

MIRS Capitol Capsule

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Center For Michigan Maps Out State's Future

What does Michigan have to do to turn itself around? Bipartisanship, clear taxing and improved K-16 education, to name a few, according to a new report released today.

The Center for Michigan, an Ann Arbor "think-and-do" tank, released its "Michigan's Defining Moment: A Common Ground Agenda for Michigan's Transformation," report today at a Lansing celebration featuring political consultant Matthew **DOWD**, a Democrat who advised 2006 GOP gubernatorial nominee Dick **DeVOS**.

The report outlines nine strategies for Michigan's future: Dramatically improved Pre-K-16 learning and completion rates; affordable access to lifelong learning; economic development and diversification; intensified entrepreneurialism; rejuvenating the quality of life of Michigan communities; re-branding Michigan as the vibrant North Coast; increased political accountability and bipartisan leadership; clear taxing and spending priorities; and intensified government collaboration and service sharing.

"This effort shows that, beyond the partisan political battles in Lansing, there is a great deal of common ground on which Michigan residents from many walks of life stake their claim to the future," said Center founder Phil **POWER**, former owner of HomeTown Communications and University of Michigan regent.

"Michigan is at a hinge in our history. The decisions we make about our state over the next few years will go a long way in determining what Michigan looks like for decades to come."

The report comes out of the Center's \$2.5 million Michigan Defining Moment (MDM) campaign. The organization has recruited more than 1,800 volunteers to give 6,000 hours of their time to figure out Michigan's future, especially with the 2010 turnover election on the horizon.

The "Common Ground Agenda" arose from more than 175 Community Conversations involving civic leaders and engaged residents in every region of Michigan.

Participants recommended more than two dozen action steps, including eliminating legislative term limits, improving infrastructure, cutting down red tape in permitting, reducing school class sizes, simplifying the state business tax, increasing regional collaboration and shifting tax dollars from the state's large and growing prison system to other priorities.

One area Michiganders want to see changes in is cooperation among state legislators. More than 80 percent of respondents in a new poll conducted for the MDM report deemed cooperation among Democratic and Republican lawmakers to be "very important" or "extremely important." Only 5 percent considered Republicans and Democrats to be cooperating "quite a bit." Instead, a majority saw no or "only a little" evidence of pragmatic cooperation in Lansing.

"Michigan needs leadership that respects the important role of parties, but also works together whenever possible for a better Michigan," said Mark **MURRAY**, president of Meijer Stores, Inc. and an MDM co-chair. "Our need for leadership committed to Michigan's future is not limited to government. Business and nonprofits also have a vital stake."

The MDM report includes the "Michigan Scorecard" — 36 measures on how well Michigan is transforming to the 21st Century economy. Created by researchers and edited by Michigan State University economist Charles **BALLARD**, the Scorecard served as a reference for those who created the MDM agenda.

Michigan gets a "thumbs up" in 10 categories, including efficiency in government employment, recreation, home ownership and voter participation.

The state garners a "so-so" in seven categories, including government spending per capita, tourism marketing and entrepreneurial activity.

In 19 categories, the Mitten State receives a "thumbs down," including population trends, crime, poverty, corrections and legislative efficiency.

The participants will gather again this summer in small-group meetings to discuss the MDM agenda with candidates in many of the more than 40 House races.

Beginning in late summer, MDM will launch additional community conversations, regional town hall meetings and distribution of citizen toolkits to increase public awareness.

The MDM campaign wants to lay the groundwork before 2010 when the governor, attorney general, and secretary of state, 75 percent of the Senate and a good portion of the House will be term-limited.

"MDM seeks to instill a common set of crucial issues so that the next generation of Michigan leaders can begin from a place of common knowledge about the state's needs," said Glenda **PRICE**, president emeritus of Marygrove College in Detroit and a co-chair of the MDM campaign. "The formation and release of the MDM agenda is a significant achievement, but there is so much more work to do. We encourage all state residents to get involved in this effort and spend a little time on the future of our state."