

Michigan's Lawyer-Legislators of the 95th State Legislature

It is with pleasure that we continue a tradition of presenting the lawyer-legislators at the start of each legislative term. For the 2009–2010 term, 23 lawyer-legislators will be leading Michigan in our state's capitol.

The short biographical and committee assignment information was compiled with the assistance of each lawyer-legislator. The lawyer-legislators were also invited to respond to the same three questions; their responses are included below the informational data.

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 Committee: Government Operations & Reform (Chair)

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



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Throughout my youth, I always admired those in the legal profession, especially my own father. His career as a lawyer contributed to his success as a state legislator. At its most basic level, the pursuit of the law is a public service—a desire to see that justice is served. My own legal education and later experiences as a lawyer contributed to my desire to run for public office. Just as a lawyer serves in the best interests of his or her clients, I draw upon my legal expertise to better serve the needs of my constituency.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

I think all citizens can contribute ideas for change, growth, and prosperity in Michigan. As I travel around the state, meeting new people and hearing new stories, I am struck by each individual's unique perspective on the economy. Certainly lawyers represent one sector of our economy affected by this current recession, but I truly believe each person can contribute to the recovery of Michigan.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

I sought public office because I wanted to effect change and better represent the interests of my neighbors and my community. Every day, I find myself involved in a debate over current law, engrossed in crafting new legislation, or researching the effects a law has on our citizens and on our state. The legislative changes I want to tackle over the next two years are almost too many to mention; however, my main focus will be on crafting and supporting legislation to make our state a more attractive environment for business and a better place to raise a family.

Senator Hansen H. Clarke (D-1, Detroit)

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Bar Admit Date: February 12, 1988

Law School: Georgetown University

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

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



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Being a lawyer is a calling to promote fairness and justice in our society.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Lawyers can best advance our legal system to better assist people who are struggling financially.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

I am proposing a court-supervised temporary freeze on mortgage foreclosures. A targeted foreclosure moratorium law could help stabilize the housing market, neighborhood property values, and invested retirement savings.

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; Hunting, Fishing and Outdoor Recreation; Judiciary (Vice Chair)

Statutory Standing Committee: Legislative Council

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)



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

When a lawyer sees injustice, he or she has the opportunity to work to make it right.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Lawyers search for truth. They are trained to look at the evidence to see what is true and what isn't true; to identify the key factors; to see what is the cause and effect. Lawyers are uniquely trained to help discern how America's economic system got off track and who is responsible.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

The Department of Corrections is my area of expertise. I want smart policies to protect the public. Another area is religious freedom. There is an encroachment of political correctness in the area of religious freedom.

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 & Public Utilities (Chair), Health Policy, Judiciary, Natural Resources & 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



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Raised by two lawyers, I grew up with a unique appreciation for the law and the professional opportunities a law degree affords. 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 for many years as the CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield. Lawyers daily defend the rights of our citizens, and used ethically and with vigor, we are crucial to the success of the democracy our brilliant forefathers envisioned.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Legal training better equips practical and legal analysis of the thousands of bills introduced every year. Though 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. Certainly in these economic times, the more diverse the decision-making body the better. Without reservation, 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.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

It is clear that due to budget constraints and the fact that our state spends more money on our corrections system than on higher education, the legislature and the governor must discuss sentencing reform. The National Council of State Governments has been working with our state to develop policies that keep the

public safe and are fiscally sound. This area of law will be roundly debated and negotiated, and will certainly have an impact on the state budget.

Representative Justin Amash (R-72, Cascade)

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Bar Admit Date: May 23, 2006

Law School: University of Michigan

Standing Committees: Education, Judiciary, Labor, Military & Veterans Affairs & Homeland Security



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

I am proud to serve in a profession that holds the protection of individual rights as its core mission.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

As Henry Hazlitt wrote, "The bad economist sees only what immediately strikes the eye; the good economist also looks beyond." Like the good economist, a lawyer is trained to look beyond. Unfortunately, too many lawyers fail to apply their training in practice.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

Constitutional law, business law, and criminal law should all move in the direction of better securing individual liberty.

Representative Lisa R. Brown (D-39, West Bloomfield)

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Bar Admit Date: May 12, 1993

Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Education (Vice Chair), Energy & Technology, Ethics & Elections, Judiciary



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

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Bar Admit Date: May 6, 1976

Law School: University of Maryland

Standing Committees: Military & Veterans Affairs & Homeland Security, New Economy & Quality of Life, Regulatory Reform, Transportation (Chair)



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

The law provides a mechanism for order. By being a student of the law, a lawyer develops a respect for order, due process, and discipline. At the same time, a student of the law can detect when there are injustices and a need to correct or improve the

law for the betterment of the community. To be part of this process is indeed humbling. Being a lawyer carries with it a responsibility to our system of justice and to our community.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

As a lawyer who ran a private practice, I am sensitive to the challenges facing small businesses in Michigan. As the legislature contemplates issues such as tax policy and regulatory requirements, I consider the implication the legislation will have on small business. In addition, my background in family law gives me a unique perspective and sensitivity to families in economic crisis.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

The areas that I will focus on initially are those that I have worked on in previous sessions. These areas include family law issues, particularly those dealing with facilitating the adoption process, as well as transportation funding and child care/pre-K services. Environmental law, economic development, and stabilizing funding for higher education will also continue to top my priority list in 2009.

Representative Bob 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 (Chair); Insurance; Judiciary; Senior Health, Security and Retirement



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Lawyers provide a great service to their clients and to the community. Lawyers counsel their clients and oversee the resolution of disputes in our legal system. Being licensed to practice law in the state of Michigan is truly an honor and a privilege.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Most lawyers in private practice have experience owning or operating a small business. Many lawyers deal with common, everyday people and their problems. Lawyers understand how changes in the economy affect people's lives—through problems like divorce, losing a job, or having to file bankruptcy. A legal education and experience practicing law makes lawyers well-qualified to enact new laws and shape public policy.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

During my term as state representative, I plan to introduce legislation that will improve the way our legal system operates and serves the public. I am particularly interested in championing legislation in the area of elder and probate law.

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

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Bar Admit Date: May 2, 2000
Law School: Michigan State University–Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Education, Government Operations, Health Policy (Chair), Judiciary



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Lawyers have a great responsibility, but also a great opportunity to help make the legal system work for those who are facing their most desperate times. It is this essential core of what lawyers do that makes me proud to be a part of the profession.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Lawyers are trained to be faithful to evidence and work in the best interests of their clients. As a legislator, it is my responsibility to apply that training in my efforts to faithfully evaluate all proposals and pursue those that are in the best interest of my client, the state of Michigan. In government, where politics can sometimes trump good policy, a lawyer's experience also offers guidance in how to break through partisanship and deliver results. Despite our adversarial roles inside the courtroom, good lawyers learn to bring parties together to find workable solutions to often difficult problems. That experience has prepared me well to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in our common pursuit to build a stronger Michigan.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

Health care is a broken system in Michigan. As chair of the House Committee on Health Policy, I hope to advance policy changes that will ensure that Michigan residents have access to quality, affordable health care in a time when more employers are cutting back.

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), Health Policy, Judiciary, Tax Policy



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Lawyers have the capacity to change, both subtly and dramatically, the day-to-day world in which we live. I think, at its core, our profession is an aspirational profession—it is one whose core aim is to promote human progress. Undoubtedly, we sometimes

allow the law to stray from our shared values; but I think we usually are able to right the ship, so to speak. Sometimes, of course, it takes the political process to expedite these corrections.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

I think many lawyers possess keen market instincts. We learn in law school to view the world through a market lens; efficient allocation of resources, broken markets, etc. So, I think that from a policymaking standpoint, we generally are well-suited to the task of determining how to fix broken markets and how to allocate ever more scarce resources. I think it is important, though, for lawyers to recognize that they are not necessarily market/economic technicians. In the public sphere, we need to work collaboratively among the professions to achieve the right policy outputs.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

I have been working hard on the issue of felony expungements. Recent trends have made it harder (if not impossible) for most ex-offenders to expunge their felony record once they have paid their debts to society. Under current Michigan law (which is a departure from most of modern history in our state), an individual who is convicted of a misdemeanor in addition to a felony is unable to even petition a judge to get the felony expunged. This is true even if the misdemeanor is as minor as, say, driving on a suspended license. I think these individuals should be allowed to at least petition a judge to expunge the felony. With a felony on their record, they are usually unable to attain meaningful employment and, often, are trapped in the very same cycle of poverty that leads to the social ills against which our criminal justice system is supposed to protect. It is, fundamentally, an issue of economic justice.

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 Subcommittees: Investigations, Intergovernmental Affairs and Oversight (Chair); Special Governmental Operation (Majority Vice Chair); Supplementals (Chair)



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

Standing Committee: Appropriations



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

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



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Lawyers are problem-solvers, and Michigan has never needed problem-solvers more than today.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

This is a critical time for our state, and the bar will eventually play a role in Michigan's recovery. As for the current environment, zealous representation of those challenged by the economy is a must.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

I am taking a hard look at Justice Weaver's judicial reform proposals. I also believe that if we are serious about reforming government, reforming the preliminary exam process as Attorney General Cox has proposed, would be a good place to start.

Representative Andrew James Kandrevas (D-13, Southgate)

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Bar Admit Date: November 19, 2001
Law School: Wayne State University

Standing Committees: Judiciary, Labor, Tax Policy, Transportation



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Lawyers are situated in our society to have the most profound impact on people's lives. Our system of government relies heavily on lawyers to create and practice the rule of law. As leaders of society, we should be bound by a higher standard of ethical behavior and use our abilities to better the world around us.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Lawyers are uniquely qualified to respond to the current economic environment because we have been trained to identify problems and then to draft a framework to correct those problems. Each period of time has a unique set of economic and societal factors that must be assessed to improve the economic health of our region and nation, and our leaders must be willing to consider corrective measures that fit the current crisis.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

There is not one specific area of law that I would like to modify, but I would like our judicial system to be more easily accessible both to lawyers and to the common citizen. We live in an era of great technological advances in how information is accessed, transferred, and archived, and I would hope that our state would be a national leader in bringing our court system in line with other industries that have taken advantage of technology to better the lives of our consumers.

Representative Ellen Cogen Lipton (D-27, Huntington Woods)

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Bar Admit Date: November 13, 1992
Law School: Harvard Law School

Standing Committees: Energy & Technology,
Insurance, Judiciary (Vice Chair), Tax Policy



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Because it affords me the opportunity to help so many people from so many different walks of life.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Oftentimes we see first the hard devastating effects of an economic downturn.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

Laws pertaining to meaningful economic development and job creation.

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

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Bar Admit Date: October 24, 1974
Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Great Lakes & Environment;
Judiciary (Chair); Intergovernmental, Urban and Regional Affairs



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Although our profession is often joked about or painted in derogatory terms, we are still held in higher regard than insurance companies and legislators! Wait a minute—I think the answer must be that I am proud to be a member of a profession that can move from one low position to another even lower. Seriously, I am proud to be part of a profession that produces people who try to make a difference in every level of society and encourages pro bono community activity.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

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 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.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

This is a tough question because as legislators everything we do modifies or changes an area of the law. That being said, I do have a wish list and I hope to see major changes in the way we sentence and parole criminals. I want to see additional protections for the elderly and for our children. I hope that in this session we can finally make changes to better protect retiree health care and to provide at least catastrophic health care to all our citizens. And, above all, I want changes that provide more opportunities for employment to our citizens.

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: Investigations, Intergovernmental
Affairs and Oversight (Minority Vice Chair); School Aid &
Education; Supplementals



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

Because lawyers are held in higher public regard than other careers I've had; to wit: journalist, talk-show host, and politician.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

As everybody rushes to work smarter, leaner, more efficiently, and cheaper, lawyers sit as referees and ombudsman to be sure corners aren't cut and the innocent aren't trampled.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

The law must be a set of rules that everyone can understand and that protect those who abide by them as well as sanction those who violate them. If it becomes a pile of ever-changing

mush that no one can understand, much less comply with, then it's no longer the law but a jungle with a procedural handbook. A "legal system" is not necessarily the same as "a system of justice." I hope to uphold the principle of a system of justice.

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,
Regulatory Reform



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

I sometimes joke that the problem with being a lawyer is that just 90 percent of us make the other 10 percent look bad. To be sure, most of us can think of members of the legal profession who defy few, if any, of the negative stereotypes that persist about lawyers. However, when I think of the most dedicated, hard-working, conscientious people I have known, the friends with whom I have practiced law rise to the top of the list. I sincerely have a great deal of respect for my colleagues, who have been able to survive in a difficult, stressful, and competitive profession, while remaining good people with whom I am proud to associate.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Capable lawyers are in an unusually good position to weather the economic problems that our state and nation are facing and contribute to the economic well-being of Michigan. As Michigan's larger corporations have lost market share and shed jobs in recent years, the state has come to rely on small businesses to play a greater role in generating economic activity. Starting one's own business, regardless of the endeavor, is likely to be risky and daunting. However, lawyers who wish to start their own small firms have a significant advantage over many other kinds of entrepreneurs. Provided that they have work to do, they can start businesses that generate revenue without having to make large investments of capital. While other business start-ups can require the purchase or leasing of expensive equipment and large facilities, a lawyer can start a productive business with the relatively minimal investment that is required to outfit a small office. Although many of us have found that financing our education has been a difficult financial burden, by investing in education we have essentially already made what for us is our initial capital investment.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

Michigan's officials must absolutely be focused on changing state government to make Michigan more attractive to job providers. Those changes will be required in not just one particular area

of law, but several, to reduce the cost of operating Michigan's government and remove obstacles that discourage economic growth in our state. They should include finding efficiencies in the Department of Corrections, eliminating unnecessary projects like the construction of a new state police headquarters, simplifying the Michigan Business Tax and removing its more punitive provisions, streamlining regulations, speeding up the permitting process for new and expanding businesses, and ending the obstructionist mentality that many businesses encounter when dealing with some state bureaucracies.

Representative Tonya Schuitmaker (R-80, Lawton)

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Bar Admit Date: November 8, 1993

Law School: Detroit College of Law

Standing Committees: Appropriations,
Energy & Technology, Judiciary

Appropriations Subcommittee: Judiciary (Minority Vice Chair)



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

I've always been proud to be a lawyer, but as a state representative, I'm now in a unique position to be on the side actually writing laws, which allows me to make a difference in my community in a way I couldn't while serving in private practice. As minority vice chair of the Judiciary Committee, I was particularly proud to work on legislation protecting foster children and instituting tougher penalties for those who abuse them.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Speaking again from my role as a state representative, the skills you learn in law school—how to objectively analyze situations and break down problems—are useful in any stressful, changing environment. From a practical point of view, a law degree travels well. Even when the economy is down, opportunities abound for those with law degrees.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

One of the major issues I will work on in the legislature during the upcoming months is reform of our corrections department, which is a major burden on our budget. I'd like to see more programs that reduce the recidivism rate of prisoners, but I think we have to be careful not to let violent criminals out early just to save money. Sadly, that has happened before with tragic results. It's also important to revisit the Michigan Business Tax to create a more competitive business environment favorable to job growth. Before being elected to the House, my focus was on business and real estate law, so it is disheartening to me to see our state pursue policies that contribute to job loss and the collapse of the housing market.

Representative Daniel Scripps (D-101, Leland)

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Bar Admit Date: November 14, 2005

Law School: University of Michigan

Standing Committees: Banking & Financial Services (Vice Chair), Energy & Technology, Ethics & Elections, Great Lakes & Environment



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

I was drawn to the law for the same reason I was drawn to my current job as state representative—I always knew that I would enjoy serving the public interest, and the administration of justice is an important form of public service. Lawyers have a unique opportunity—and a special responsibility—to work for the betterment of their communities and our society as a whole, and it is an honor to be working toward that end.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

Lawyers are trained to handle a broad range of difficult issues, and to see the competing points of view in every argument. I think that ability—to forcefully argue one side while understanding the other—is especially needed as we work to respond to the challenges facing Michigan families.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

To renew Michigan, we need to ensure that the system by which we regulate our economy is appropriate to the world in which we live. By making improvements in sectors ranging from how we compete for renewable energy jobs and investment to upgrading our capital markets infrastructure, we can build the framework necessary to compete and thrive in our global economy. In addition, we need to make sure we're providing adequate protections for Michigan citizens, and there are a number of civil law reforms to achieve this goal. We also need to take a hard look at our criminal justice system to make sure it properly reflects the priorities of the people of this state. Finally, it's incredibly important that we craft an environmental policy that works to preserve the legacy of a thriving Great Lakes basin, which is our birthright as Michiganders. The Great Lakes Water Compact was a critical first step toward protecting the Great Lakes, but by treating water as a commodity, we are leaving loopholes in the legislation that could threaten the lakes for future generations. It is imperative to do all that we can to protect the lakes, rivers, and streams that are Michigan's most precious natural resources.

Representative Rashida Tlaib (D-12, Detroit)

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Bar Admit Date: January 4, 2007

Law School: Thomas M. Cooley

Standing Committee: Appropriations

Appropriations Subcommittees: Higher Education, Human Services, Judiciary (Chair), School Aid & Education



Representative John J. Walsh (R-19, Livonia)

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Bar Admit Date: November 25, 1987

Law School: Wayne State University

Standing Committees: Commerce, Education, Government Operations, Tax Policy



Why are you proud to be a lawyer?

My law degree and the experience earned through practice have permitted me the opportunity to serve not only clients but my community as well. I enjoy helping citizens and businesses understand the sometimes complex world of law.

How are lawyers uniquely qualified to respond in the current economic environment?

The study and practice of law require discipline, logic, focus, and patience—four indispensable traits necessary to address the myriad issues facing the state of Michigan. The application of those traits can permit lawyers the ability to create and apply effective solutions.

Is there a particular area of the law that you hope to modify or change?

My focus, based on my interest, experience, and the pressing need in our state, will be on laws that affect commerce. My goal is to make Michigan competitive for our current and future businesses through laws that are sensible, appropriate to the need, and easy to understand.