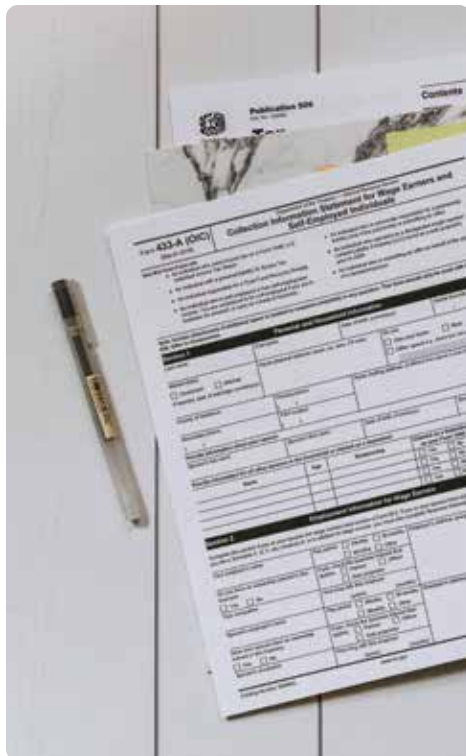
Quintin L. Messer, the CEO of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, collects \$287,000 annually. The MEDC is the state government

agency that cooperates with local corporate subsidy agencies by helping steer state tax revenue to projects in their own region. It also receives Indian casino money the state gets under agreements entered with the tribes.

The Detroit Invest Foundation, a similar nonprofit corporation, took in \$37.5 million in revenue in 2019, of which \$2.9 million came from taxpayers. Its CEO collected \$400,000 in total compensation that year.

There was no response from Ann Arbor Spark when it was contacted for a comment. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 15, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29325](https://michcapcon.com/29325).*



## Consumers Energy Admits More Renewables Risk Higher Rates, Pushing Ahead Anyway

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Michigan households currently pay some of the highest electricity rates in the Midwest, and Consumers Energy has plans that will almost certainly increase them. That was one finding brought out by individuals testifying at Michigan Public Service Commission hearings related to the company's plans to move increasingly to intermittent power sources, including solar and wind.

Consumers Energy admits that its 20-year plan to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy will result in Michigan customers paying more due to the intermittent nature of solar and wind. This could cause utilities here to buy more and more electricity that was generated elsewhere.

Consumers Energy filed its proposal for meeting various long-term targets in June. It calls for decreasing its use of fossil fuels and relying more on renewable energy sources and increased conservation, augmented by imported power from providers outside the state.

The document, called an integrated resource plan, contains exhibits from many sources. One of those includes the

testimony of Anna K. Muni, a Consumers Energy employee who said at a state hearing that if wind and solar produce more energy than expected, it would reduce costs for customers.

"If, however, solar and wind resources are not able to dispatch at their projected capacity, due to either persistent unfavorable weather conditions, unexpected outages, or maintenance, a portfolio that contains a high percentage of these resources is at a high risk for unfavorable costs," Muni said.

Customers would have to pay more then. That's because Consumers Energy would have closed the plants — called "baseload power" plants — that burn gas or coal. It would then have to buy electricity from other companies, which might still use fossil fuels.

A document called the Siemens Report contains information that backs up the testimony Consumers Energy provided to state regulators. The company reports that it expects to increase electricity purchases from the Midcontinent Independent System Operator, one of the regional bureaus that operate the U.S. power grid and helps utilities seeking to buy and sell electricity from each other.

Consumers Energy currently buys 18% of its energy from MISO. Company projections say this will increase to 63% by 2040.

Michigan is one of the worst states in the nation for solar energy production. Photovoltaic panels only capture 16% of solar energy falling on them over a 12-month period. In December, that number drops to 6.8% in Michigan, and some other power source must make up the shortfall.

Katie Carey, director of external relations for CMS Energy and Consumers Energy, offered the following in response to a request for comment. "The Clean Energy

Plan update proposed in June — which requires regulatory approval — positions us as a national leader in the clean energy transformation. The 20-year blueprint will allow us to be cleaner faster, more reliable and lower cost, providing the electricity Michigan homes and businesses need while protecting the environment we all cherish. Our plan will reduce exposure to volatile energy markets and save customers around \$600 million through 2040 compared to our current plan." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 23, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29323](https://michcapcon.com/29323).*



## To Teachers Union, Public Schools Are Part Of America's 'Systems Of Oppression'

BY JAMIE A. HOPE & TOM GANTERT

Michigan's largest teachers union wants public school teachers to actively combat what it calls institutional racism in their classrooms.

"Systemic racism is so deeply rooted in our history, culture and institutions that there's no escaping it. Visible or not, its impacts are ever-present," states a guide put out by the National Education Association on how to generate classroom activism around racial issues.

"Combating institutional racism and advancing racial justice in education and beyond is at the forefront of the NEA's vision," the guide states.

The Michigan Education Association's website has a link to [neaedjustice.org](https://neaedjustice.org), which contains a resource guide on lessons for teachers and students.

The mission, according to the National Education Association's "RACIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION" guide is to "break down the barriers to racial equity, and to prepare every student to succeed in a diverse and interdependent world."

The guide states that avoiding the issue "communicates to students of color that racism doesn't matter enough to warrant attention," while white students "often see racism being accepted and normalized, without acknowledgement or accountability." It also states that the

"lofty ideal of educational excellence and equity for all students, if it even exists at your school, may seem like a hollow commitment."

The document describes racial equity as "the systematic fair treatment of all people, resulting in fair opportunities and outcomes for everyone." The call for an undefined goal of "fair outcomes" suggests this is not the same as equal rights under the law.

The guide also advises teachers: "You probably don't have to revamp your entire curricula or classroom practice. But there are many ways we can make room for addressing racial dynamics. Discussions in your classroom can even be stepping

stones to addressing race in your school, school district and community."

It continues to teachers: "If you are white, you may be used to the privilege of not having to think or talk about race, especially your own. Push yourself to take some risks, which will likely lead to some rich learning. Your honesty and humility will help your students open up."

In Michigan, 65% of the public school students were white in 2020-21.

The MEA did not respond to a request for comment. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 2, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29158](https://michcapcon.com/29158).*



## Detroit Schools Is ‘Deeply Using’ Critical Race Theory In Its Curriculum

BY TOM GANTERT

On Aug. 10, Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction Michael Rice said at a State Board of Education meeting, “Critical race theory is not a curricular issue in pre-K-12 education.”

In a June 27 Detroit Free Press story, Michigan State University professor Dorinda Carter Andrews said it was misleading to suggest the concept of critical race theory is being taught in Michigan schools.

Andrews, a professor of race, culture and equity who also chairs MSU’s Department of Teacher Education, told the Free Press,

“I’d be hard pressed to find a K-12 teacher who is doing that in their school district.”

And in a July 6 Bridge Michigan story, Michigan Association of School Boards spokeswoman Shelly Davis Boyd said that the group is not aware that any schools in the state are teaching critical race theory.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers union, said, “Let’s be clear: Critical race theory is not taught in elementary schools or high schools.” The Detroit Federation of Teachers is a branch of AFT.

But in a Nov. 15 story published by the nonprofit news site Chalkbeat Detroit,

Detroit Public Schools Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said critical race theory is being taught in the state’s largest school district.

The publication reported Vitti saying at a recent school board meeting:

“Our curriculum is deeply using critical race theory especially in social studies, but you’ll find it in English language arts and the other disciplines. ... Students need to understand the truth of history ... understand the history of this country, to better understand who they are and about the injustices that have occurred in this country.”

In a subsequent academic committee meeting on Monday, Vitti reiterated that the Detroit school district embraces the basic tenets of CRT. It does so as part of its 2020 anti-racism resolution to “reexamine district-wide policies and curriculum and encourage students and teachers to critically analyze dominant historical narratives and question institutions of power.” ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 16, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29349](https://michcapcon.com/29349).*

## Parents, Students Take A Back Seat As School Districts Announce Last-Minute Closures

BY STAFF

In recent weeks several Michigan school districts have suddenly closed their doors to in-class schooling, or announced “remote learning only” on specified days, blaming COVID. Here are several:

**Newaygo Public Schools** announced on its website on Tuesday, Nov. 9 that classrooms would be closed the following three days, Nov. 10, 11 and 12. The district acknowledged this would cause hardships for some families and blamed staff illnesses, a shortage of substitute teachers and other issues it said were beyond its control.

In an email, Superintendent Jeff Wright said the district plans to count those missed days as snow days for purposes of meeting minimum state requirements for the number of school days each year. Wright added that fewer than 75% of students attended school on Nov. 8, which could trigger penalties.

On its website, the district said that remote-only learning was not an option for the week: “Due to the state requirements for virtual instruction, our district does not have the connectivity, parental consent documentation, or ability to transition back and forth from in person to virtual learning.”

**Southfield Public Schools** announced in an Oct. 31 letter to parents that schools



would be closed on Fridays between Nov. 5 and Feb. 4, 2022. The letter claimed the move would help the district deal with the challenges of enhanced COVID-related cleaning and staff shortages.

When asked to comment, Jennifer Martin-Green, superintendent of Southfield Public Schools, replied in an email. “Southfield is providing a full day of remote, synchronous, direct teacher instruction on each Friday outlined in our letter to the community. This type of instruction is allowable under 50A of the pupil accounting manual. Utilizing this framework, the district is able to meet the seat-time and days and hours requirements.”

**Ypsilanti Community Schools** informed parents in a Nov. 8 letter that schools would be closed for all of Thanksgiving week. The district calendar had previously included classes on Monday and Tuesday of that week, Nov. 22 and 23.

Superintendent Alena Zachery-Ross claimed the closure was directed at giving more time off to school employees. Staff shortages, she wrote, “resulted in our amazing YCS staff experiencing an unprecedented level of fatigue.”

She added the district would also use those two days for “deep cleaning,” which will continue during the winter break. Zachery-Ross told parents that most

students have internet access, and the district “will provide our students with the tools they need to do independent work during those two days.”

It is not clear whether the district plans to count those days as instructional days or snow days. Zachery-Ross did not return an email request for comment.

**Ann Arbor Public Schools** also closed schools for all of Thanksgiving week, blaming more COVID cases and staffing shortages. The district also reported pay raises aimed at attracting more substitute teachers.

When asked to comment on the requirements for state funding, Andrew Cluley, director of communications, wrote, “If needed, we will take appropriate steps as necessary to achieve the statutorily-required full school year for our students and staff during this 2021-2022 school year.”

By law, a district must offer 180 days of instruction in a school year to receive state funding. A district may cancel up to six days for circumstances outside its control (colloquially known as “snow days”) and it may petition the state superintendent for permission to cancel three additional days. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 1, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29372](https://michcapcon.com/29372).*

# School Board Member Says President's Claim Parents Rushed Meeting Stage Never Happened



BY JAMIE A. HOPE

Sara Clark Pierson, president of the Grand Ledge school board, said in local and national interviews (WILX-TV and National Public Radio) that the school board experienced a “mini-January 6 insurrection” during a recent public meeting when parents rushed the stage with their fists up.

But fellow school board member Ben Cwayna says the incident never happened and the parents do not deserve to be labeled as violent.

Clark Pierson originally made her claim in a WILX-TV interview, and repeated it in an interview with NPR.

Cwayna responded to an email which asked if Clark Pierson’s version of the events was accurate, and if the parents who say no such incident happened are telling the truth. He sent the following statement in response:

I am writing in response to your second email regarding this issue below. Please understand that I write to you as a Grand Ledge Board Member. I do not speak for the entirety of the board; only myself.

Normally, the board speaks with one voice through the president to the press and I am usually reluctant to speak on such issues. However, I do feel that this issue should be addressed and the record corrected. I had originally hoped that the record would be corrected

at Monday’s meeting with regard to the allegation within the WILX article that parents rushed and took over the stage at the June 14th meeting. Unfortunately, it was not corrected and only addressed obliquely.

I was present at the June 14th meeting in my capacity as a board member. At no time did any member of the audience take over the stage at the meeting. I witnessed no rushing of the stage or fists being shown. In fact, when the recess was called, I stayed in my chair on the stage and eventually walked down and chatted with some in the audience. If I am not mistaken, one other board member (Jarrod Smith) stayed in his chair as well for awhile and may have walked down into the audience area while we waited for the meeting to reconvene.

While the meeting was loud, spirited, and at times, raucous, there was absolutely no violence, threat of violence, or anything of the sort. Had there been, I am sure the authorities would have been called and proper action taken against the offenders. I am unsure where the WILX reporter got information that the stage was taken over. It most certainly was not.

I cannot comment on board member’s interactions with members of the public before or after meetings while walking to their car; however, after that specific

meeting, a few of the board members (including the new superintendent) stayed behind and talked to members of the public in the auditorium and outside in the parking lot.

I believe equating what occurred on June 14th to any violent event is not an accurate or fair comparison and only serves to heighten the tensions and ill will in an already very fractured community. The people speaking out at these meetings do not deserve to be labeled as violent. Mistaking the passion and anger displayed by parents as a result of being ignored for over a year should not be equated with anything violent. Many of the people in the audience that evening were well respected community members and leaders, parents, neighbors, and genuinely concerned people.”

Lansing activist John Clore video records public meetings with a group called “US Against Media.” He said Clark Pierson’s statement that parents were yelling about taking the seats of board members is false.

He said, “The entire assembly left without calling a proper recess or giving a formal adjournment. From my understanding, according to Roberts Rules of Order, at this time the floor can call a motion to fill those positions that have been abandoned by the assembly. I stated this to the parents in which we all decided to not proceed with

filling the seats as it may turn out to look the way they are trying to spin it.”

The Grand Ledge district was mentioned in the footnotes of a letter sent by the National School Board Association to President Joe Biden, asking him to take action regarding parents whose “threats of violence” and “acts of intimidation” at school board meetings it equated to “domestic terrorism.” The National School Board Association later put out a memo apologizing for the letter.

In her interview with WILX, Clark Pierson also mentioned a bill in the Michigan Legislature, Senate Bill 689, which would add extra penalties for assaulting or hurting school personnel. Clark Pierson said it does not go far enough and should also allow school boards to ban parents they consider disruptive from future meetings.

In her interview with NPR, she said: “We used to see people who would shout, and occasionally follow me to my car. ... Now what we’re seeing are people who rush at the stage with their fists in the air shouting at us. Yelling at me, as board president, saying, “Take her seat, we’ll run this meeting.”

In an email, Clark Pierson stood by her claim: “I said they ran at the stage. They did and they were screaming and had their arms and fists in the air.” ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 29, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29294](https://www.MichCapCon.com/29294).*





# Parents Upset After State Senator Calls School Board Meeting ‘Hostile’

BY TOM GANTERT

State Sen. Dayna Polehanki is being criticized by Livonia residents who say they are upset she characterized a school board meeting as “hostile.” In the meeting, a woman not wearing a face mask, citing health reasons, was required to leave, and did so in the company of police officers.

Polehanki, a Democrat from Livonia who is a former public school teacher, made her comments at a state Senate committee hearing on Oct. 19. Five days earlier, she had introduced a bill to authorize a one-year enhanced sentence for assaulting or endangering school employees, board members, or contractors.

The meeting she mentioned in her comments happened the day before, at a Livonia Public Schools Board of Education meeting. Polehanki’s chief of staff is Dan Centers, who is a trustee on the Livonia school board and was present at the meeting.

Polehanki’s description of the school board meeting has upset parents who were in attendance.

“I haven’t heard about parents being labeled as terrorists,” Polehanki said. “But I will tell you that my chief of staff, who is sitting behind me right now, is also a

school board member. And last night he texted me from the back room of a school board meeting where the school Board members were overrun by hostile, screaming people opposing the school’s mask mandate, which was administered by the health department.”

Polehanki continued: “The police were called, and it was ugly, and that’s why I introduced a bill to stop it.”

A report from Livonia police makes no mention of any of the allegations Polehanki made. Michigan Capitol Confidential obtained the report through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The police report states that school board President Colleen Burton told police that “[Local resident Tanya] Hug was causing a disturbance by refusing to wear a mask and causing the board meeting to stop.” There is no other mention of disturbances in the report.

The website [UsAgainstTheMedia.com](http://UsAgainstTheMedia.com) was the first to question the accuracy of Polehanki’s comments.

A YouTube video of the public meeting does not reveal anything to support Polehanki’s version of events. There is a one-hour break, when the board took a recess, that was not recorded. It was during

this time the woman was escorted out by police.

There is video of Tanya Hug being interviewed by police officers at the meeting. But the conversation was not animated, and there were no raised voices on either side.

Hug was so bothered by Polehanki’s comments that she sent the state senator a letter. She also sent a copy of the letter to Michigan Capitol Confidential.

“We, the parents from Livonia have video evidence of the lies she told. Including an entire video of me speaking with the police calmly and politely both inside and outside the building,” Hug wrote. She said she was allowed into the meeting despite wearing no mask because she presented a notice from a disabilities advocate, which cited the Americans with Disabilities Act. Security personnel reviewed the document and allowed her inside, she said.

Hug said that once she was inside the meeting, Burton announced that everyone had to wear a mask.

When Hug tried to respond, Burton spoke over her, hit the gavel and said the meeting was going into recess.

Hug said Burton offered her a visor. She declined, saying her ADA paperwork states

she can’t wear a face mask or covering of any type.

She said she left after being questioned by police.

“I walked out of the building with the police officers after speaking with them and that was it,” Hug said. “There was not one moment of raised voices; there was not a moment of arguing; there wasn’t even a moment of somebody being upset.”

Hug said that the Livonia police officer also told her that if she came back to another meeting, she could be arrested for trespassing.

Burton, Polehanki and Centers did not respond to emails seeking comment.

Some Livonia residents have used social media to protest Polehanki’s comments.

Reina Vendramini posted a message on Facebook that she had sent to Centers. “Dan Centers, you are on notice,” she told the trustee.

Vendramini continued, “Fabricating this insane depiction out of thin air in order to create public outrage and support for her ridiculous bill designs to limit free speech. ... I have no respect for liars.” ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 27, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29288](http://MichCapCon.com/29288).*



## Teacher Calls Parents 'White Supremacists' For Raising 'Critical Race Theory' Concerns

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

A teacher in the Grand Ledge school district used social media to label parents of children attending its schools white supremacists who use 'Q talking points.' The comment came after parents expressed concerns at a recent school board meeting about critical race theory. They also spoke about a "diversity, equity, and inclusion" curriculum then under consideration.

"Q talking points" is a reference to an internet conspiracy theory.

The parents addressed the school board on June 14 after learning it planned to vote on implementing a diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, curriculum. The board was also planned to incorporate DEI in its training and hiring practices.

Julie Boruta, a special education teacher at Beagle Middle School, posted on Facebook during class hours on June 15, the day after the board meeting:

"Grand Ledge teachers, parents, and generally ANYONE that cares for how our district moves forward... An EMBARRASSING board meeting last night, where our (now hopefully if he wants to come here) soon to be superintendent was SUPPOSED to have

his contract ratified, was shut down by Q talking point supporters. It's SO DISGUSTING. This is white supremacy RIGHT HERE in GL. We MUST be louder than them!"

A video posted of the school board meeting showed parents addressing their concerns over critical race theory, DEI and potential mask mandates for the 2021-2022 school year. Others threatened to pull their students or gave notice they had already done so over the issues.

In 2020 the school board created its Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee, after it fired the district's superintendent for referencing George Floyd's criminal history on social media. The committee submitted a report in June recommending the district adopt DEI-based policies. In August the board voted to hire a diversity, equity, inclusion and student support director, with a salary of \$100k.

Beagle Middle School Principal David Kushman did not respond to a request seeking comment on Baruta's remarks. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 5, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29148](https://michcapcon.com/29148).*



## State Sen. Dale Zorn Praises State Subsidy To Taiwanese Firm

BY TOM GANTERT

State Sen. Dale Zorn, R-Ida, issued a press release applauding a \$1 million state grant for EOI Pioneer to expand its operations in Dundee, which the company says will bring 95 jobs.

Zorn called the \$1 million state grant "exciting news." The press release stated, "EOI Pioneer Inc. is a subsidiary of Excellence Optoelectronics, Inc., a Taiwan-based manufacturer of LED light sources and electronics assemblies for the automotive industry."

The senator has a consistent record in favor of giving taxpayer-funded subsidies to private companies and developers selected by state officials. The Mackinac Center's Business Subsidy Scorecard shows that Zorn has never opposed

one of the programs that transfer state revenue to private interests. The scorecard tracks legislators' votes on bills authorizing cash payments to certain private companies — not just tax breaks and other favors.

Specifically, since Zorn was first elected to the state House in 2010, he has voted "yes" on bills authorizing up to \$1.815 billion worth of such favors. He has never voted "no" on a bill that meets this scorecard's criteria. He has also cast hundreds of favorable votes on other so-called economic development benefits for a relative handful of corporations and developers. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 5, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29378](https://michcapcon.com/29378).*



## Tlaib: 'Corporate Dems' Resist Biden Welfare Blowout; She Was A 'Corporate Dem' Herself As State Rep

BY TOM GANTERT

U.S. Rep. Rashida Tlaib made news when she criticized certain U.S. Senators who might not support Joe Biden's massive social welfare expansion bill, calling them "corporate Dems." The U.S. House passed the bill on Friday.

In an interview on HBO, the Democrat from Detroit called out the Senators of her own party who might oppose the bill.

But as a member of the Michigan House of Representatives from 2009 to 2014, Tlaib agreed to give taxpayer-funded subsidies to corporate interests every time she was present and had the chance. During her three terms in the Michigan Legislature, there were nine such bills identified in a scorecard the Mackinac Center for Public Policy created. The scorecard on corporate welfare only includes votes that authorized

actual payments to businesses, not other forms of special treatment, such as property tax abatements.

Tlaib was absent during one of the votes, which authorized \$50 million in subsidies to makers of photovoltaic cells. She was, though, present and voted on the other eight subsidy bills meeting this scorecard's criteria during her three terms in the state House. Taken together, those bills authorized up to \$1.031 billion in cash payments to favored corporations and developers. The largest offered \$365 million to companies promising to build electric car batteries in Michigan. Most of the projections behind that subsidy never came to pass. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 22, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29361](https://michcapcon.com/29361).*



## Despite Costly Previous Failures, Michigan Governor Wants 'Venture Capital' Corporate Subsidies

BY TOM GANTERT

In 2003 state legislators in Michigan enacted a law authorizing what they called venture capital subsidies for certain business owners. The scheme ultimately cost the state \$613,000 for every job it created, which in this case meant taxpayer dollars collected to pay for other state priorities went instead to repay lenders to failed companies.

In 2021, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer wants lawmakers to try it again with a similar program.

Before it was suspended by the Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder in 2015, the state's Venture Michigan Fund spent \$450 million in funds repaying loans made by third parties to 52 companies, all to create what turned out to be 734 jobs, according to a 2018 Auditor General report.

But in 2003 the concept received praise from voices inside and outside government. Business reporter Rick Haglund wrote a story for Booth News



promoting the concept. It downplayed concerns state taxpayers would be stuck with the bill when its beneficiaries fell short of their promises.

Haglund wrote: "Supporters of the state-backed fund say big losses are unlikely. Oklahoma, which has had a similar program for 10 years, hasn't had

to hand out any tax credits to make good on its guarantee, according to Jason Burr, an Ann Arbor venture capitalist who has studied the Oklahoma fund. Burr is treasurer of the Michigan Venture Capital Association."

The 2003 story continued: "If state-backed funds don't meet their guaranteed

rate of return, the state must make up the difference in tax credits."

Only if investments went belly up would investors tap into money, dubbed "tax vouchers," authorized to secure the funds. The program that became law used regular state revenue to cover the eventual losers, not pension fund dollars.

Eighteen years later, investors had claimed every one of the \$450 million in tax voucher bailouts that had been authorized — exactly what the program's corporate, government and media boosters insisted would not happen back in 2003.

Now, Crain's Detroit Business is reporting that officials want to resuscitate the concept, this time funded by federal COVID-19 relief dollars collected by the state. The new plan is to dedicate \$200 million from this source to very similar scheme with a new title, the "Startup Resilience Initiative." ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Oct. 4, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29215](https://michcapcon.com/29215).*



## State Gives \$1M To Michigan State University ‘Hub Of Innovation’ That Promotes ‘Decentering Whiteness’

BY JAMIE A. HOPE

The state of Michigan gave an additional \$1 million in taxpayer money to Michigan State University this year for a Hub of Innovation in Learning and Technologies, an internal consulting group.

This is said to promote learning communities, which the organization describes as “groups of faculty who are eager to attend recurring meetings and collaborate around a specific pedagogical topic.” Many of the learning communities engage in a range of race-based, equity, and social justice engagements.



One such community, the Anti-Racist Educator Dialogue Group, “aims to support educators in enacting anti-racist pedagogy and decentering whiteness in their work with doctoral students.”

Other learning communities are created for what the group describes as feminist community engagement, equity and social justice in medical education, diversity, equity and inclusion as part of the curriculum, and engineering and social justice.

One learning community, Teaching for Equity and Social Justice in Medical Education, has participants reading and discussing the book *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*. The book’s publisher describes it as a comprehensive resource guide that includes material on

intersectionality, classism, contemporary activism such as Black Lives Matter and “White Settler societies and colonialism.”

MSU will receive \$354 million under the 2021-22 state budget, all from Michigan taxpayers. MSU is also getting tens of millions in additional federal relief dollars. Separately, the university has an endowment fund that was valued at \$3.4 billion in 2019-20. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Dec. 2, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29373](https://michcapcon.com/29373).*

## Governor, Corporate Welfare Advocates Boast That Phantom Pfizer Plant Produced Vaccines

BY TOM GANTERT

A recent story in the *Tulsa World*, a daily newspaper in Oklahoma, ranked Michigan as having the second-best state for recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, the ranking was based on a certain false claim that is commonplace in the world of corporate welfare. It included in its statistics jobs that companies receiving pledges of government subsidies said they will create, but which have not yet come into being — and which experience suggests in many cases never will.

Counting these as actual jobs caused the *Tulsa* newspaper to falsely report, “Plus, with support from Good Jobs for Michigan, Pfizer built a drug manufacturing plant

in Portage, Michigan, from where the company shipped the first doses of their COVID-19 vaccine.”

But Pfizer did not break ground on the subsidized project until March 2021. That was two months after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said the new facility was already in operation and providing 450 new jobs. It was also three months after the company released its first shipment of the vaccine, in December 2020.

Good Jobs for Michigan is a corporate welfare scheme that delivers cash subsidies to a small number of businesses and developers selected by government officials. In 2018, officials approved giving \$10.5 million to Pfizer to expand an existing plant in Portage in return for

the pharmaceutical giant creating 450 new jobs.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer stated in her January 2021 State of the State address, “You might not know, but Pfizer was the first business to utilize Good Jobs for Michigan. They built their sterile drug manufacturing plant and created 450 good-paying jobs in Portage. Passing this legislation will be good for our families, our businesses, and our economy. Let’s get it done.”

But buildings on the Kalamazoo campus did participate in distributing COVID vaccines, the one Whitmer mentioned did not yet exist when she made the claim.

In a related appeal to a local zoning board, Pfizer said on March 8, 2021, that it anticipated completing construction on the

new facility in June 2023. Company officials have since said it would not be operational until 2025.

Yet many politicians and news agencies have reported that the Pfizer COVID vaccine is being produced in a plant that does not exist, and they credited Good Jobs for Michigan.

A Democratic politician, a TV station, a labor union, economic development bureaucracies and business trade groups are just some of those who have erroneously credited this corporate welfare program’s handouts as contributing to Pfizer’s COVID vaccine. ■

*The original version of this story was posted online on Nov. 12, 2021 and is available at [MichCapCon.com/29333](https://michcapcon.com/29333).*



**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.

140 West Main Street, Midland, Michigan 48640 989-631-0900 [MichCapCon.com](https://michcapcon.com) [Mackinac.org](https://mackinac.org) [MichiganVotes.org](https://michiganvotes.org)



## MichiganVotes.org

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

2021 Senate Bill 594

### Authorize 3% county Airbnb tax

Introduced by Sen. Ed McBroom (R)

To allow counties to impose a 3% tax on Airbnb type short term vacation rentals.

2021 House Bill 5325

### Impose more auto market seller restrictions

Introduced by Rep. Phil Green (R)

To prohibit a new vehicle wholesaler from being located within 200 feet of an existing wholesaler. Also, to impose new facility, government paperwork, and hours of operations mandates on used or secondhand vehicle parts dealers, vehicle scrap metal processors, vehicle salvage pool operators, distressed vehicle transporters, brokers, and automotive recyclers. When automakers were granted taxpayer bailouts in the 2000s Michigan and other states were required to make minimal reductions to “protectionist” laws restricting competition in new car sales.

2021 House Bill 5334

### Authorize a “prostate awareness” plate, give profits to particular group

Introduced by Rep. Roger Hauck (R)

To authorize a “prostate cancer awareness” specialty license plate, and give the profits to a particular foundation named in the bill.

2021 Senate Bill 631

### Legalize mescaline and psilocybin

Introduced in the Senate

To revise a health code provision banning substances like mescaline or psilocybin (“an entheogenic plant or fungus”), by allowing a person to create and deliver these if no money or other valuable consideration is given or received.

2021 Senate Bill 644

### Revise school count day detail

Introduced by Sen. Wayne Schmidt (R)

To establish that if a public school student has been required by the local health department to be in quarantine due to possible COVID contact and is getting “virtual” lessons via the internet on the day when school districts count students for annual state funding purposes, the student will still be counted as enrolled.

2021 House Bill 5285

### Create government “aquatic invasive species sales advisory council”

Introduced by Rep. Sarah Anthony (D)

To establish a “aquatic invasive species sales advisory council” comprised of specified government officials, environmental groups and conservation organizations, business groups and more, to recommend new laws against selling aquatic invasive species online.

2021 House Bill 5297

### Add appeals and more reporting requirements with school expulsion

Introduced by Rep. Felicia Brabec (D)

To require public schools to engage one or more “independent decision makers” when deciding to expel or suspend a student who has committed an assault against staff or other student. Senate Bill 634 adds appeal provisions and race, class and gender-related reporting requirements to this process.

2021 Senate Bill 619

### Revise marijuana business license “character and fitness” provision

Introduced by Sen. Jeff Irwin (D)

To revise a state marijuana business licensure law “character and fitness” provision by creating an exception that would allow individuals with a felony record to still get a license if the offense was related to illegal marijuana sales.

2021 House Bill 5342

### Ban state swimming bans due to big waves or riptides

Introduced by Rep. Luke Meerman (R)

To prohibit the Department of Natural Resources from prohibiting an individual from entering a body of water from state managed land because of temporary conditions of waves or currents. This would apply to surfers among others.