

MAY / JUNE 2023

IMPACT



MACKINAC CENTER'S WORKERS FOR OPPORTUNITY WINS IMPORTANT NATIONAL VICTORIES



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MACKINAC IN THE MEDIA



Director of Energy and Environmental Policy Jason Hayes on Fox News



Protectionism Benefits Some at the Expense of Others

“We shouldn’t want our lawmakers to play favorites between domestic interests, and people should be more skeptical when policymakers dip into protectionist rhetoric.”

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

The Detroit News

‘Free’ preschool will hinder low-income families in Michigan

“More demand into a system with an already limited supply means fewer spots and higher costs. Lower-income families already have a tough time finding preschools; this makes that problem worse.”

*Jarrett Skorup, Vice President of Marketing
and Communications*

The Washington Post

House votes to overturn Biden’s student loan forgiveness program

“The conservative nonprofit Mackinac Center for Public Policy also sued, saying the payment moratorium amounts to government overreach and undermines the power of the congressionally approved Public Service Loan Forgiveness as a recruiting tool. Both cases are ongoing.”

Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, Washington Post reporter

CRAIN’S DETROIT BUSINESS

Want a better economy? Stop giving corporate welfare and start fixing business-expense accounting

“In lieu of improvements to the state business climate, policymakers’ approach to growth is to subsidize select businesses at the public’s expense.”

James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy

Forbes

Celebrating A Milestone For Homeschooling Freedoms

“The court’s decisions represented a milestone in the educational freedom movement,” said Molly Macek, director of education policy at Michigan’s Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Kerry McDonald, Forbes Contributor



What Does the Repeal of Right-to-Work Mean?

You were entitled to a dispirited moment when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and the Legislature repealed Michigan's right-to-work law in March. It's a big setback.

But do not despair. There are four points to note about right-to-work repeal: It is one step back for freedom, not ten. We locked in durable gains that keep paying dividends. Michigan is still a battleground state. And we must reinstate right-to-work as soon as possible.

The repeal didn't blow us back to Square One, which I'll define as 1992, when the Mackinac Center first called for a right-to-work law. The idea was scorned, ridiculed, and mostly ignored. Conventional wisdom held that Michigan, the birthplace of United Auto Workers and America's union stronghold, would never give workers the right not to pay a union.

Big policy ideas move stepwise through a political process:

- Unthinkable
- Radical
- Tolerable
- Sensible
- Popular
- Policy

“**We can restore this right legislatively or at the ballot box. The Mackinac Center, with your help, is already looking to our next big win.**”

We patiently advanced right-to-work through these steps until it became law in 2012. Repeal merely bumped right-to-work back one notch, from “policy” to “popular,” not all the way back to “unthinkable.” The Legislature passed the repeal with no Republican votes and no votes to spare in either house. Whitmer announced her signing with only a press release.

Voters, including 60% of union members, favor right-to-work by a 2-1 margin. Democrats didn’t change anyone’s mind or shift the Overton Window. They merely overturned a popular law.

Repeal doesn’t return unions to the world they enjoyed in 2012, because we kept pushing after right-to-work passed. We advised workers about their rights, and thousands left their unions. We redoubled our efforts in 2018 after the Supreme Court ruled in Janus that no public sector worker in any state can be compelled to support a union.

Michigan unions have lost 26%, or 143,000, of their members since right-to-work took effect. That’s about \$90 million in annual dues. The two largest teachers unions are down 32%, as are the unions that once captured state workers.

Although unions will soon regain the power to drag private sector workers into their ranks,

they can’t touch public sector workers, thanks to Janus and our educational and legal assistance. Nationally, Janus costs unions \$700 million annually. Nothing about repeal changes that.

No policy defeat – or victory – is permanent. The repeal of right-to-work is akin to losing a big game in the middle of a long baseball season. In policy and politics, the season never ends, and tomorrow always offers another chance.

Michigan doesn’t fit neatly into “red” or “blue” categories. Outcomes are actively contested, conclusions are not foregone, and conditions change quickly. The repeal of right-to-work, ten years after enactment, just underscores Michigan’s status as a battleground state.

We can restore this right legislatively or at the ballot box. We can even write it into our constitution, as Tennesseans recently did with theirs. The stakes are high, but the prize is closer than it was before. The Mackinac Center, with your help, is already looking to our next big win. ■



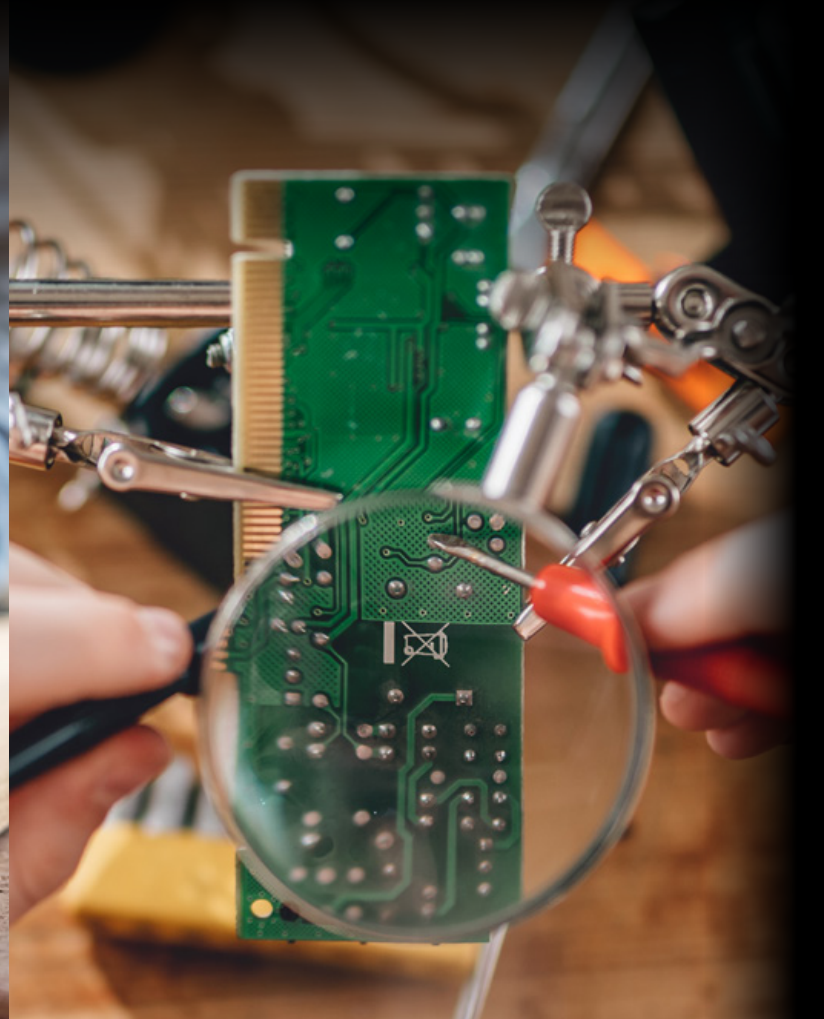
Joe

By Joseph G. Lehman

President of the Mackinac Center



PREPARING PRISONERS FOR SUCCESSFUL REENTRY



Efforts to reduce the rate of repeat criminal offenses are notoriously ineffective. Policymakers have created program after program aimed at driving down recidivism rates, but most of the time these don't accomplish much. But new Mackinac Center research indicates there is one relatively simple and inexpensive way to fight crime: Educate prisoners.

Last year the Mackinac Center teamed up with an economist and a criminal justice expert from Middle Tennessee State University. We aimed to analyze the best academic research on the impact of prison-based educational programs. Daniel Smith, a former intern at the Center and member of our Board of Scholars, made the connection for us.

We suspected these programs had a positive impact, based on a handful of studies we were aware of, as well as anecdotal evidence from a few programs in Michigan. Our scholars' work to test this suspicion was thorough. They systematically reviewed 750 research papers on the topic and identified 78 high-quality studies from that group. Our researchers then averaged and summarized the findings from the highest-quality studies.

They found that education programs offered in prisons decreased the chance of a prisoner returning to prison by 15%. This may not seem like much. But considering the high and rising cost of prisons, a 15% reduction saves a lot of taxpayer money.

Our researchers found other benefits from these programs. Inmates who received education or training while in prison were 7% more likely to find employment after serving their sentences, and they earned higher wages, too.



“Inmates who received education or training while in prison were 7% more likely to find employment after serving their sentences, and they earned higher wages, too.”

The study compared the performance of various educational programs, such as remedial courses, GED programs, vocational training and college-level classes. Each type of program had a positive return on investment from the taxpayers' perspective, with vocational training yielding the greatest benefit. College degree programs had the lowest return for taxpayers, though they provided the most benefits for participants.

We published a summary of these findings in January, and it is available on our website. The scholars — Steven Sprick Schuster and Ben Stickle — plan to publish their full results in an academic journal later this year. The Mackinac Center is planning to do more research along these lines in 2023. We hope to inform policymakers about the importance of prison-based educational programs and see more of them soon in Michigan. ■



By Michael Van Beek
Director of Research



PARTNER
FEATURE



Welcoming Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to the Mackinac Center



“We were proud to welcome Gov. Ron DeSantis to the Mackinac Center headquarters.”

– Joseph G. Lehman

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy hosted Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis for a policy roundtable during the governor's April visit to Michigan. DeSantis, a 2024 presidential candidate, was in the state to discuss his Florida Freedom Blueprint, also appearing at events at Hillsdale College and the Midland County Republican Party.

Mackinac Center President Joseph Lehman moderated a discussion at our Midland headquarters with some of our staff, board members and supporters, as well as about a dozen state lawmakers.

"We were proud to welcome Gov. Ron DeSantis to the Mackinac Center headquarters," Lehman said. "The governor has been a leader on school choice, labor rights and emergency management during COVID. We work with lawmakers and learn from good governance in other states, as the Founding Fathers intended."

Florida and Michigan have widely diverged in recent public policy decisions. While Michigan repealed its right-to-work law, Florida strengthened its own law, reaffirming workers' right to join or not to join a labor union. The Sunshine State also requires each union in a workplace to win a majority of votes, in regularly held elections, from those working under the union contract.

Florida has no state income tax, while Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Attorney General Dana Nessel are working to hike Michigan's income tax next year. Florida was one of the freest states during the COVID-19 pandemic, while Michigan saw one of the most severe lockdowns in the country. As DeSantis noted at the event, lockdowns did not stop many politicians from leaving their home states and heading to Florida.



Michigan Senate Republican Leader Aric Nesbitt, Gov. DeSantis, and Mackinac Center President Joseph Lehman discuss policy at Mackinac Center headquarters.

Over the past decade, and especially in the years since COVID-19 hit, Florida has grown much more rapidly than Michigan in jobs, income and — especially — population. Michigan has been among the slowest-growing states since the pandemic ended, and our death rate from COVID-19 was higher than Florida's.

DeSantis follows in the path of other governors who have visited Mackinac Center. John Engler, a Republican, and Jennifer Granholm, a Democrat, both came by our headquarters while in office. Former Gov. Rick Snyder came to several events, including our annual gala. Governors from other states have also spoken at Mackinac Center events, including a former Republican governor of Indiana, Mitch Daniels, and a former Democratic governor of West Virginia, Bob Wise. ■



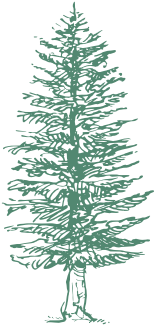
By Jarrett Skorup

Vice President for Marketing and Communications



**MACKINAC
STAFF
PROFILE**





Operations office assistant **Kara Malkowski** Mackinac's All-Star Utility Player

Every team needs a utility player – someone who can excel in a variety of roles. We have Kara Malkowski.

“One thing I love about working here is the variety of things I get to do – website publishing, copy editing, invoicing and contract management,” Kara says. “Part of my personality is that I need variety to be fulfilled.”

And she's great at it. Kara started at the Center in 1999 and has worked in fundraising, operations and wherever else she's needed. Over 20-plus years, she has worked full-time, part-time and on contract in a variety of positions for a variety of departments.

“The job has changed tremendously,” Kara says, “and I have always appreciated the Mackinac Center's flexibility in respecting my desire to serve my family while staying involved. In return, I am driven to work very hard for them.”

Kara is a native of Midland, Michigan. She studied English and speech communications at Northern Michigan University, where she also met her husband Keith. They moved to Milwaukee, where Keith got his master's degree at Marquette University and Kara was hired in the advancement department.

“After our first child was born, we got tired of the long drive around Chicago back to Midland,” Kara says. “So, we began keeping our eyes open for positions opening up back home.”

Kara met Larry Reed, the Mackinac Center's first president, through her mom, who worked at Northwood University when he was on the faculty. During Larry's run for Congress, Kara volunteered as a youngster in his campaign office, doing mailings and other duties. When Larry was president of the Mackinac Center, a position opened, and Kara jumped at it. She started as a database manager.

Today, Kara's position is operations office assistant, but there really isn't a position title that captures all she does. Which suits her just fine.

Kara and Keith have been married for nearly 30 years and have four daughters, ages 14 to 24. They enjoy camping, especially in the Upper Peninsula. They also travel, having been to Poland and England.

Kara also volunteers locally at Phoenix Community Farm in the summertime, planting, weeding and harvesting produce. She leads the hymns at her local church and is an avid reader. ■



By Jarrett Skorup

Vice President for Marketing and Communications



THE STRATEGY OF OUR

SUSTAINABLE MICHIGAN BUDGET PROJECT

Good policy for Michigan, even if it is not politically feasible right now

Michigan, like the rest of the states, has a balanced budget requirement. Lawmakers are not supposed to go into debt for routine daily expenses. Legislators interpret this to mean that they can spend all the money they collect in taxes each year, plus last year's unspent funds.

But they don't have to. This is why we've recommended our Sustainable Michigan Budget target, which is based on the percentage growth of the state's population each year, plus the inflation rate.

Legislators have a large amount of cash at their disposal, thanks to last year's restraint and more tax revenue than expected.

The question is whether they are listening to the message of restraint.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer doesn't seem to be. She's got a plan for all but a small portion of the state's surplus funds.

The benefits of keeping a lid on spending increases are real and important, regardless of whether Democrats or Republicans are in charge. In this session, the majority caucuses in the Legislature are Democratic, and they have not shown an interest in restraint.

There is a time and a place for making recommendations that legislators are likely to adopt. We are making a number of suggestions that are politically feasible. But it is also important to recommend good policies, whether or not legislators are going to consider them this year. The Sustainable Michigan Budget is a good recommendation, but so far it has not been accepted.

Michigan's budget should not grow faster than residents' ability to pay, and the state's balanced budget requirement was likely enacted as a way to honor that principle. But our budget target ensures that state government only grows at sustainable levels.



Lawmakers are not likely to adopt our recommendation until they see the problems with spending every dollar they have available, understand the benefits of sustainability, and endorse the budget target as they run for office. That's not going to happen out of the blue. It's going to take time to get the idea out there and change people's minds. When that happens, candidates will conclude that taking up this cause is the popular move.

Think tanks like the Mackinac Center can operate on a time scale that endures beyond the scope of today's politicians. And with good strategy, clever marketing and consistency, we can enact good policies even if they are politically impossible today. ■



By James Hohman

*Director of the Morey
Fiscal Policy Initiative*

The Mackinac Center's work, including this magazine, is made possible by the Mackinac Center Board of Directors:

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Amy E. Green: 1971-2023



In May 2023 the Mackinac Center lost our beloved colleague and dear friend, Amy E. Green. Earlier this year, the Mackinac Center Board of Directors passed the following resolution honoring Amy's time and dedication to the Mackinac Center.

Amy E. Green

This recognition is presented to Amy E. Green for her years of service to the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the cause of liberty.

The Mackinac Center met Amy when she was a high school student, attending one of our annual debate workshops. Amy later became the eighth employee we hired, working from 1994 until 2002. She then freelanced from 2005 to 2013 while raising her children, Emily and Ryan. Amy returned to the Center from 2015 to 2022.

In the early days, Amy served as assistant to senior vice president Joe Overton. He taught her that in a professional workplace, “expectations matter” — a phrase that still appears in the Mackinac Center Values and Culture statement.

In the late 1990s, as the Mackinac Center outgrew its offices behind a Midland pizza parlor, Amy suggested we move into the abandoned Woolworth’s building on Main Street. Amy not only offered good ideas; she

took action. She wielded a sledgehammer against the old Woolworth’s brick façade in the ceremonial groundbreaking of our Mackinac Center headquarters building. Amy later led the installation of our first multi-line telephone system, used until 2011.

Amy was a copy editor extraordinaire, earning the moniker “Eagle” (as in “eagle eye”) from Joseph G. Lehman. Her initials, then AEK, accommodated the nickname: “Amy Eagle Kellogg.”

In her most recent role as assistant to the president, Amy was charged with maximizing the time of president Joseph G. Lehman and executive vice president Mike Reitz. She often joked that juggling their calendars was “like playing a game of Tetris.”

On this, the 20th day of February 2023, the Board of Directors of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy expresses its gratitude for the work and person of Amy E. Green. ■





Gov. Ron DeSantis signs the Teachers' Bill of Rights, empowering teachers to resist union coercion.

Years of diligence paid off for the Mackinac Center's Workers for Opportunity initiative recently when Tennessee and Florida enacted laws to protect workers from union overreach.

Workers for Opportunity joined Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis in May as he signed a measure known as paycheck protection, ending the practice of having schools automatically deduct union dues from teachers' paychecks. Florida taxpayers will no longer foot the bill for union dues collection, and teachers will be protected from having

schools take money out of their paychecks without permission.

In addition to protecting Florida's taxpayers, the law bolsters transparency requirements for unions and increases their accountability. Unions will have to submit audited financial statements to state officials, making the statements a matter of public record. Union members will be notified each year of the total cost of annual dues. The law also increases the percentage of employee membership a union must hold to stave off a



MACKINAC CENTER'S WORKERS FOR OPPORTUNITY WINS IMPORTANT NATIONAL VICTORIES

recertification election. The threshold is now 60% of workers covered under a contract rather than a bare majority. The change is a small step toward remedying the problem that even people who do not support a union are bound by its contract.

Gov. DeSantis included these provisions in his January Teachers Bill of Rights proposal. But the work on these reforms began in 2019, when Workers for Opportunity started helping key lawmakers and the administration develop model legislation. These relationships proved powerful as the momentum for reform increased.

The outcome was not assured, however. During the bill's final hearing, union leaders packed hearing rooms with vocal and well-organized protesters. The Workers for Opportunity team, working with key allies from the Florida-based James Madison Institute, used traditional and digital outreach tools to spread the word about the bill's importance and the positive effects that would come from its passage.

Several national and local unions filed suit once the governor signed the bill into law, threatening to undo years of hard work. Gov. DeSantis' administration was ready and waiting, thanks in part to our warning. The Workers for Opportunity team helped Gov. DeSantis fight that challenge, and we continue working with his administration as unions try to block the law.

Florida wasn't the only victory for Workers for Opportunity this session. Two bills passed in Tennessee made monumental strides for worker freedom in the Volunteer State.

Workers for Opportunity paved the way for Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee to sign a first-in-the-nation law

linking state economic incentives to private-ballot protections. The law secures Tennessee workers' right to decide union representation in secret-ballot elections, rather than through public card signings, often monitored by union representatives. The law, which Gov. Lee signed





Florida Rep. Dean Black presents the bill on the House floor.

Lindsay Killen and F. Vincent Vernuccio of Workers for Opportunity discuss strategy in advance of final Florida House hearing.

Workers for Opportunity worked closely with Gov. Lee, as it did with Gov. DeSantis, to enact paycheck protection in Tennessee.

May 11, frees people at workplaces receiving taxpayer dollars from being strong-armed by union tactics. This gets taxpayers out of the business of funding union coercion.

The reform almost didn't make it into law. A vote in the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee stripped the paycheck protection clause out of the bill just days before it was slated



The Workers for Opportunity team celebrates with allies from The James Madison Institute after Florida lawmakers approve the Teachers' Bill of Rights.

for a final House floor vote. The Workers for Opportunity team worked tirelessly through a weekend to pass information and resources to key lawmakers and the general public before a final Monday floor hearing. Our friends at the Tennessee-based Beacon Center responded to our call for help and provided support for the provision.

When Monday came, the House passed the bill, with paycheck protection reinstated by the narrowest possible vote.

Support for paycheck protection grew in reaction to a union self-enrichment measure that we called attention to as the law was being crafted. One part of the bill gave teachers a substantial pay raise – the biggest in state history. But the bylaws of the Tennessee Education Association allow union leaders to impose a special assessment on members whenever teachers receive a raise. “This bill is a pay raise meant for teachers,” Workers for Opportunity emphasized in our outreach to media and legislators, “not unions.” The message helped restore paycheck protection.

The historic victories in each state will benefit teachers there. But they also generate momentum across the nation for similar pro-worker reforms. The legislative session for 2023 is over in many states, but we are already exploring opportunities to build on these wins in 2024 and beyond. ■



By Taylor Anderson
Outreach Manager



BY THE NUMBERS

200,000

The number of people affected by the Florida's Teachers' Bill of Rights

72-44, 23-17

Votes in the House and Senate for the Florida's Teachers' Bill of Rights

60%

The share of employees in a workplace who must financially support a union in order to avoid a recertification election



From the Yellow Pages to One of Michigan's 'Coolest Places to Work'



John Cook loves Lake St. Clair and the Grosse Pointe community. "It just gets in your blood," the area native says.

"I believe my parents helped lead me to believe in free-market values," says John. His father worked his entire career at AT&T and his mother worked as a homemaker and office manager for a steel company.

Church and sports were John's priorities in his youth. He married his high school sweetheart Susan 32 years ago. They have one daughter, Olivia.

With an MBA from Wayne State University, John followed in his father's footsteps at AT&T. He worked as a Yellow Pages account executive for 17 years before the internet devastated the industry.

Embracing the change, John reinvented his career. He took a job in the health benefits industry and then set out on his own.

"I've always had a dream to run my own business," he says, "and after about two years, I got the opportunity to buy a block of business from a friend who was retiring. I decided to bet on myself, buying it and starting my own business."

Five years ago, he merged his company, Benepro, and he has continued to grow the business.

After John took over at Benepro, the company was named one of Michigan's "coolest places to work" by Crain's Detroit Business.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The success of John's business only deepens his concerns about Michigan's prospects in 2023.

"The total change in our political landscape will have a devastating long-term effect on our ability to lower taxes," John says. "Michigan ranks in the bottom half of states in economic growth. Our education system ranks in the bottom half of states as well. Finally, Michigan's green energy push will seriously impact our ability to produce affordable energy going forward."

Why does John Cook support the Mackinac Center?

"I support the Mackinac Center because I truly believe in its mission," he says. "Specifically, in the area of education, with its school choice initiatives. The Mackinac Center focuses on limiting the size and scope of Michigan's bloated government. The Mackinac Center supports Michigan workers through advancing and promoting right-to-work. Finally, the Center protects individual property rights. These are just a few of the many worthy causes that the Mackinac Center fights for and I support." ■



By Joe Milligan

Director of Strategic Partnerships



MichCapCon.com

Michigan Capitol Confidential reports with a free-market news perspective.



WorkersForOpportunity.org

Advancing the liberty of employees across the country and protecting First Amendment rights.



Mackinac.org/MCLF

Our public interest law firm advances individual freedom and the rule of law in Michigan.



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STUDENT LOAN PAUSE: ANOTHER BREACH OF EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY

The COVID-19 pandemic gave Americans many opportunities to see how times of crisis lead to government overreach. One such overreach was the U.S. Department of Education's continual deferment of student loan payments. The Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the New Civil Liberties Alliance are challenging this unconstitutional extension in a lawsuit against the department.

The March 2020 CARES Act gave financial relief to borrowers by suspending monthly payment obligations for federal student loans. This was supposed to be a short-term solution, but the program is still in force. The suspension on interest accruals has so far cost taxpayers \$150 billion.

The pause enacted by Congress was meant to last six months. President Donald Trump bypassed Congress and extended the pause for three months in September 2020. The Biden administration has followed suit by extending the pause another six times.

The most recent extension, announced in November 2022, came after the administration said it had granted a final extension. Payments are scheduled to resume in August.

The administration said it granted the latest extension because of uncertainties brought by lawsuits against its plan to cancel certain college loan debt. Several lawsuits, including one from the Pacific Legal Foundation and another from the Cato Institute, challenge the constitutionality of the plan. The U.S. Supreme Court will soon decide whether the administration can unilaterally forgive \$400 billion in student loan debt.

Continuing to defer payments through executive action is unconstitutional as well as bad policy. Debt that individuals willingly take on should not be offloaded to taxpayers, whether through pausing repayments and interest accrual or through outright cancellation.

The Department of Education keeps changing its justification for continuing to defer loan



repayments. The department relied on economic hardship provisions of the Higher Education Act of 1965 for the earliest extensions but later cited the HEROES Act of 2003. It then stopped citing legal authorities and quit publishing new extensions in the Federal Register.

The Mackinac Center is both the counsel and plaintiff in the lawsuit. The loan pause has a direct negative effect on nonprofit organizations by diluting the value of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. This program, enacted in 2007, provides partial debt forgiveness to student loan borrowers who work ten years at 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations and make consistent payments. Extending debt cancellation to all borrowers, regardless of where they work, weakens a benefit Congress intended exclusively for nonprofit organizations. By continuing the pause, President Biden is overriding a policy that was duly enacted by Congress, in favor of an executive branch fiat that violates the Constitution and is costing the taxpayers billions.

This isn't the first time the Mackinac Center has stood up to unlawful power grabs during the pandemic. When the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced excessive business penalties and fines, we took it to court and got the penalties rescinded. When the Michigan Department of Health and Human

Services appeared to conceal the true number of COVID-19 deaths occurring in long-term care facilities, we worked with Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist Charlie LeDuff to challenge the department. This uncovered the truth that the department had been significantly undercounting deaths. We fought back when Gov. Gretchen Whitmer unilaterally imposed COVID-19 policies without the input of the Legislature. The Michigan Supreme Court struck down her powers and declared them unconstitutional.

Most recently, we protected taxpayers nationwide after the Michigan Education Association and its insurance affiliate wrongfully took \$12.5 million in Paycheck Protection Program loans. These loans were meant to help small businesses harmed by the government-imposed shutdowns, not unions.

It's nothing new for the government to exert additional powers during a time of emergency. But at some point, all emergencies must come to an end. We will continue to oppose executive overreach and hold the government accountable. It's time bureaucrats and executive branch officials realize they can't toss checks and balances aside simply because they believe there is a crisis. ■



By Holly Wetzel
Director of Public Relations





“The more cost-effective energy is, the more we can have human flourishing.”

- Alex Epstein



An Evening with the Mackinac Center

If you attended An Evening With the Mackinac Center in May, you had a chance to ask yourself: Do I love fossil fuels?

Philosopher and energy expert Alex Epstein does. He delivered a powerful keynote address on free-market energy policy during our annual gathering at the Royal Park Hotel in Rochester, Michigan.

Friends of liberty came to make new connections and catch up with old ones, but the real conversation starters were the “I love fossil fuels” buttons on all tables during a delicious dinner.

Epstein laid out his provocative claim, arguing that fossil fuels are uniquely cost-effective, reliable, versatile and scalable forms of energy and therefore critical to human flourishing.

“The more cost-effective energy is, the more we can have human flourishing, which means humans living to their highest potential – long lives, healthy lives, and lives filled with opportunity,” said Epstein. “The more cost-effective energy we have, the more we can use machines, and machines are the difference between an abundant and safe world and a deficient and dangerous world.”

Epstein’s message was a contrarian one in an era when support for green energy is the only socially acceptable stance. But it helped those gathered to reaffirm their support for a free-market approach that allows the best forms of energy to prosper so we can



live healthier, safer and more productive lives. The Mackinac Center is one of the few state-based think tanks in the nation to have a dedicated energy and environmental policy initiative, working to create public support for free-market solutions to powering our state and nation.

Attendees also heard from Joseph G. Lehman, Mackinac Center president.

“You’ve helped us excel at finding chinks in the armor of government overreach even in challenging political environments,” Lehman said, thanking Mackinac Center partners for their steadfast support in securing strategic policy wins in a challenging year for Michigan. “With you as partners, we’ve been able to do things that by all accounts should be impossible – a tax cut and holding the Michigan Education Association to account for pandemic fraud.”

An Evening with the Mackinac Center is an annual opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals to share ideas, hear from the top thinkers in the free-market movement and discuss ways to build momentum for reform in our communities and state. We hope to see you next year. ■



By Jennifer Majorana

*Director of Donor
Communications*

WELCOME TO THE TEAM

Meet the Mackinac Center's newest staff members





Dave Bondy

Fresh out of the world of traditional media, Dave Bondy has joined the communications team as our digital and video content manager. With more than 700,000 active social media followers, Dave develops and communicates stories to promote the Mackinac Center.

“The staff at the Mackinac Center is more like a family,” says Dave. “Whenever I have a question or need something, there is always someone to assist me.”



Lindsey Severson

If you’ve visited the Mackinac Center office recently, you may have met Lindsey Severson, our administrative assistant. She is the first face anyone visiting the Mackinac Center will see. In addition to monitoring the general email inbox and phone system, Lindsey processes staff travel and expense reporting.



Nathan Burgard

Nathan Burgard began his career at the Center as an advancement intern in 2021 and recently joined the Mackinac Center full time working in donor relations. His favorite part of the job is meeting ambitious people who work hard for the cause of liberty.

“Mackinac has produced real results, and the people here are creative in finding ways to produce those results.”



Joseph Rupert

Joining Nathan in the advancement department is Joseph Rupert, who serves as the Mackinac Center’s advancement manager. Joe is responsible for donor stewardship and cultivation, along with overseeing the department’s interns.

In his free time, Joe enjoys ultimate frisbee and playing several musical instruments.

“The culture of optimism, audacity, and respect at the Mackinac Center is special,” Joe says. “Every day offers new challenges and great conversations.”



Josh Antonini

Our energy and environmental policy department welcomes Joshua Antonini as a research analyst. Josh started with Mackinac in May 2022 as an intern and joined the team full time in May 2023.

A native Texan, Josh appreciates Michigan’s cooler temperatures but admits he’s still getting used to the wintry road conditions.

Josh’s free time is filled with podcasts, articles, books, and audiobooks. He enjoys talking to anyone who will listen about his passions, from policy to faith to country music.



Mick McArt

Mick McArt brings more than 25 years of experience to the Center, where he serves as graphic designer and creative projects manager. In his role, Mick oversees the Mackinac Center’s brand and works to get our message out in a visually inspiring way.

Outside of work, Mick is the author of “Tales of Wordishure,” a children’s book series, as well as “The Unremembered Realms,” a fantasy series. He enjoys traveling all over the state promoting his work and meeting thousands of wonderful people.

“My dream has always been to give people a reason to smile,” Mick says. “Now I get to live that every day!” ■



By Taylor Anderson *Outreach Manager*



Has the Overton Window Shifted on Right-to-Work?

In 2012, Michigan lawmakers passed the state's right-to-work law, which kept workers from being fired for refusing to pay unions. In 2023, Michigan lawmakers repealed that law. Did the political environment change so much in 11 years? Did what was politically possible completely invert?

Right-to-work was clearly outside the Overton Window for much of Michigan's history. It was toxic even to talk about in the Legislature as late as 1999. William T. Wilson found out the hard way. A vice president at Comerica bank, he told a legislative committee that right-to-work was a good policy. Union leaders were so incensed that they threatened to withdraw their deposits from his bank. Wilson was fired before he returned home. His offense: praising something outside the Overton Window.

A lot has changed since then. Union leaders remain the primary opponents of right-to-work, but the public's opinion has changed. The Mackinac Center and other free-market groups did a lot to persuade people that letting workers

opt out of paying unions was good for union members, for the state economy, and even for unions themselves.

Lawmakers got to see where the public stood on the subject in 2012, when union leaders gathered enough signatures to put a constitutional prohibition of right-to-work on the ballot. The proposal also called for elevating union contract terms above state law, effectively giving unions veto power over legislation. Voters rejected the proposal 57% to 43%. And polls taken immediately after found that between 51% and 54% of voters favored right-to-work policies. This led legislators to act on the voters' message and pass right-to-work.

Since then, voters seemed to view the law favorably.

The law gave workers the option to opt out of unions, and 143,000 people did just that.

The 2022 election saw Democrats win majorities in both legislative chambers and reelect the state's Democratic governor, but it didn't seem to be a

“The Overton Window has clearly shifted over the past 30 years. It shifted to make right-to-work possible, but it did not shift enough to make its repeal impossible.”

referendum on the right-to-work law. Whitmer didn't discuss right-to-work on her campaign website. Neither did the new House Speaker, nor the new Senate Majority Leader.

Polling conducted at the end of 2022 and in the first months of 2023 revealed overwhelming support for right-to-work from Republicans and independents. Even union households favored the law.

Yet, repealing right-to-work became one of Democrats' top priorities.

What is surprising is how little Democrats and union advocates did to try to persuade people. Even when the repeal was going through the legislative process, supporters refused to explain why unions couldn't rely on voluntary support.

Advocates of repealing right-to-work didn't have to. They just needed to get enough people with a union label elected to office.

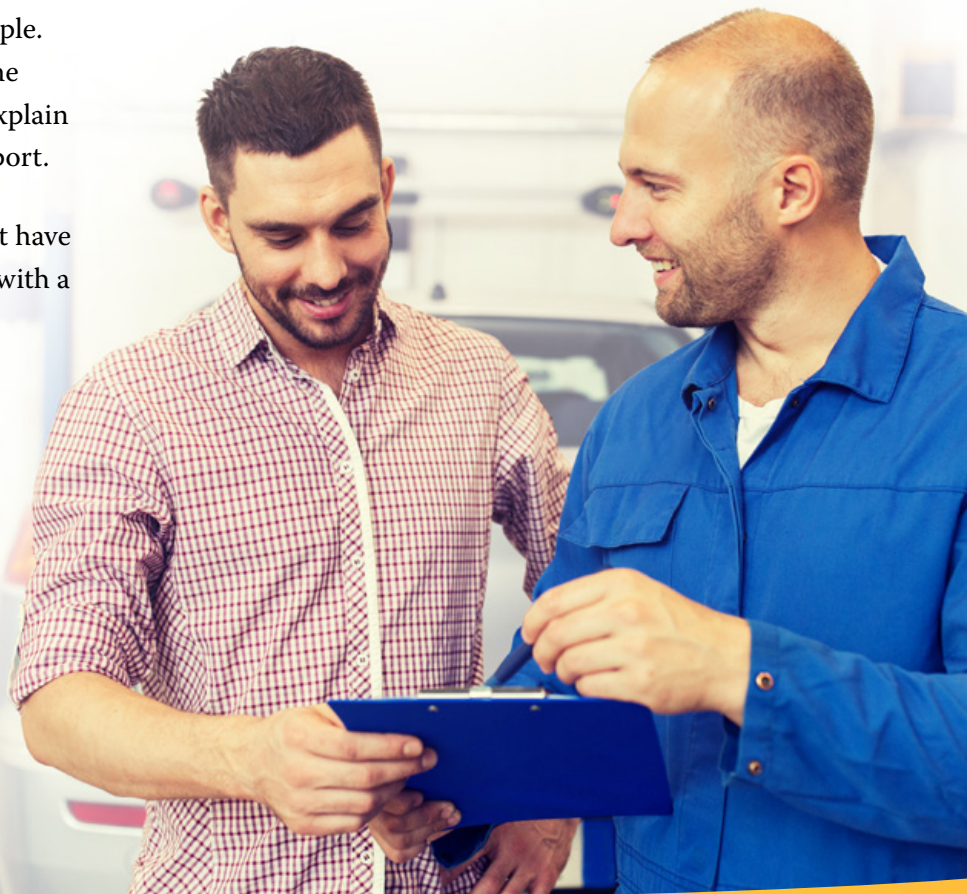
The Overton Window has clearly shifted over the past 30 years. It shifted to make right-to-work possible, but it did not shift enough to make its repeal impossible.

Both approval and repeal are in the Overton Window now. That's a major change. But more work is needed to convince people that unionization should rest on the constitutional right to voluntary association, as is the case with most American institutions. ■



By James Hohman

Director of the Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative





Essay Contest Winners Examine Market Forces and Free Speech

Three high schoolers distinguished themselves in The Charles M. Bauveric 2023 Essay Contest, presented by the Mackinac Center and Northwood University. The students' well-researched and thoughtful treatment of the role of free markets and government in enabling free and responsible speech impressed our judges. The winning students received prizes of \$1,000, \$750 and \$500, respectively, as well as a certificate and a commemorative pen.

Amy Lee won first place in the high school track of the essay contest. A senior at H. H. Dow High School in Midland, Amy plans to attend the

University of Michigan to study engineering. She learned about the contest from her high school counselor. Her research and participation in Mackinac Center and Northwood University educational events informed her opinion and helped her see the subtleties of potential arguments. "My main hurdle when writing the essay was figuring out how to narrow the topic," she says. In her free time, Amy enjoys participating in marching band and robotics. She is also a member of the National Honor Society.

Second-place finisher Zixuan Wang drew upon his experiences living under the Chinese government's

FIRST PLACE



AMY LEE

SECOND PLACE



ZIXUAN WANG

THIRD PLACE



ANDY YAO

Congratulations to the three winners of the 2023 Bauervic Essay Competition, and to all those who participated!

pervasive censorship. He is currently a high school student in Beijing, and he encountered the essay contest opportunity while browsing the Mackinac Center website. “Chinese schools rarely teach students how to write essays, and they often suppress independent and creative thinking,” Zixuan says. He was grateful for the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay among government, market forces and freedom of speech. Zixuan hopes to study political science or sociology at a university in the United States and perhaps apply for a summer internship at the Mackinac Center.

Andy Yao, who placed third in the contest, also attends H. H. Dow High School and plans to enroll at the University of Michigan to study computer science. The essay contest afforded him the opportunity to be heard on an issue that is relevant to his life. Andy found the essay contest while looking for scholarships and decided to apply because he is interested in current debates about regulating social media. “As a high schooler, it means a lot to me that my writing has a tangible impact on the world – whether I win prize money or not.”

The Mackinac Center was honored to present this opportunity to help the next generation develop free-market sensibilities and be rewarded for their efforts. ■



By Jennifer Majorana

*Director of Donor
Communications*

**Read the winning essays at
www.mackinac.org/essay.**



Lawrence W. Reed spoke to Bauervic Essay Contest participants and other free-market supporters at Northwood University in November 2023. Reed served as the first president of the Mackinac Center for 21 years.

Your Feedback is Crucial to the Mackinac Center's Work

Something that sets supporters of the Mackinac Center apart is the way they engage with our work. You don't view yourselves only as sources of financial support but as partners in our mission to advance economic freedom and individual liberty. Your feedback and insight play a critical role in shaping our work and sharpening our focus.

Our supporters share their perspectives on the issues that matter most to them, increasing our effectiveness as we incorporate that feedback into our efforts to hold back the long arm of government. This strengthens our work, and helps build a stronger sense of community among friends of liberty.

Today we reflect on the comments we have received from our supporters so far this year. Messages like "Thank you for all you do," "Please keep up with the fight," "You're our only hope," "Keep the faith!" and "Now the work begins again" inspire us to keep fighting for a freer, more prosperous future.

Ironically, letters from our opponents, those who favor compulsion over freedom, also inspire us. Many are inappropriate for sharing here. Still,



To our supporters:
We are proud to have
you as partners.

the criticism from proponents of big government affirms that our work is necessary.

We appreciate your valuable feedback and unwavering commitment to our shared work. Knowing that you are standing with us adds to our motivation to seek justice in court for victims of government overreach, shine a spotlight on misguided state activity, create a climate that encourages policymakers to act in the public interest, and advance free-market policies to foster human flourishing. We are grateful for your engagement and your passion. We could not continue our work without it. ■



By Jim Walker

*Vice President for
Advancement*