

An Interview with

GOVERNOR

Jennifer M. Granholm

She would like to build bridges of understanding—to walk on common ground rather than separate paths. Michigan's first female governor, Jennifer M. Granholm, has made it her goal since taking the oath of office six months ago, to emphasize connection and consensus. Her inclusive leadership style, observers agree, has brought new vitality to state government and to the corridors of power in Lansing. Her resolve to govern well was tested very early. Only 14 days after taking the oath of office, the governor found out that the state was \$300 million short for the current fiscal year. The difficulties of budget shortfalls (that were much larger than anticipated) and having to cut money from schools (education is her top priority), as well as battles in the Republican-controlled legislature, all seem to fuel her high-energy approach to leadership. "I would rather be a governor now than a governor in the 90s when there was so much money people didn't know what to do with it, only because now is when the decisions really make a difference," Granholm said in a recent interview in her Lansing office.

Born in British Columbia, Canada, Granholm moved with her family to California when she was only four years old. She later attended the University of California—Berkeley and Harvard Law School graduating with high honors from both institutions. She chose a career in public service and became a federal prosecutor in Detroit in 1990. In 1994, she was appointed Wayne County Corporation Counsel, heading the County's Law Department. She ran for the office of Attorney General in 1998 and won. During this time, she focused her efforts on protecting Michigan consumers. Granholm announced her intentions to run for the office of governor in 2001. She was elected to office in November 2002. She is married to

Daniel Mulhern, a Michigan native. They have three children. The following is from a short interview with her in June 2003.

Governor, you've just returned from a tour of various Michigan sites, is the trip connected in any way with your vision for the State?

It sure is. It was a trip about economic development. It was a trip about jobs and obviously if we don't have employment in the state we are not going to succeed in the state. The tourism industry consists of about 173,000 jobs related to tourism, so on the one hand it is an economic development piece, which supports our jobs, our businesses, our economy, and that industry, but the second piece of it is that I think Michigan residents don't recognize what a great state this is and what wonderful gems we've got inside the state. It was an opportunity to show Michigan residents what we've got here, so that they spend their dollars in Michigan. Michigan residents spend about \$4.7 billion outside of the state every year on tourism. People are concerned about the price of gas or they are concerned about SARS or terrorism or just traveling. You can have a great vacation right here at home. So the vision for the state is to be a magnet state and that means being magnetic to our own citizens and highlighting the great places that we've got inside of Michigan for travel.

What would you like to achieve during your tenure as governor?

I want you to travel to another state and have people say "you're from Michigan, I'm moving there. I hear that Michigan is the place that has the most vibrant cities in America. I hear that Michigan has focused on and made education the number one priority, because Michigan recognizes that that

is the biggest economic development tool that we have. I'm moving to Michigan because Michigan is a place where they innovate, where they inspire, where entrepreneurs are welcome. I'm moving to Michigan because it's a diverse state and it welcomes thoughts and people from all over. I'm moving to Michigan because it has got the most fabulous quality of life of any state in the country. It is the best place in which to raise a family." I want Michigan to be viewed and its image to be viewed as being a magnet state. That means that it's not just an image; we have to have the reality as well.

We've been historically considered as a rust-belt state and yet we produce the most technologically advanced mass-produced product in the world, the 21st century automobile. That automobile is not going anywhere. How do we transform peoples' vision of that manufactured product into a high-tech product? Certainly the technologies that go into advanced manufacturing, as well as the technologies that layer upon that automobile, whether it's global positioning satellite technology or voice-activated software technology or radar or whatever else makes that product (which can be the most in demand product across the world) a high-technology product. How do we keep those workers here? How do we have cool cities for people to live in and attract that young segment to stay here and not to move to Chicago or other places? And then how do we make sure that our citizens and families are protected and our children are educated? Those are clearly goals that I have for this administration.

What have your first six months in office been like?

Being governor is an enormous privilege and I've learned the challenges at this time (because of our economy) are much greater than what I initially had anticipated or my



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opponent in the last campaign had anticipated. It was a much deeper economic hole that we were in. Perhaps that's the reason why it is such a great time to be governor. It's a great privilege to be able to govern at a time when your decisions really have an impact. I think we've had high and low points in six months even though it's been a very brief time. I'm very proud of the budget that we presented to the legislature only because it cut the largest amount that has ever been cut out of a budget in Michigan's history—over a billion dollars and it raised a deficit of 20 percent of the general fund without raising general taxes. I'm very proud of the tone of fiscal responsibility that we have taken.

We have cut hundreds of millions of dollars of administrative cost, of waste and inefficiency out of government on the one hand and, on the other hand really worked on trying to make employees feel valued and appreciated in state government. We've got some of the most fabulous employees you'll ever want to meet, people who have given their lives in service and who need to be recognized for that and who've chosen this line of work not necessarily for the money, but because of the value that it brings to their psyche and to the world. So the ability to cut and still work on employee morale—we've really tried to make strides in that area. We've got a long way to go still, there's no doubt about it.

I'm proud of the efforts at consensus that we've tried to achieve. I'm not interested in a government that is a zero-sum government. I

want to be able to achieve bipartisan consensus. I want to be able to work with people who may be from a different political party but have the same goals of having a great education system or having a wonderful environment. We've all got so much more common ground that it makes much more sense to work on the areas that unite us rather than focus on the areas that divide us. So that has been a tone-setting milestone, I think, in this administration, and we will continue to work on that and that includes engaging citizens as well in achieving consensus, going to the people and asking for their opinion on things, whether it's the budget or anything else.

I'm also proud of the fact that we've been able to achieve things in an unusual way, for example, to achieve a mass transit agreement among the leaders of southeast Michigan when it had not been done before. I think that's a very good thing and healthy sign of moving forward.

What's your experience so far with the Republican legislature?

We've had a very healthy working relationship. I meet on a weekly basis with the leadership and with the House and the Senate on both sides of the aisle and so we all bring lists of what it is we want to discuss, talk over and I think that's been a very good process. I know that a few people on the Republican side have said that they met more with me than they did with my predecessor even though he was a Republican. I say that not in criticism but just as a fact, because I really try to reach across the aisle and I think that's the right thing to do. We will have our points of difference, there is no doubt about it, but I

think that we have begun a good solid relationship and I intend to keep it that way.

Has your training as a lawyer influenced your view of government and governing?

Sure it has and, certainly having been attorney general, who is being the lawyer for the state, running the largest law firm in the state, it certainly has influenced my thinking about government. Having that experience makes me understand the Constitution, makes me understand what public entities can and cannot do, and how you can get something done in spite of layers of bureaucracy that might otherwise impede people. Having been a public lawyer and knowing that that's the highest calling that a lawyer can have, has given me a great appreciation for the law and for those who serve the public sector. When I was attorney general, I would say all the time to my staff and I say it today, those lawyers are among the noblest people that I have ever met. They are a wonderful office and a wonderful staff that is really committed to public service and it's that notion of elevating the cause of being a lawyer to serve the public that I would like to see us continue to prove.

You've now been able to make several appointments to judicial office. When you get the opportunity to appoint a judge what qualities or prerequisites will you be looking for?

Somebody who is excellent and somebody who is fair. Somebody who is open-minded and does not come in with a pre-existing view of how things ought to be but who is willing to be rigorously fair.

What can you do as the head of the Executive Branch to address problems in Michigan's court system? What do you see as the most important priorities in our court system?

Certainly in the Executive Branch one has to respect the autonomy of the Judicial Branch, and I think we have a good many members of the judicial branch that are



excellent jurists and conscientious and swift in meting out justice. I think that there are joint problems we are all working on. I applaud Maura Corrigan for her leadership, for example, in collecting child support and making sure that the Friend of the Court system is uniform throughout the state. I think that's certainly one of the areas we need to continue to work on. I want to continue to pursue a balanced judiciary, and I think that it's important for citizens to believe that when they go to court they don't have to form shop, that they're going to get an excellent and fair jurist no matter where they go and I'll continue to do that.

I believe at one time that you contemplated a career as a civil rights attorney. Are you concerned about what's happening to our civil liberties ever since September 11?

I do think that any time there is war, there is a threat of retrenching on civil rights,

on rights that make us American . . . When you start to encroach upon peoples' freedoms merely because of their immutable characteristic then, you certainly infringe upon all of our freedoms as Americans. So, I think there's always a danger and I think that it has to be very carefully balanced. I'm also a former prosecutor and I come from that perspective as a lawyer, so I think there must be a balance, but I'm grateful for the courts that often are there to make sure that the balance is struck in favor of individual rights, while still preserving the safety of our society.

You've been a guiding force in the Mentor Michigan program, would you encourage more lawyers to get involved in it?

That's a great leading question. I absolutely would encourage more lawyers to get involved in mentoring. In fact, we have as lawyers an obligation to give back and I encourage the Bar to allow pro bono credit for mentoring a child that might otherwise not

have a view into a future that will be successful. If a lawyer teams up with a child that's at risk or at promise, as we say, who might not otherwise have a role model, then you potentially are creating the next Atticus Finch or Clarence Darrow, or someone who is going to change the world for the better—some child that otherwise may not have that view. I think it's a very important thing for us to be doing as citizens to mentor children that don't otherwise have adult role models and I very much encourage both members of the Bar and the Bar association as well to exhort people to give back in that way.

How do you recall your own experiences as a State Bar of Michigan commissioner?

I loved being a Bar commissioner! I loved working with the State Bar. I very much enjoyed my Bar colleagues, many of whom are still serving. They are great, serious, dedicated people who are committed to the profession, committed to its image, and committed to its integrity. I have nothing but enormous respect for them and fondness for my days being a Bar commissioner.

Would you encourage other lawyers to get involved with State Bar work?

Absolutely, I would encourage lawyers to become involved with the State Bar of Michigan because it's not just good for the Bar and the profession, but it's good for them as individuals. It's not just a great networking opportunity, although it is, but it certainly gives you a vision for what services a Bar offers and the way to develop professionally on your own. It connects you to other lawyers across the state that are doing great work as well. It's a great organization and I would encourage other lawyers to be involved.

Any specific message to the legal community?

I think it's good for the legal community to have a friend in the governor's office. ◆

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