

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2023

# IMPACT

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**MACKINAC  
IN THE  
MEDIA**



**Biden will not be deterred from using your money to pay off other people's student loans**

“Two think tanks – the Michigan-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Cato Institute – have challenged the Biden administration’s loan forgiveness for more than 800,000 borrowers who had participated in income-driven repayment plans. The groups cite Biden’s ‘utter disregard for federal law and the Constitution.’”

*Ingrid Jacques, USA Today Columnist*

**The Detroit News**

**Price controls will lead to drug shortages**

“Whatever the industry or item, the trade-off for price caps is clear: When politicians or government boards start setting prices, consumers inevitably experience shortages.”

*Jarrett Skorup, Vice President of Marketing and Communications. William S. Smith, PhD, Director of the Life Science Initiative at Pioneer Institute*



**Nobody Is Buying What Gretchen Whitmer Is Selling**

“Like Biden, Whitmer doesn’t have a messaging problem. She has a policy problem. And as the states that are growing can attest, the solution is to empower families and job creators, not try to woo them with empty advertisements.”

*Michael LaFaive, Senior Director of Fiscal Policy*



**A politician's job announcements are very different from a state's economic trends**

“Headlines might indicate something in the broader economy, but they typically mean that state lawmakers are willing to hand out special favors to create the appearance of economic growth. Business subsidies waste tons of money without improving state economic performance.”

*James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy*



**Little-known Michigan court case could have massive constitutional effects across the nation**

“If warrantless drone surveillance is deemed a form of reasonable search, there’s little standing in the way of routine, invasive drone patrols in any American neighborhood. And if the court allows illegally obtained evidence to be used in civil cases, municipal governments could launch legal fishing expeditions against any private citizen.”

*Jarrett Skorup, Vice President of Marketing and Communications, and Brett Skorup, Attorney and Senior Research Fellow at Mercatus Center*



**Politicians' Job Training and College Sales Pitch is Snake Oil**

“The political popularity of job training and college has led to a proliferation of costs and programs with little accountability. Every problem results in one more effort to do more job training and college. None of it assesses what is already done, or whether it works.”

*James Hohman, Director of Fiscal Policy*



# Legislative Hubris and Very Real Intelligence

This likely isn't the first time you've read something written with the help of artificial intelligence, but it might be the first time an author admitted it to you.

My inspiration came from a breathtaking package of energy bills that were passed by the Legislature in early November and signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer right after Thanksgiving. The new laws require Michigan energy utilities to generate 100% so-called clean energy by 2040.

Breathtaking because that mandate is so expensive, radical and grandiose as to be impossible. It reminds me of other absolutist political promises, like sending every kid to college, ending homelessness and creating gun-free zones.

We'll probably never get to 100% renewable energy, but even if it were possible to reach that goal, government shouldn't force it before its time. Renewable energy is improving, but we can tell it's not ready for prime time because it still needs the twin fists of subsidies and mandates. If green energy were less expensive and more reliable, customers would adopt it without the need for force.

Stunned by the legislative hubris of the renewable mandate, I asked one of the most popular AI tools, ChatGPT, "What happens when public policy denies human nature, laws of economics, and reality?" The program instantly provided ten themes and elaborated on them as if it had been

Photo by Adobestock



# “We’ll probably never get to 100% renewable energy, but even if it were possible to reach that goal, government shouldn’t force it before its time.”

programmed by Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and Thomas Sowell:

- Inefficiency and economic distortions
- Unintended consequences
- Reduced incentives for productivity
- Erosion of individual liberty
- Social and cultural discontent
- Market distortions and cronyism
- Budgetary challenges
- Environmental degradation
- Failure to achieve policy goals
- Loss of public trust

I asked what would happen if the policy was a 100% renewable energy mandate by 2040. ChatGPT said this policy was “aligned with environmental sustainability goals,” but it had much more to say about related challenges:

- Technological and infrastructure challenges
- Reliability and intermittency of renewable sources
- Economic and cost considerations
- Impact on energy prices and affordability
- Job transition and economic impact

- Flexibility and realistic timelines
- Integration with existing energy infrastructure
- Public engagement and acceptance

The software was beginning to sound like my colleague and Very Real Intelligence Jason Hayes, the Mackinac Center’s director of energy and environmental policy. That’s remarkable because ChatGPT was built by a Silicon Valley tech company of the kind we are led to believe teems with left-thinking engineers, managers and leaders. The program denied pandering to me just because it knows I’m a free-market proponent at the Mackinac Center.

I can only conclude that, at least as far as this type of AI is concerned, the conclusions enumerated above (and the detailed treatment that I cannot include here) are fair and objective, and do not come from a built-in, Jason-like bias. They flow naturally from the policy proposition, and they should be examined, debated and weighed.

The AI was an interesting starting point, and Jason needn’t worry about being replaced. It’s going to take all the Very Real Intelligence we can muster to deal with the consequences of fantasy policy. Thank you for your support. ■



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe".

**By Joseph G. Lehman**

*President of the Mackinac Center*

# Workers for Opportunity Hosts Educational Labor Summit for Lawmakers

Nearly 20 legislators from six states gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, for an educational summit hosted in October by the Mackinac Center’s Workers for Opportunity initiative. The summit aimed to educate lawmakers about the landmark 2018 Supreme Court decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* and about the reforms promoted by Workers for Opportunity in the years since.

Joining us at the summit was Mark Janus himself, who spoke to attendees about the importance of allowing workers to decide whether they want to pay money to a union. He also told lawmakers of his experience trying to leave the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees before the court decision.

Other notable speakers were Tennessee Speaker of the House Cameron Sexton and Tennessee Senate Majority Leader Jack Johnson, who discussed their state’s labor reform. Last year, Tennessee became the latest state to enshrine right-to-work in its constitution, an effort advanced by Speaker Sexton and applauded by Workers for Opportunity.

Workers for Opportunity was also pleased to present several key lawmakers with the Defending the American Worker Award, which honors legislators who have paved the way for significant labor reforms.

## The recipients of the 2023 Defending the American Worker Award are:



**Jack Johnson**  
Tennessee Senate Majority Leader



**Cameron Sexton**  
Tennessee House Speaker



**Chris Todd**  
Tennessee Representative

Workers for Opportunity announced a new award to recognize legislative staff, The Michael Maren Perseverance Award. The award is named after Michael Maren, a research analyst for the Tennessee General Assembly who died in September. It honors staffers who have made significant contributions to worker freedom from behind the scenes. The 2023 Michael Maren Perseverance Award went to Luke Gustafson, chief of staff for Majority Leader Jack Johnson. ■



**By Taylor Anderson**  
*Outreach Manager*





# TRANSPARENCY MOVES INTO THE OVERTON WINDOW



In 2023, transparency moved into the Overton Window in Michigan. Lawmakers were slow to catch up.

Voters approved Proposal 1 last November. The measure called for shorter term limits. It also required lawmakers to pass a bill mandating financial disclosures for officeholders and candidates for state offices: representative, senator, governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general and secretary of state.

The people of Michigan have a clear interest in knowing the financial ties of the politicians who represent them. In 2022 and the years prior, we could only guess. That will change in 2024.

It took 2.8 million Michiganders voting in unison to arrive at this point. Even after that vote, lawmakers were slow to act. Facing a constitutional Dec. 31 deadline, they didn't submit a financial disclosure bill until October. The earliest versions of the bill had no teeth, only a \$1,000 fine for outright falsehoods and a \$500 fine for non-filers. Whatever transparency comes from Proposal 1 will be hard-earned and require vigilance. Legislators didn't embrace transparency on their own. The public dragged them kicking and screaming.

That's not to claim victory. Transparency is not a native impulse for Michigan lawmakers. The public will have to train them. And CapCon will be there to assist by telling the state's residents what their lawmakers are doing.

Consider Michigan Senate Bill 271. This bill to require utilities to derive 100% of their energy from so-called clean sources by 2040 went through eight revisions and gained 30 pages between its introduction in April and its November passage in the Senate.

But the public only had access to the original bill during that seven-month debate.

Some lawmakers only got the revised bill 15 minutes before a hearing of the Senate Energy, Communications, and Technology Committee, which lasted a mere 16 minutes. This means most of the discussion on a bill to transform Michigan's energy future took place behind closed doors and out of the public eye. That's not transparent.

All told, 2023 was a good year for transparency in Michigan. But we the people must demand more and be vigilant until we get it. Demands got us this far, after years of asking nicely. ■



**By James David Dickson**

*Managing Editor of Michigan  
Capitol Confidential*





**MACKINAC  
STAFF  
PROFILE**

# *What an Event!*

## Meet the Wizard Who Makes It Happen

A profile of Sandra Darland, the Mackinac  
Center's director of events





# “I never realized how much public policy affected me and my family until I started working here.”

When most people attend a Mackinac Center event, they can meet new people, have a good time and learn something. But that happens only after someone has planned the event and worked out dozens of details.

That’s where Sandra Darland comes in.

“As an event planner, I work on everything from small presentations with a few people to huge gatherings with hundreds of people,” she says. “There are a lot of details to make it successful – speaker, venue, catering, registration. These details help make it successful and enjoyable.”

Sandra, the youngest of seven children, has lived in Saginaw almost her entire life. Most of her siblings live close by. As is true of many large, blue-collar families, they have someone in almost every trade, such as construction and heating and air conditioning.

While attending Arthur Hill High School, Sandra began working for Saginaw Public Schools in a student co-op program. She stayed on full time for more than 30 years, picking up bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Saginaw Valley State University along the way.

“I stayed in the same department but did a bit of everything,” Sandra says. “Graphic arts, photography, district-wide event management, head of marketing, and I even oversaw the print shop the district owned.”

After retiring from the public school system, she started working at the MidMichigan Innovation Center, where she learned about the Mackinac Center as it was launching its VoteSpotter app. The more Sandra learned, the more intrigued she became. Soon after, the director of events position opened, and she jumped at the chance.



Outside of work, Sandra has many hobbies.

“I’m a big crafter,” she says. “I hold craft classes at my home and have taught some at Studio 154. I love the thrill of helping other people create things.”

She met her husband, Shaun, while they were in high school, and together they have two sons. Recently, Shaun retired from the family business of installing lockers, and the Darlands have taken up rock hunting across the state, finding rare Petoskey stones and others of interest.

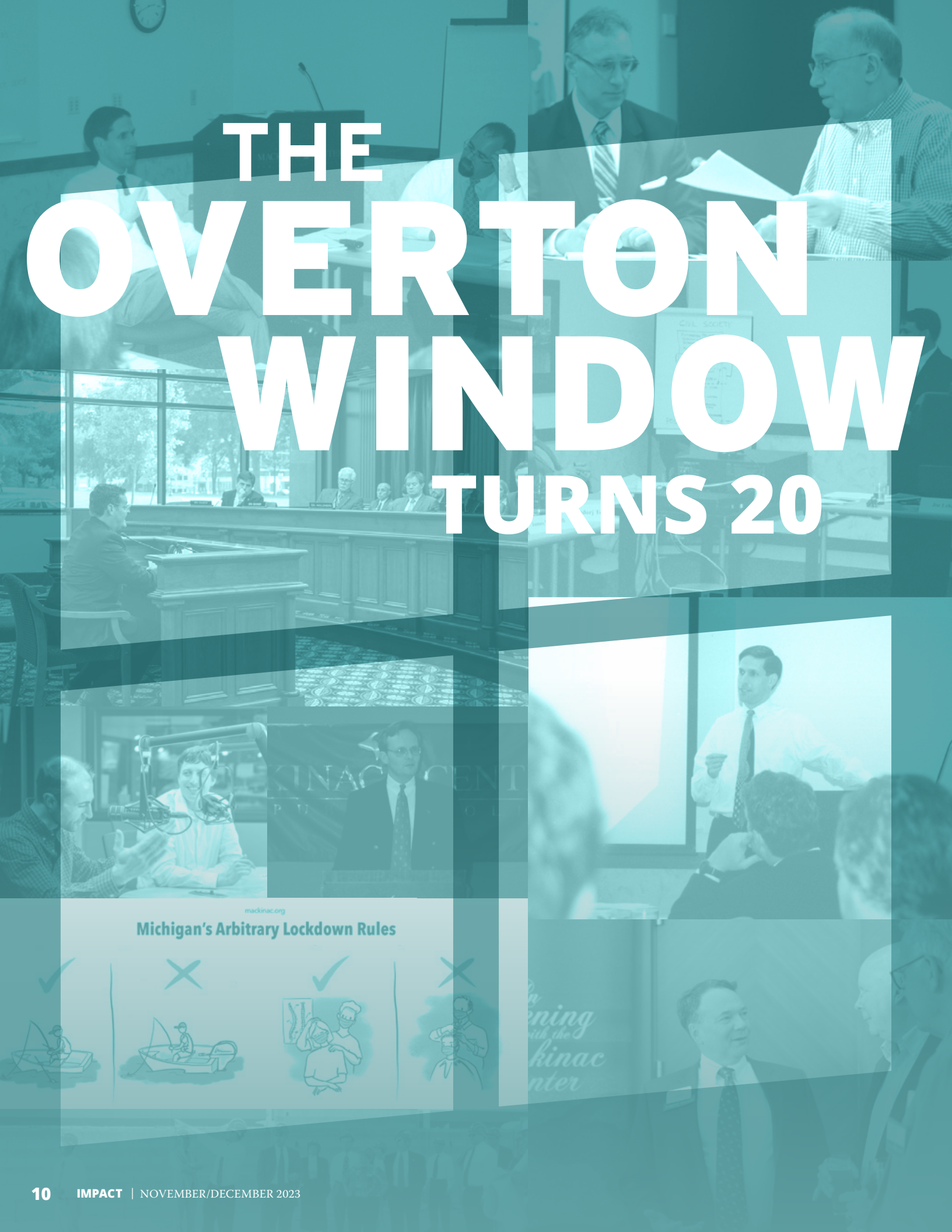
“I had heard about the Mackinac Center here and there during my career and I was always aligned philosophically, but I never realized how much public policy affected me and my family until I started working here,” Sandra says. “Being a small business owner and now understanding how much they were fighting for me and my husband and hard-working Michigan citizens is so inspiring.” ■



**By Jarrett Skorup**

*Vice President for Marketing and Communications*

# THE OVERTON WINDOW TURNS 20



[mackinac.org](http://mackinac.org)

## Michigan's Arbitrary Lockdown Rules



Opening  
with the  
Mackinac  
Center





# JOSEPH OVERTON

Senior Vice President at the  
Mackinac Center for Public Policy

It's great when ideas take on a life of their own. That's what happened with the Overton Window.

The late Mackinac Center Senior Vice President Joe Overton developed the idea to address a concern from prospective donors: Why should they give money to the Mackinac Center when it doesn't have the power to change anything? Politicians have the power to pass laws, so wouldn't interested citizens have more influence by donating to political campaigns?

The insight Joe Overton brought to these questions was simple but important. Politicians cannot pass whatever legislation they like. They find themselves bound by what is popular, or at least their sense of it. They can only pass legislation within a narrow set of ideas. And he called that range "the window of political possibilities."

Some things cannot be enacted. The public just isn't ready for them, and any legislative champion who calls for them never gets far. Many good ideas are unpopular, unheard of, or unfashionable.

A think tank such as the Mackinac Center can do something about that. We can inform, persuade and rally people around issues. We can show people how our issues affect the things that they care about. We can find interesting insights into policies. We try to inspire or raise people's concerns about state policy. And if we are successful, we can transform an idea that was politically impossible into something that is inevitable.

It used to be that the only conversation policymakers had about public education was how much more money they should give public schools each year. Students were placed in their nearest government-run schools. That was the whole of education policy for most school-age children.

We came along and made the case that giving parents more options for their kids would improve outcomes. Eventually policymakers did just that. Schools opened themselves up to anyone who wanted to attend, even if that meant crossing assigned boundaries. Innovation-minded educators opened charter schools and then expanded them.

What was once impossible became possible and then policy.

This window of political possibilities is a useful concept. It helped potential supporters understand that a lot goes into policy. It's not just about electing the right people.

The Mackinac Center spread the word about the window of political possibilities. We enjoyed the chance to tell up-and-coming organizations about the window. We are part of the Atlas Network, which supports policy organizations around the world. Our colleagues in the network would bring

people to Midland for training on the business of running a think tank and making a difference in policy. Naturally, we'd share some of the insights about the window of political possibilities.

The word got out from there. It wasn't just something we used with donors; people around the world grabbed ahold of it.

Joe Overton died in a tragic ultralight plane crash in 2003. He left an important legacy for us at the Mackinac Center. And we chose to honor him by calling the concept he pioneered the Overton Window.

## An Example from Education Policy

No government policy on school attendance

No government-run schools or public funding of education

No homeschooling regulation

No private schooling regulation

### THE OVERTON WINDOW

Politically Acceptable  
Policy Positions

Private schooling publicly funded with vouchers, tax credits, etc.

Homeschooling allowed, regulated, no public funding

Private schools allowed, regulated, no public funding

Online public schools allowed

Independent/charter public schools allowed

Students may choose any public school in any district

Students may choose any public school in their district

Students must attend nearest local public school in their district

Homeschooling prohibited

Private schools prohibited

All students must attend state-run schools

All students must attend federally controlled schools



Many people find that “Overton Window” is a much catchier name than “window of political possibilities.” Hardly a week goes by without someone in the national discourse mentioning it. The Overton Window appears in many arenas outside politics, too.

Sports writers say that baseball superstar Shohei Ohtani shifted the Overton Window for teams looking at players who can both bat and pitch.

Automotive industry critics refer to the Overton Window when discussing whether motorists will tolerate subscription fees for heated seats.

Tech commenters worry that the Overton Window prevents them from raising concerns about artificial intelligence.

Those examples come from this fall alone.

We didn’t reach out to these people; they stumbled upon the idea themselves. But we want everyone to know how to use the concept. That’s why we started a podcast where we look at issues around the country and talk to the people who change what is politically possible. Guests have included people at other think tanks, cartoonists, editorialists, talk show hosts, lawyers, environmentalists, judges and others.

The Overton Window has gotten a lot of attention. It’s a useful concept, and we want to help people get more use out of it. ■



**By James Hohman**

*Director of Fiscal Policy*

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# MACKINAC CENTER ASKS SUPREME COURT TO CLARIFY JANUS DECISION

The Mackinac Center and the Landmark Legal Foundation have filed an amicus brief asking the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold its 2018 ruling that extended right-to-work and other protections to public employees. The Sept. 29 brief asks the high court to overturn a state court ruling that challenges a key part of *Janus v. AFSCME*.

The Supreme Court decided in *Janus* that public sector workers cannot be forced to support a union's political speech as a condition of keeping their jobs. This decision protected millions of workers' First Amendment rights. But the Mackinac Center recognized that the *Janus* ruling could do even more.

Shortly after the court ruled, the Mackinac Center launched Workers for Opportunity, an initiative to advance the worker freedoms outlined in the case. In the years since, WFO has educated workers and lawmakers across the nation on what *Janus* requires. For one thing, public sector workers should only be considered to have waived their First Amendment right not to join a union if they do so with knowing, informed and regular consent.

Alaska was the first state to embrace this understanding. In August 2019, the Alaska attorney general adopted WFO's ideas, issuing a legal opinion that said the state's dues deduction system failed to offer the protections required by *Janus*. Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy issued an administrative order a few

weeks later. The order required the state to create a new process for deducting dues that would protect the constitutional rights of state employees.

The Alaska State Employees Association sued to stop the reforms from going forward. The case advanced through the court system, and the Alaska Supreme Court ruled that neither *Janus* nor the First Amendment required Alaska to change its system for making payroll deductions.

The governor was not willing to let that ruling stand without a fight. Neither was the Mackinac Center. Alaska Attorney General Treg Taylor and the Mackinac Center both submitted briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court, highlighting the need for clarity on the *Janus* decision. We hope the court will agree to hear the case and hold that workers can only waive their rights when they know what those rights are. If the court agrees, it will protect more than a million workers from being forced into supporting a union simply because they don't know about their own rights. That outcome would be a win for workers everywhere. ■



**By Stephen Delie**

*Director of Labor Policy*



# Michigan Comes Out a Loser in UAW Strike

The most important rule in economics, and one of the most important in life, has been famously restated several ways.

“There is only one difference between a bad economist and a good one: The bad economist confines himself to the visible effect; the good economist takes into account both the effect that can be seen and those effects that must be foreseen.”

– Frédéric Bastiat

“There are no solutions, only trade-offs.”

– Thomas Sowell

“There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch.”

– Economists (and parents) everywhere

As the United Auto Workers strike concluded, few seemed to understand the thought expressed above. There was much talk about the benefits, but little about the cost of the strike itself and the expensive contracts that came out of it.

The tentative agreements between the union and the Big Three automakers feature 26%-100% pay increases, depending on the plant and seniority of the worker, and they automatically put future workers under the UAW master agreement. Workers will see increases in their benefits. The union did not, however, get the 32-hour work week it wanted. It also did not get automakers to pay employees who don’t work, and the agreements did not restore traditional pensions.

While the union might be happy with the strike’s outcomes, it seems to have overlooked the costs. In the short term, the strike meant tens of thousands of people, including non-union workers, were out of

work. In the medium term, workers will see wage and benefit gains. But in the long term, the strike is likely to hurt Michigan and the auto industry.

For decades, the number of auto jobs in Michigan has been declining. Many jobs were replaced by automation, while others departed to Southern states or other countries. A key reason for this outmigration has been the trade-offs present in the UAW contracts. Those agreements contain provisions that make workers more expensive and less productive, which is only amplified by semi-regular work shutdowns. Auto companies either cut jobs or outsource to new locations where labor costs make them competitive. The recent strike is likely to amplify this trend.

The Mackinac Center responded strongly to the crisis. We helped reporters and the general public understand the benefits and the costs of different actions. Our work — featured on CNN, Fox News, USA Today, National Review and many other places — laid out the strike’s negative effects.

While the media focused on the positives for unionized autoworkers, we should keep in mind the long-term costs. The latest strike and the new contract structure have made Michigan autoworkers much more expensive to employ. In time, Michigan is likely to come out a loser. ■



**By Jarrett Skorup**

*Vice President for Marketing and Communications*

# CHARACTER IS IT!

These three words summarize Mike Radelt's charitable philosophy. A Mackinac Center supporter for more than a decade, Mike believes a flourishing society needs citizens who demand character, accountability and transparency from their government.

Michigan runs in Mike's blood. He grew up on a farm outside Imlay City that his great-grandfather established in 1904. His father still lives there. Mike learned his strong work ethic from his father, who worked night shifts at General Motors and on the farm during the day and weekends.

Growing up in Michigan, Mike got into politics at the age of 17 when he became actively involved in Lapeer County. This experience sparked an enduring passion for principled and nonpartisan approaches to public policy. A brief stint in

Kansas provided Mike with valuable insights into the broader landscape of politics.

Having spent most of his life in Michigan, Mike feels a deep connection to the state. A proud graduate of Michigan Tech, he is particularly impressed by the school's pivotal role in creating the ideas behind the Line 5 tunnel, which would move a petroleum pipeline from the bottom of the Great Lakes to a tunnel encased in bedrock. But Mike is disheartened by government incompetence and obstruction of the tunnel and other commonsense solutions. His frustration with partisanship fuels Mike's commitment to advocating for a more pragmatic and effective approach to public policy.

People have a great responsibility in a democracy, and Mike believes the Mackinac Center plays an essential role by educating lawmakers and voters so they can make sound decisions for Michigan. "A society with knowledge is a society with power," he says.

He believes a self-governing society is possible only if the citizens are educated. In a world riddled with political division and misinformation, Mike says independents "don't stand a chance" unless they can find fact-based analysis from institutions such as the Mackinac Center.

Philanthropy is a fundamental aspect of Mike's life, instilled in him by his Christian upbringing.





“A society with knowledge is a society with power.”

He credits his father for teaching him to share his time, talents and treasure with others. A talented photographer, Mike helps out with various charities, such as the Livingston County Ultrasound Initiative.

Mike Radelt backs the Mackinac Center because he is committed to the ideals of integrity and character in government. His belief that “Character is it!” testifies to the importance of upholding these values and forging a better future for generations of Michiganders. ■



**By Nathan Burgard**  
*Donor Relations*

# ONLINE RESOURCES



## **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.



## **OpportunityMichigan.org**

Want to get more engaged with public policy in Michigan? Opportunity Michigan is right for you.



## **FrankBeckmannCenterForJournalism.com**

Keeping citizens informed with news and analysis that expose government overreach and abuse.



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# WE'RE STILL FIGHTING TO PRESERVE YOUR TAX CUT



Photo by Adobestock

Some of you may remember that we filed a lawsuit on behalf of individual taxpayers, business groups and lawmakers against Michigan Treasurer Rachel Eubanks. The treasurer had announced earlier this year that the 5% tax cut Michigan residents received for 2023 (thanks to a 2015 law) would be temporary and that the rate would go back up in 2024.

The treasurer made this announcement after Attorney General Dana Nessel issued an opinion that said the tax-cut trigger, which lowers taxes when the state's revenue outpaces inflation by a set amount, was not intended to create a permanent cut.

In response to our lawsuit, the office argued that if the attorney general did misinterpret the law, only the Legislature could fix that misinterpretation. This logic is odd, as a key responsibility of the court is to interpret laws and strike down those that are unconstitutional – a precedent established in 1803 by *Marbury v. Madison*.

The state's brief also tried introducing procedural hurdles that would stop our challenge. At one point, the state argued that the Mackinac

Center was both too early and too late in filing the lawsuit.

The Mackinac Center's response brief addresses the state's arguments and explains why the 2015 law clearly intends for the rate reduction to be permanent. It also emphasizes that lawmakers should be given revenue estimates that are as

accurate as possible, which the state's brief argued was not important. When lawmakers appropriate funds, it's critical for them to know how much tax revenue they can budget for.



The attorney general's interpretation was wrong, as are the new arguments her office introduced in a motion to dismiss our case.

A second brief from the state brought another head-scratcher. In its latest brief, the attorney general's office appears to downplay its original arguments from the March opinion, while still claiming the end result of a tax rate increase is the same.

We're waiting for the court to rule. If we succeed, 4.9 million Michiganders will be spared a \$714 million tax hike. ■



**By Patrick J. Wright**

*Vice President for  
Legal Affairs*



# NEW STUDY OFFERS REFORM TO MICHIGAN FOIA LAW

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act is a law whose promise has been undermined by official malpractice. The law helps citizens hold their government accountable. It gives the public access to records and information created by government bodies, which in turn allows citizens to understand how government functions and hold it accountable. Unfortunately, government bodies in Michigan have applied FOIA in ways that undermine its usefulness.

The problem can be traced to a culture of non-transparency, but the practical problems with FOIA are straightforward. Public bodies circumvent FOIA in three ways: They levy excessive fees; they create excessive delays; and they redact documents excessively. Taken together, these practices often lead to FOIA responses that are late, insufficient, and sometimes totally useless. A citizen's only option is to appeal a decision about fees or redaction to the same public body that initially made it, or to sue.

Public records belong to the public, and the public should be able to access them quickly and at minimal cost. But for that to happen in Michigan, lawmakers need to make significant amendments to FOIA law.

The Mackinac Center has proposed comprehensive amendments to the entire FOIA statute. If adopted, these amendments would close many of the law's most common loopholes, lower costs, and help ensure that citizens receive records in a timely fashion. The amendments are also annotated, to explain why each change is necessary. We hope these recommendations can guide FOIA reforms that return power to the people.

Michigan needs more transparency. Without it, parents will be stymied in their attempts to learn what curriculum public schools teach their children. Journalists will be unable to uncover government wrongdoing. Citizens will be unable to hold politicians accountable for the policy decisions that affect the lives of every Michigander. FOIA should be reformed, and we believe that our amendments would help transform Michigan from one of the worst states in the nation for transparency into a national leader in open government. ■



**By Stephen Delie**

*Director of Labor Policy*



# MICHIGAN NEEDS MORE EDUCATION



It is crucial to create policies that help students succeed, especially after the learning setbacks caused by the pandemic. We need to provide more options for families who want alternatives to conventional public schools.

But Michigan is in a precarious position: The governor and the legislative majority are unfriendly to school choice policies. The political landscape in the state presents both challenges and opportunities for those seeking educational freedom.

Advocates of education reform must work together in 2024 to protect the school choice options families enjoy. A coalition of advocates will also need to develop ideas for reforms that win bipartisan grassroots support from families and those who serve them.

The Mackinac Center partnered with State Policy Network in October to host the first of many workshops for education entrepreneurs in Michigan. It took place at Engaged Detroit, a homeschool co-op and advocacy network founded

by Bernita Bradley. Bradley is famous for supporting parents seeking non-traditional learning options for their kids. Homeschool parents were at the event, as were founders of nonprofit organizations serving youth, including self-directed education centers, hybrid private schools and charter schools. Kyle Smitley, founder of Detroit Achievement Academy and Detroit Prep charter schools, shared her success story. She also discussed the Mackinac Center's role in pushing for policies that allowed her to expand her charter school model, which serves hundreds of students.

The workshop allowed local entrepreneurs to talk about the difficulties they've experienced and come up with solutions.

The participants pursue various solutions, but their stories share a common theme: Families need more access to education options outside the conventional public school system. Families whose children are being failed by the current system need different options.

# ATION OPTIONS



Entrepreneurs are working hard to meet the growing demand in Detroit for new, sustainable options for education. Creating those options and making them available to families requires support from legislators.

Anyone who engages with those taking an entrepreneurial approach to education can understand the urgent need for change. For many families, access to unconventional learning options is the only way to meet their children's needs. Lawmakers should embrace creative approaches and encourage entrepreneurs in Detroit and elsewhere. Only then will all children, regardless of their circumstances, have the chance to achieve their potential. ■



**By Molly Macek**  
*Director of Education Policy*



## BY THE NUMBERS

**11**

Number of education entrepreneurs who showed up to the Mackinac Center's workshop

**6%**

National average of students who are homeschooled

**\$4,000 –  
\$8,000**

The range of per-student scholarships offered in states that have universal school choice programs



# THE BIG 'G' IS FOR GOD, NOT GOVERNMENT

## A profile of Grace Centers of Hope

The Mackinac Center is known throughout Michigan for its work to help people live fuller lives by challenging the ways big government gets in their way. Other organizations, such as Grace Centers of Hope, get more directly involved in the lives of the people they serve by offering a homeless shelter and educational programs.

The organization offers housing to more than 100 people in its Pontiac, Michigan, facility. Its one-year program equips residents with the skills, tools, and practices to interview for a job, break bad habits and balance a budget. All this happens in a supervised environment, free of charge to the resident.

Pastor Kent Clark has been with Grace Centers of Hope for almost 40 years, working in a variety of roles. His primary role, though, is as the center's spiritual guide. One thing he loves about the shelter house is its refusal to depend on or even accept government assistance.

"We were not political in the sense of receiving any government funding here," Clark says. "We have a multimillion-dollar budget that all comes from the private sector."

Private sector donations have allowed Grace Centers of Hope to open a program it calls "homelessness to homeowner." Grace has bought nearly 60 houses in the Pontiac area, almost all needing restoration and repairs. Residents of the Grace shelter work on the homes, turning them

into beautiful living spaces. In the process they learn valuable construction and manual labor skills. The organization has sold 25 homes to former residents, who move from homelessness and addiction to stability and responsible homeownership.

Clark credits "people who just want to help people" for the organization's longevity. Grace Centers of Hope plans to continue expanding its homeownership program. It also anticipates building on its wellness services that equip residents to live freer and more fulfilling lives.

The shelter's residents face many obstacles, including some created by government. Occupational licensing laws can make it impossible for some people to get hired due to decades-old criminal convictions that had nothing to do with the jobs they're applying for. The Mackinac Center is a strong champion of updating or repealing those laws.

"I believe in a big God," says Clark, "So when I say I believe in the big G, that stands for God, not the government." ■



**By Taylor Anderson**  
*Outreach Manager*



**PEOPLE WHO JUST WANT  
TO HELP PEOPLE**







Photo by Adobestock

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**By Victoria Hoffman**

*Donor Relations*