



Serving in the 94th State Legislature: **Lawyer-Legislators**

Sworn into office on January 10, 2007, members of a newly elected House of Representatives and Senate began a two-year session during a time many describe as pivotal for Michigan. Included in the 94th legislature are 22 lawyer-legislators. It is with pleasure that we present these public servants.

The following information was compiled with the assistance of each lawyer-legislator. After each legislator's name, you will find his or her party affiliation, district, hometown, Lansing office contact information, e-mail address, website address, date of admittance to the State Bar of Michigan, law school, and committee assignments. At the time of publication, House statutory committee assignments were not determined. Each lawyer-legislator was asked to respond to the same three questions, which are printed with each response.

If you wish to contact a legislator by mail, address State Senators to: The Honorable (full name), State Senator, State Capitol, P.O. Box 30036, Lansing, MI 48909-7536. Mail to State Representatives should be addressed to: The Honorable (full name), State Representative, State Capitol, P.O. Box 30014, Lansing, MI 48909-7514.



Senator Michael D. Bishop, Majority Leader (R-12, Rochester)

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Bar Admit Date: May 14, 1993

Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Government Operations and Reform (Chair)

Statutory Standing Committees: Legislative Council (Chair), Senate Fiscal Agency Board of Governors (Chair)



Senator Hansen H. Clarke, Assistant Minority Caucus Chair (D-1, Detroit)

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Bar Admit Date: February 12, 1988

Law School: Georgetown University

Standing Committees: Banking and Financial Institutions, Commerce and Tourism (Minority Vice Chair), Government Operations and Reform, Health Policy (Minority Vice Chair), Judiciary

Statutory Standing Committees: Administrative Rules, Legislative Retirement Board of Trustees



Why did you become a lawyer?

I wanted to protect and help people who may not be politically powerful.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Legislators who are lawyers can craft more effective statutes because they are trained to understand how laws can impact various factual situations, and they understand how legislative action relates to judge-made law.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Be clear on what you are committed to. Don't be discouraged by temporary obstacles in accomplishing what you are intending to do. Actively support candidates who you believe will serve the public.

Senator Alan L. Cropsey, Majority Floor Leader (R-33, DeWitt)

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Bar Admit Date: May 5, 1978

Law School: Thomas M. Cooley

Standing Committees: Appropriations, Judiciary (Vice Chair)

Appropriations Subcommittees: Capital Outlay, Department of Environmental Quality (Vice Chair), Department of Transportation (Vice Chair), Judiciary and Corrections (Chair), State Police and Military Affairs (Vice Chair)

Statutory Standing Committee: Legislative Council



Why did you become a lawyer?

I wanted to influence public policy. The legal profession gave me excellent training, a good information base, and a solid ethical foundation.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

There are three important reasons for lawyers to serve in the legislature:

1. The different viewpoints of society need to be heard in the legislature. If the differing voices of the people are to be understood, each voice needs an able advocate. Because attorneys are trained in the art of persuasion, they are likely to be effective communicators in the legislature.

2. Statutory law is frequently a compromise between the desires of competing interests. Good attorneys tend to be proficient negotiators and mediators. Negotiation and mediation skills are invaluable assets to have in the legislative process.

3. Statutory law needs to be precisely written to convey the concepts of the legislature. Because lawyers are trained in the fine points of legal writing, which accurately conveys their client's position or desires, attorneys in the legislature are particularly well-suited to writing the legislature's intent into law.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

If you wish to have a positive impact on public policy, go into a small general-practice firm for at least three years before running for the legislature or other elected office. Besides acquiring real-world knowledge of the law and experience in persuasion, negotiation, and writing, you gain a tremendous amount of wisdom in dealing with people.

Senator Bruce C. Patterson (R-7, Canton)

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Bar Admit Date: December 14, 1972

Law School: Wayne State University

Standing Committees: Energy Policy (Chair), Government Operations and Reform (Vice Chair), Health Policy (Vice Chair), Judiciary, Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs

Statutory Standing Committee: Legislative Council



Senator Gretchen E. Whitmer (D-23, East Lansing)

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Bar Admit Date: November 9, 1998

Law School: Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University

Standing Committees: Agriculture, Education (Minority Vice Chair), Finance, Judiciary (Minority Vice Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

Raised by two lawyers, I grew up with a unique appreciation for the law and the professional opportunities a law degree provides. My mother, Sherry Whitmer, used her degree as a private practitioner, a professor, and ultimately an assistant attorney general. My father, Dick Whitmer, worked for Governor Milliken, practiced privately, and served as Blue Cross Blue Shield president. My aunt is a judge in California and my uncle is a prosecutor in Macomb County. The diversity of opportunity and potential for personal fulfillment convinced me that earning my law degree was the right move. I thoroughly enjoyed law school and employ my training daily.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Legal training better equips practical and legal analysis of the thousands of bills introduced every year. While some of my colleagues have gone so far as to say only lawyers should serve in the legislature, I believe in the value of representative government. Without a doubt, however, I have seen lawyers on both sides of the aisle come together and have reasonable discussion about the substance of the laws proposed. That, I think, is in the best interest of the public we serve.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Run for office. Help a friend run for office. Befriend an officeholder and take an active role in the process. With term limits, legislators are hard-pressed to learn all of the issues on which we cast votes. The more input and expertise that you can share with your legislator or a legislator working on an issue of import to you, the better.

Representative Steven M. Bieda (D-25, Warren)

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Bar Admit Date: May 18, 1993

Law School: University of Detroit Mercy

Standing Committees: Ethics & Elections,
Judiciary, Labor, Tax Policy (Chair), Transportation



Why did you become a lawyer?

I became an attorney because of a deep interest in law and public policy. I have always been fascinated by world history, and I was inspired by the many contributions made by members of the profession. In addition, I saw the legal profession as a way to make a positive contribution to society, as well as an interesting way to make a living.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

I have had the honor of serving with some terrific individuals in the legislature. Some are attorneys, others are of different professional backgrounds. While the diversity of individual experiences and backgrounds offers a richness and insight that is useful and desirable to the formation of public policy, lawyer-legislators

offer specialized knowledge of existing law and professional experience in dealing with aspects of civil and criminal issues, and show a greater sensitivity to potential constitutional and other legal issues involved in bills before the legislature. More than any other profession, attorneys appreciate the nuances of language, know how to ask the tough questions in searching out the truth, and generally exercise a strong analytical approach.

I think it is important that individuals with a legal background serve in the legislature because, perhaps more than any other profession, ours is a profession that closely follows, implements, and works within the parameters of the laws that evolve in the legislature. I think it is important for individuals to contribute to society, and a background in the study and practice of law has much to offer.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

My best advice to an attorney who wants to have an impact on public policy is to become active in both the bar association and in government. Develop an area of expertise and continuously upgrade your skills and knowledge base. Attorneys interested in making an impact on public policy don't necessarily have to run for office themselves. They can serve as an important source of information and advice for individuals in public office. They can offer expertise, testimony, and a source of information for public policymakers in both elected and non-elected positions. Working with the bar association or other professional organization, they can have a great impact in developing proposals and responding to and improving proposals made by others.

Representative Pamela G. Byrnes, Associate Speaker Pro Tempore (D-52, Chelsea)

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Bar Admit Date: May 6, 1976

Law School: University of Maryland

Standing Committee: Appropriations

Appropriations Subcommittees: Community Health (Majority Vice Chair),
Higher Education (Chair), Judiciary (Majority Vice Chair), Transportation



Why did you become a lawyer?

I was working full time when I learned that the University of Maryland had an evening law school. I thought this was an opportunity to expand my career. Being one who enjoys challenges, I looked at this as an opportunity to expand my knowledge.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

It provides a firsthand experience on the legislative process. The enactment of a bill is *not* a neat, clean process. With many pieces of legislation, there is a political influence. The legislature is comprised of people from many different backgrounds, which affect the legislative process.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Build coalitions and work with those legislators who share an interest in your particular issue. Good public policy emanates from strong bipartisan coalitions.

Representative Paul F. Condino (D-35, Southfield)

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Bar Admit Date: November 21, 1986

Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Government Operations, Insurance, Judiciary (Chair), Oversight and Investigations (Majority Vice Chair), Tax Policy (Majority Vice Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

I essentially followed my father's footsteps. He was a lawyer and always taught how noble it was to advocate on behalf of someone.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

It is important because we need lawmakers who have been trained in the law and the Constitution. The foundations of law school education really shape a due process and issues-centered legislator.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

I would advise more lawyers to entertain working in the public sector. The public sector is the best place to shape public policy, and we have a desperate shortage of lawyers willing to enter the arena.

Representative Robert Constan (D-16, Dearborn Heights)

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Bar Admit Date: May 18, 1987

Law School: University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Standing Committees: Government Operations; Insurance; Labor; Senior Health, Security & Retirement (Majority Vice Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

I became a lawyer to serve the public and to promote justice and fairness in our great state. Several other members of my family are lawyers. Holding a license to practice law in the state of Michigan is truly a privilege. The privilege and the power a lawyer enjoys must be used to promote justice and fairness.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Lawyers are well-suited to serve the public as lawmakers. A legal education and experience in private practice are great assets for a legislator. Lawyers advocate for their clients. Lawyers

understand the problems their clients face and how law affects people's lives. Lawyers are well-suited to propose, debate, and enact laws that protect seniors, help single parents, or provide consumers with a legal remedy that did not previously exist.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Join forces with your fellow lawyers and your fellow citizens to make your interests and concerns heard. Contact your state legislator; we want to hear your views. Work with the various bar associations and with lobbying groups to impact and shape public policy.

Representative Marc R. Corriveau (D-20, Northville)

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Bar Admit Date: May 2, 2000

Law School: University of Detroit School of Law

Standing Committees: Education, Ethics & Elections (Chair), Health Policy, Judiciary



Why did you become a lawyer?

As early as I can remember, I was in courtrooms, meeting judges and lawyers, and hearing my father discuss the law. I became aware that a lawyer played a critical part in people's lives. Whether my father was helping someone who had lost a job, was in trouble, or having problems within their family, I realized that he was helping people at a time of great need. I wanted to do the same.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Having practical experience in understanding how the different bodies of government relate to each other and how laws affect people is invaluable. Other jobs and professions provide the same experience, but none more. Our profession teaches us to fight for interests that may not be the same as our own. We learn

Lawyer, Legislator, Leader

For the first time in recent history, lawyers hold the top three leadership offices in the executive and legislative branches. For the last 50 years, and perhaps even longer, the offices of governor, Speaker of the House, and Senate majority leader have never before been simultaneously held by lawyers. Governor Jennifer M. Granholm, Speaker Andrew Dillon, and Majority Leader Michael Bishop were elected to serve at Michigan's helm. Joining them during this historic moment is the majority floor leader in the House of Representatives, Steve Tobocman, and the majority floor leader in the Senate, Alan Cropsey. The offices of majority floor leader in both chambers have also not been held by lawyers at the same time as governor, Speaker, and majority leader.

Fast facts of Michigan leadership:

Since 1949, 5 of 7 governors were attorneys.

Since 1947, 4 of 17 Speakers of the House were attorneys.

Since 1951, 6 of 15 Senate majority leaders were attorneys.

Since 1967, 4 attorneys have served as majority floor leader of the House.

Since 1967, 2 attorneys have served as majority floor leader of the Senate.

to bring different parties together to find workable solutions. These lessons have prepared me to work with my fellow lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to build a stronger Michigan and to put the best interests of the people of Michigan first.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Having an impact on public policy begins with one's willingness to get involved. Our schedules are often dominated by our work and families, but I believe we should get involved on whatever level our lives will allow. As lawyers we are often maligned as a necessary evil, but our opinions, our words, and our actions are given great respect. Our position gives us the real ability to accomplish real change.

Representative Andy Coulouris (D-95, Saginaw)

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Bar Admit Date: May 9, 2003

Law School: University of Michigan

Standing Committees: Banking & Financial Services (Chair); Commerce; Health Policy; Intergovernmental, Urban and Regional Affairs; Judiciary (Majority Vice Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

Lawyers have a tremendous opportunity *and* responsibility to move public policy. I wanted to be a part of a profession that, by its nature, is in a position to shape the world in which we live.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

I think the analytical reasoning abilities that law school helps one acquire and refine are invaluable in the policy arena.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

You have at your disposal the most powerful tool to impact public policy—your right and privilege to practice law and move policy one case at a time. We in the legislature are keenly aware of case law developments. Just as laws affect litigation, litigation and case law affects laws and lawmaking.

Representative George Cushingberry, Jr. (D-8, Detroit)

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Bar Admit Date: April 29, 1994

Law School: University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Standing Committee: Appropriations (Chair)

Appropriations Subcommittee: Supplementals (Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

To advocate for those in need and to champion civil rights, civil literacy, and a civil society.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

So the process is considerate of all branches of government, and to bring experience to the policy, practice, and theory of law making. To provide technical leadership in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of the policy process.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Get to know your local legislator and the party leadership.

Representative Andrew J. Dillon, Speaker of the House (D-17, Redford Township)

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Bar Admit Date: December 29, 1989

Law School: University of Notre Dame



Why did you become a lawyer?

My father was a lawyer and then a judge for many years. He was my initial and primary exposure to the legal world, and it appealed to me for a variety of reasons. Family life is very important to me, and my father was able to participate in family activities while successfully performing his duties to the law. My father also impressed upon me the significance of working-class families and how they provide the foundation for our economy. I wanted to be a lawyer to make certain that they would be taken care of, as well as any others who felt that their rights had been violated.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Lawyers are probably from the background that is best suited to participate in legislative affairs. It only makes sense that the lawmaking body of government would comprise individuals from all across the state with a working knowledge of the law. It works out better for the citizens that way, too. Everyone is familiar with the litany of jokes about shady lawyers and politicians—and maybe the two go hand in hand—but a lawyer running for public office is less likely than someone with no legal background to make an outlandish campaign promise to get elected. Once elected, a lawyer's exposure to the law will also make it easier to draft quality legislation.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

My advice would be that lawyers elected to serve the public should make sure that their policy jibes with the will of the citizens who elected them. I feel that those who study the law have a better feel for the legislature and a better idea of what policy can and cannot be realistically implemented. The more knowledgeable and grounded one is in the law, the simpler it becomes to navigate through the limbo where most ill-conceived legislation ends up.

Representative Kevin A. Elsenheimer, Assistant Minority Leader (R-105, Bellaire)

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Bar Admit Date: November 1, 1993
 Law School: Wayne State University
 Standing Committee: Judiciary



Why did you become a lawyer?

Because I couldn't do math! Actually, when I was growing up, my father always had great respect for the lawyers in our hometown of Traverse City, and that attracted me to law. I ultimately chose law as a profession because it seemed a way to blend intellectual curiosity with creativity and strategic thinking.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

The public would be surprised at how few of us there are in Lansing! In my experience, lawyers who are legislators tend to be the final check on bills on almost every committee on which they serve. Other legislators rely on us for our expertise. We also seem more able to bridge partisan divides and unite on issues important to the bar and to the state.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

First, recognize that advocating in court and advocating public policy are distinct skills. Zealous representation is a requisite when you're a trial attorney, but advancing policy in the political system usually requires a more modest approach and a willingness to compromise.

Representative Edward J. Gaffney (R-1, Grosse Pointe)

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Bar Admit Date: May 7, 1976
 Law School: Thomas M. Cooley
 Standing Committees: Health Policy (Minority Vice Chair), Regulatory Reform



Why did you become a lawyer?

To be a useful and productive human being. To learn to analyze issues and to communicate with people on a highly intellectual level.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

To bring reason and a sense of justice to the political process.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

I would encourage young lawyers to get involved at the local level first. Start out at the city council or school board level and work your way up from there.

Representative Matthew O. Gillard, Associate Speaker Pro Tempore (D-106, Alpena)

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Bar Admit Date: January 9, 2001
 Law School: Wayne State University
 Standing Committee: Appropriations (Majority Vice Chair)

Appropriations Subcommittees: Judiciary (Chair), School Aid and Education (Chair), Supplementals (Majority Vice Chair)



Representative David Law (R-39, West Bloomfield)

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Bar Admit Date: June 9, 1995
 Law School: Detroit College of Law at Michigan State University

Standing Committees: Government Operations, Insurance, Judiciary



Why did you become a lawyer?

I became a lawyer because, from an early age, I've had a desire to devote my life to helping people. Being a lawyer presents a unique opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Before joining the legislature, I was an assistant prosecuting attorney in Oakland County, where I worked closely with law enforcement and the judiciary to help crime victims.

The Lawyer-Legislator Presence

It is commonly assumed that a majority of legislators are attorneys. As reported in the March 2005 *Michigan Bar Journal* article, "Lawyers, Law-Making and Legislative Power: Reflections on the Modern Michigan Experience," the average percentage of lawyers serving in the legislature since 1971 is actually only 14.1 percent. The highest percentage occurred 1971-1972 at 18.9 percent, the lowest 1981-1982 at 9.5 percent. With 22 lawyers serving among 148 state legislators (or 14.8 percent), the 94th session is consistent with that average.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

I feel that lawyers add a much-needed perspective to the legislative process, as lawyers use the law daily in their profession. The different laws and how they are crafted directly affects the legal profession. Therefore, having lawyers in the legislature to address issues and craft legislation is beneficial for the state and the legal profession.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Get involved and be vocal. You can make a difference. If there is an issue that you feel needs to be addressed, share your insights with your state representative and senator. We want to hear from you and we want to help.

Representative Mark S. Meadows (D-69, East Lansing)

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Bar Admit Date: October 24, 1974
Law School: Detroit College of Law at
Michigan State University

Standing Committees: Great Lakes and Environment; Intergovernmental, Urban and Regional Affairs; Judiciary; Labor (Majority Vice Chair); New Economy and Quality of Life; Regulatory Reform



Why did you become a lawyer?

I was active in the peace movement in the 60s and early 70s. Like many people, I thought social justice was best accomplished through nonviolent means. At some point I became convinced that becoming an attorney would advance my interest in accomplishing these objectives. I took the LSAT, was accepted to law school, and during my last year, Frank Kelley came to the school recruiting assistants. His vision of public law and the public interest was compelling, and I have never regretted my 27 years as one of his assistants.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

There are demands for many areas of expertise in the creation, passage, and review of legislation. Lawyers bring a particular perspective to the legislative process because of broad-based training and background. Lawyers are used to relying on the expertise of others in relation to technical areas. Lawyers have strong written and verbal language skills, or they don't last long in the law. Lawyers are used to identifying an objective and crafting language to attain it. Lawyers are used to compromise. Lawyers are trained in the analysis of complicated legal issues. Lawyers are "big picture" people. All of these skills are useful in every subject matter area of legislative work.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

I tell every lawyer that involvement in his or her community is an essential part of success as an attorney. Whether it is as a

planning commissioner or some other community board, this type of experience can open your eyes to the practical application of the law and influence your personal attitude toward the law. There can be no greater impact on public policy than at the local level. Be active in your community and you will eventually have an impact on statewide policy as well.

Representative Chuck Moss (R-40, Birmingham)

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Bar Admit Date: November 14, 1979
Law School: University of Detroit Mercy School of Law

Standing Committee: Appropriations

Appropriations Subcommittees: General Government, Judiciary (Minority Vice Chair), School Aid and Education



Why did you become a lawyer?

I liked to argue and I liked to write. What else is there?

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

Because if you're making sausage, it helps to be a butcher.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

a) Master your area of concern, because you're likely to be the only real expert in the room.

b) Always remember there can be honest disagreements between honorable men and women of good faith.

c) I prefer to put my ideas out in front of the people and ask their consent, via an election. There are other ways to make policy, but I think this one is best.

Representative Tory M. Rocca (R-30, Sterling Heights)

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Bar Admit Date: May 11, 2000
Law School: University of Michigan

Standing Committees: Insurance, Judiciary



Why did you become a lawyer?

I'd like to be able to say that I have some inspiring story of having an epiphany when I was young that led me to the inextinguishable conclusion that I could do nothing else with my life but practice law. For example, a good friend and colleague of mine realized as a child that she wanted to pursue a career in the law as she watched *Miracle on 34th Street* for the first time. The unseemly truth is that I probably first became interested in becoming an attorney when I was in elementary school, most likely because I enjoyed winning arguments. That, of course, was not

enough to motivate me to spend three years in law school. Later, however, I developed an interest in public service as a career, and serving the public in some capacity as an attorney struck as the best use to which I could put myself.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

We are very fortunate that we have people from a wide variety of backgrounds serving in the state legislature. When constituents visit me in Lansing, they are often under the impression that most state legislators in Michigan are attorneys. Of course, that is not the case, and please accept my apology for always telling them that we wouldn't want that to be the case. The people of the state of Michigan genuinely do benefit from having doctors, law enforcement officers, teachers, farmers, small-business people, and a whole host of others from a broad array of callings serving as their representatives. Our state government spends about \$40 billion per year, and makes and enforces laws that touch virtually every facet of human activity. Therefore, it is very important that we have legislators who, collectively, have experience in as many fields of endeavor as possible.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Attorneys can impact public policy in a number of ways. First, and most obviously, attorneys can run for elected office. Those who choose that path should bear in mind that the public perception of attorneys is about what you'd expect, so don't plan on your status as a member of the bar carrying the day for you with a majority of voters. You will have to convince voters that you are qualified for other reasons, and that you will be a good public servant for them. For those who would like to maintain their current careers, they can contact their legislators and make suggestions regarding public policy.

Representative Tonya Schuitmaker, Assistant Minority Floor Leader (R-80, Lawton)

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Bar Admit Date: November 8, 1993

Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Education, Judiciary (Minority Vice Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

I became a lawyer because I wanted to follow in my father's footsteps. I was able to see the kind of good he has done for people over the years, and I was interested in continuing that.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

I believe that legal training can be a real asset to a legislator. As a general practitioner, I have seen firsthand how our laws affect Michigan's citizens. Sometimes, what seems to be a good

idea has unintended consequences, especially when implemented into a real-world setting. Legal training can help legislators recognize and analyze bills in a way that will help them see how they will be implemented in the judicial branch.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

I believe the best way to have an impact, regardless if you are an attorney or not, is to communicate with your state and U.S. elected officials. It's important to get involved and play a part in the political process. Attorneys often see firsthand how our laws affect Michigan citizens, and therefore are particularly cognizant to laws that are beneficial or have unintended consequences.

Representative Steven H. Tobocman, Majority Floor Leader (D-12, Detroit)

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Bar Admit Date: November 12, 1997

Law School: University of Michigan

Standing Committee: Oversight and Investigations (Chair)



Why did you become a lawyer?

I became a lawyer because of my love for public service. The combination of legal and public policy skills has helped me tremendously in moving forward my agenda for social justice.

Why is it important for lawyers to serve in the legislature?

In a time of term limits, the need for legal skills is critical. While the legislature invariably benefits from having legislators with a variety of real-world expertise at the table, there is an undeniable need for a legal perspective as well. With term limits, there is so little time to learn how the legislature works and to become an expert in making law. Having a legal perspective has been a huge asset in creating good policy.

What advice would you give a lawyer who wants to have an impact on public policy?

Lawyers have a multitude of opportunities to impact public policy, particularly through volunteer opportunities. The State Bar of Michigan, its various committees, and other pro bono service organizations, such as Community Legal Resources, are excellent resources for lawyers to be involved with policy.

Important to Note

Worthy of recognition are Representative Barb Byrum (D-67, Lansing) and Representative Andrew Meisner (D-27, Ferndale), who have both completed their juris doctor. The representatives are not yet members of the State Bar.