

MICHIGAN COUNTIES



**9/11 ceremony marks
2026 Annual Conference**



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Cover Photo:
At the 2026 Annual Conference, members of a Grand Traverse County honor guard led a ceremony on Sept. 11, 2026, to mark the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks.

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83 COUNTIES MANY MORE STORIES



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Letter from the Executive Director



STEPHAN W. CURRIE
MAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"In Genesee County, direct VA expenditures reached nearly \$150 million in fiscal year 2024. In Lenawee County, the VA provided about \$89 million in benefits and services to roughly 6,000 veterans."

Light the way for veterans

From Nov. 4 to 11, county buildings across Michigan will glow green as part of Operation Green Light for Veterans, a national effort led by the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers. For Michigan's county commissioners, taking part is one of the simplest and most effective things we can do for the people who served.

Michigan is home to one of the largest veteran populations in the country. Yet the state has long ranked near the bottom nationally in federal VA dollars reaching each veteran. Michigan has made real progress in connecting veterans with their benefits since creating the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency in 2013, and counties are where that work happens. Every veteran we reach is another family supported and more federal dollars invested in our communities.

In Genesee County, direct VA expenditures reached nearly \$150 million in fiscal year 2024. In Lenawee County, the VA provided about \$89 million in benefits and services to roughly 6,000 veterans. That money pays for groceries, rent and car repairs, and it stays in local economies. Behind those numbers are county veterans service officers helping veterans file claims for health care, disability compensation, education, and more.

Michigan's County Veteran Service Fund provides state grants to help counties staff veterans services. The Michigan Veterans Trust Fund and county Soldiers Relief Commissions fill emergency gaps. Federal policy is moving too. The Dole Act, passed in 2024, authorized the first-ever federal grants for county veterans service officers, with priority for areas facing high veteran suicide rates or severe staffing shortages. Michigan counties should watch for those opportunities.

Michigan counties already are swinging into Green Light action in 2026. As of mid-October, I know Genesee County was handing out 1,000 green bulbs and inviting



Genesee County's Weather Ball will again have a green hue to honor veterans as part of the 2026 Operation Green Light.

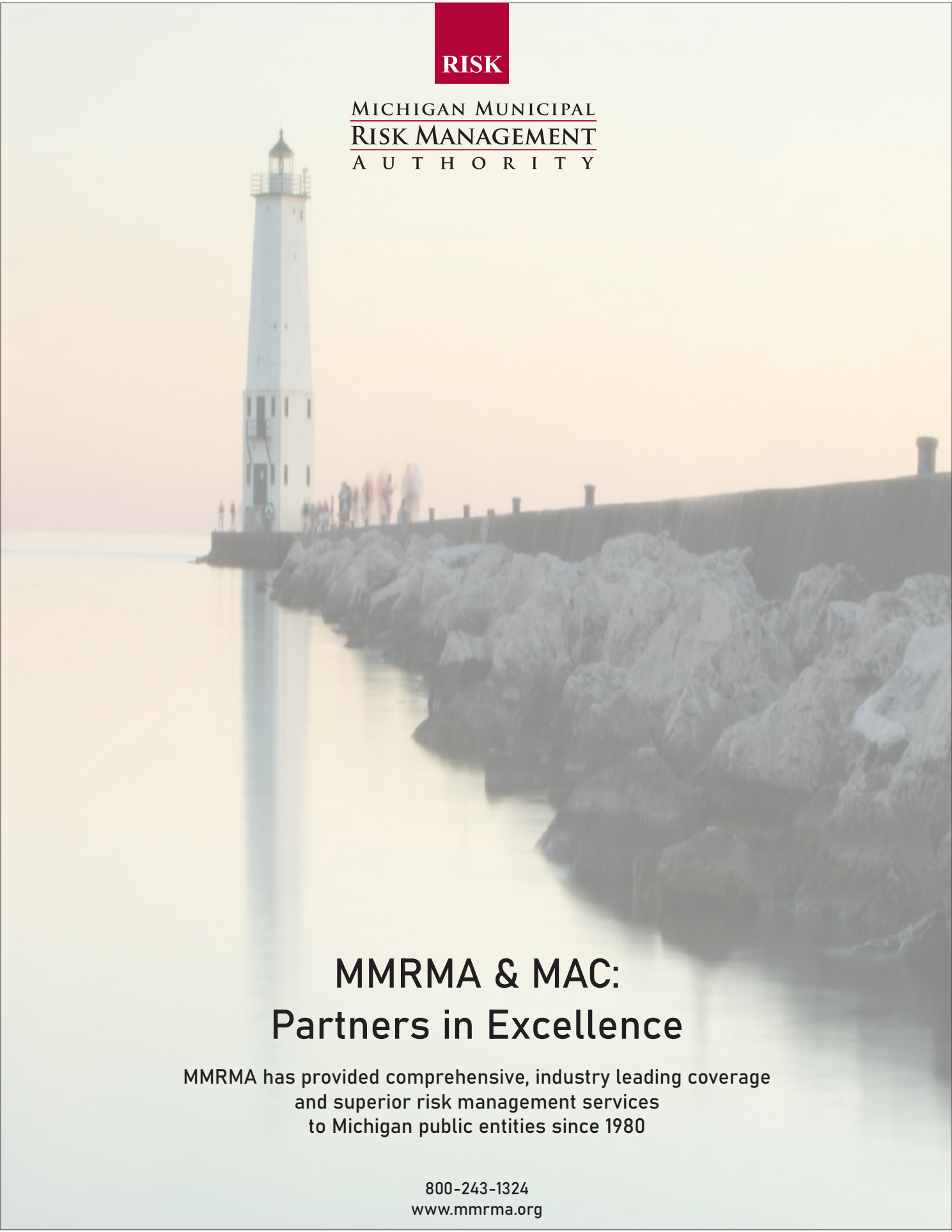
veterans to a lighting ceremony of its historic "Weather Ball." In the Upper Peninsula, Delta County has enacted a resolution of support and equipping all its county buildings and airport with green lights.

These counties are turning a symbol into a service moment, and that is the real value of Operation Green Light. A green bulb in a courthouse window or a resident's porch starts a conversation, and that conversation can end with a veteran walking into a county office.

How to join the effort this year:

- **Bring a resolution to your board.** (A template is available at <https://bit.ly/3VOMRUR>.)
- **Light a county building green in November and share photos with local media, with your state/ federal legislators and MAC** (melot@micounties.org).
- **Ask your veterans services office to offer extended hours that week.**
- **Invite local businesses, townships, and residents to swap one bulb.**

Michigan's veterans have sacrificed a great deal. Let's make sure every one of them knows their home county sees them and knows where to go for help. ♦

A photograph of a white lighthouse situated on a rocky pier extending into a body of water. The scene is captured during sunset or sunrise, with a warm, orange glow in the sky and water. The lighthouse is tall and slender, with a dark top section. A group of people is visible on the pier near the lighthouse. The foreground shows large, dark rocks in the water.

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Letter from the President



BRYAN KOLK,
MAC PRESIDENT

“One of my best friends and I have many clashes on how we feel the government should be run. Never a “knockdown, drag out” brawl but certainly some lengthy and repeated discussions. In the end, we can sit down together and enjoy each other’s company and maybe a mug or two of a foamy beverage.”

Finding common ground, getting things done

EDITOR’S NOTE: Bryan Kolk of Newaygo County delivered inaugural remarks to attendees of the 2026 Annual Conference on Sept. 10, 2026.

Well, OK, I guess here we go.
My first official presidential greeting and welcome to my fellow MAC members.

I never saw myself here a dozen years ago when I was retiring from county employment and decided to run for County Commissioner. As a matter of fact, I had the chair of the Newaygo County Board at the time get ahold of me and ask me to meet up with him.

We met in one of the private rooms after a board meeting and he asked me what my intention was.

I told him that I just wanted to be part of the big picture and stay involved with Newaygo County. He asked me if I realized that, as a county commissioner, I would be put on the spot in having to make some decisions that would not sit well with my former fellow employees. I told him that in my 32 years as a Sheriff’s Deputy, there were not many days that I didn’t have to make decisions that made someone upset and that I realized that my objective had to be in the interest of Newaygo County as a whole. That is what led me here today.

As I stand here now, I think back to some of my adventures with downhill skiing or maybe at the swimming pool. I am minding my own business and having a good time, and it dawns on me that while this is great, there is a bigger hill, or a taller diving board. That must be even better.

So, I go up the ski lift or start climbing that ladder and when I get to the top and get ready to have that adventure, I look out and begin to wonder what I have



Newaygo County’s Bryan Kolk takes the oath as MAC’s 118th Board president during the 2026 Annual Conference on Sept. 10, 2026.

gotten myself into. And here I am today. Every time, when I got to the end of that journey, I looked back and said, “What a rush! I am glad I did that.”

This is what I expect to say a year from now.

I had one of my fellow commissioners ask me what my theme was going to be for my year as president.

What? I need a theme?

He asked me this just before the primary elections, so that may have tempered my decision. Well, I am not sure I really do need a theme, but if I did, it would probably be something like: “Can’t we all just get along so we can get something done?”

Now, that sounds kind of whiny and doesn’t fit well on a banner or a letterhead, so maybe I can pare it down to “Working Together.”

I think that is an important concept to keep in our minds as we approach county government. One of my best friends and I have many clashes on how we feel the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

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Help CRC understand Michigan's local government capacity problems

BY ERIC LUPHER / CITIZENS RESEARCH
COUNCIL OF MICHIGAN



MAC strongly supports the work of the [Citizens Research Council of Michigan](#), a nonpartisan, independent public policy research organization. MAC Executive Director Stephan Currie currently sits on the CRC Board.

Signs point to Michigan's counties (alongside cities, villages and townships) having capacity problems. The Citizens Research Council of Michigan plans to work with the Center for Local, State, and Urban Policy (CLOSUP) at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University Extension to quantify what that means and assess approaches to addressing local government's capacity woes. We want your help.



First, we need help understanding what capacity means for local government officials. If your county, or the local governments within it, is struggling with capacity problems, is that related to

- The ability to maintain current service levels?
- The ability to take on something new – whether to provide elective services to meet evolving needs, the ability to react to emergencies, or to respond to state or federal mandates?
- The ability to adapt to changing cultural, economic, or demographic conditions?

As we think about capacity, we're conceptualizing three unique, but interdependent dimensions.

Resources relate to the inflow of revenue but also fund balance to be able to respond to changing conditions. It relates to the existence and condition of facilities. It relates to technology systems and the know-how to use the systems. It relates to access to financial markets. And it relates to outside services providers as potential intergovernmental collaboration partners, vendors, or contractors.

Clearly money is part of the problem. Michigan local governments are highly dependent on property taxes for the majority of their resources, but the constitutional property tax limitations constrain growth of the tax base. As a result,

the majority of local governments, including 93 percent of counties, have resorted to tax rate increases in efforts to yield needed funds. State revenue sharing, the second largest source of revenue, has been underfunded and growth has been relatively flat. But money problems are not the whole story.

People capacity tells us whether you have the staff to provide services, both in FTEs and people with the skills to engineer, manage, and execute services. It relates to political and leadership resources to fill elected and appointed positions. And it relates to community engagement to solicit volunteers, work with the business community, and partner with stakeholder groups.

Michigan's population growth has been stagnant for five decades. Recently we have had more deaths than births. Too many young adults are starting their lives in other states. As a result, our population is getting older. The effects of Michigan's stagnant population growth and aging population are felt especially acutely in Michigan's rural regions.

Power capacity asks whether you have the explicit statutory, constitutional, or home rule charter authority to execute services and activities. It relates to the political support of residents and stakeholders. And it relates to the relationship between your government and other governments, organizations, and officials at other levels of government.

Tell CRC your capacity issues

On Oct. 13, the Citizens Research Council partnered with the University of Michigan and Michigan State University to host a symposium to explore these issues with a group of state and local government officials. CRC wants to add your voice to the conversation.

Drop me a note to elupher@crcmich.org about the capacity problems in your corner of Michigan. Is more money the magical elixir that will solve your troubles? Do you have people interested in serving in elected offices, on boards and commissions, or just to fill the line jobs to perform the services? Do the laws need to evolve to empower you to evolve and respond to the needs of your constituents and businesses?

Generally local government officials reflect and are in tune with their constituents, but we see examples of data centers, battery plants, solar fields, windmills, and other developments where leaders receive pushback from residents.

Eric Lupher is president of the Citizens Research Council. ♦

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Who pays when Lansing makes the rules?

BY DEENA BOSWORTH /
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

“Property tax relief is a legitimate policy goal, but reducing property taxes does not reduce the cost of sheriff patrols, elections, courts, public health or the many other services local governments are required to provide.”

Nearly 50 years ago, Michigan voters adopted the Headlee Amendment and enshrined an important principle in our state Constitution: If the state requires local governments to provide a new activity or service, or increases an existing requirement, the state has a responsibility to pay the necessary increased costs.

The legal application of Headlee can be complicated. The principle behind it is not.

When Lansing makes the rules, it also needs to consider who will pay the bill.

That question is particularly relevant today as lawmakers consider proposals affecting court funding, dam safety and property taxes. In each case, the policy discussion may be very different, but the fiscal question is remarkably similar.

Recently, the Senate Committee on Civil Rights, Judiciary and Public Safety approved Senate Bills 1089-91, establishing a standardized statewide process for determining indigency. The bills would also prohibit courts from imposing certain costs, fees and assessments on individuals determined to be indigent.

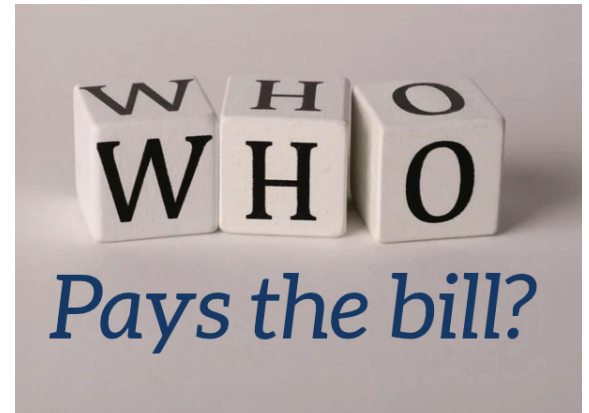
There is a legitimate policy discussion about how Michigan treats individuals who cannot afford to pay court costs.

But Michigan's trial courts are substantially funded locally. Court operations, employees, security, technology and facilities must be paid for, regardless of how much revenue is collected. Yet the legislation currently provides no replacement funding source if collections decline.

MAC testified in opposition to the bills as drafted, asking lawmakers to address that fiscal reality.

Dam safety presents the issue from another direction.

Michigan learned a painful lesson from the 2020 failures of the Edenville and Sanford dams. Strengthening dam safety is an important public policy objective.



But stronger inspection, engineering, maintenance and planning requirements come with significant costs. Of Michigan's 357 county-owned dams, 113 could be affected by proposed new requirements. The state has committed an initial \$20 million toward dam safety efforts but estimates of Michigan's overall dam infrastructure needs approach \$1 billion.

We can support safer dams while still asking the obvious question: If the state requires a higher standard, how will local governments afford to meet it?

Then there are policies where Lansing doesn't impose a new expense but instead removes revenue from local budgets.

Michigan's Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption is perhaps the clearest example.

Since 2013, Michigan has exempted qualifying disabled veterans from property taxes on their homesteads. It is a benefit MAC supports.

But while the state created the exemption, local governments pay for it.

Michigan law specifically requires each local taxing unit to bear its portion of the lost revenue. Over time, those losses have grown to tens of millions of dollars annually.

Now lawmakers are considering further expansions of the exemption. Why is a benefit created by the state of Michigan financed through reduced revenue to local governments?

That same concern is magnified by the property tax package passed by the House earlier this year.

The package proposes approximately \$5 billion in tax reductions through elimination of the 6-mill State Education Tax, State Real Estate Transfer Tax, Personal Property Tax and the property tax “pop-up” that occurs when property changes ownership.

The House passed the tax-cut bills — but not the companion reimbursement legislation.

Property tax relief is a legitimate policy goal, but reducing property taxes does not reduce the cost of sheriff patrols, elections, courts, public health or the many other services local governments are required to provide.

State government has every right — and often an obligation — to establish statewide policy. But the fiscal consequences of those decisions should not be treated as somebody else’s problem.

Headlee recognized that principle nearly five decades ago.

It’s long past time to follow it. ♦

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Annual Conference features gubernatorial candidates, data centers, board elections



A capacity crowd filled the main conference hall on Sept. 10 to hear from a panel of experts on data centers in Michigan.

The 2026 Michigan Counties Annual Conference was marked by a spirited discussion on a hot-button issue — data centers — and a solemn tribute to those lost in the terror attacks of 9/11.

The conference, held Sept. 9-11 at the Grand Traverse Resort in Grand Traverse County, brought together more than 300 county officials, speakers and others for policy sessions, networking and platform and board elections for the Michigan Association of Counties.

"It seems the responsibilities of counties never stop growing," said Stephan W. Currie, MAC's executive director. "Just look at the spirited discussion we had at the conference on data centers, as one example. It's a testament to the spirit of public service of our members that they take on each new challenge with determination and, most importantly, open minds."

In addition to plenary sessions on data center (see pages 14-17) and ballot proposals in November (pages 22-23), attendees also heard from Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson and Congressman John James on their respective bids for governor and participated in a live taping of MAC's Podcast 83.

Policy breakout sessions included reports on opioid service success stories, deer herd management plans, trending issues with the Open Meetings Act and dam safety. (To see slides from presentations, visit MAC's website

at micounties.org/2026-michigan-counties-annual-conference.)

On Sept. 10, Commissioner Bryan Kolk of Newaygo County was sworn in as MAC's 118th Board president. In his inaugural remarks, Kolk said, "The important thing is to remember a disagreement should not be life-altering. We are all here with a common goal, and that is the betterment of our community, our county, our state and our nation ..."



Gary Sauer



Jeff Dontz



Josh Brugger

During caucus elections held earlier that day, members re-elected Dwight Washington of Clinton County and Joe Derocha of Marquette County to the MAC Board of Directors. Newly elected to the Board are Gary Sauer of Benzie County, Jeff Dontz of Manistee County and Josh Brugger of Ottawa County.

As the conference closed, the MAC Board confirmed officers for the 2026-27 term. Joining Kolk are William Miller of Oakland County (first vice president) and Dwight Washington of Clinton County (second vice president). Antoinette Wallace of Macomb County moves to immediate past president. ♦

2026 county calendar

**If you wish to add an event to the calendar, contact Derek Melot at melot@micounties.org.*

NOVEMBER
**MCMCFC DON
Financial Meeting**

Nov. 4 - 6
Crystal Mountain,
Thompsonville

DECEMBER
**MAC Clerks Fall
Quarterly Meeting**

Dec. 3 - 4
Courtyard Hotel,
Mt. Pleasant

2027
**MAC Treasurers Winter
Conference**

Jan. 31 - Feb. 3, 2027
Comfort Inn,
Mt. Pleasant

FEBRUARY
**MACDC Winter
Conference**

Feb. 10 - 12, 2027
Kewadin Casino,
Sault Ste. Marie

**NACo Legislative
Conference**

Feb. 20 - 23, 2027
Hilton Hotel,
Washington, D.C.

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Conference panel discusses data center trends, opportunities, challenges



MAC convened a panel of utility and other experts at the 2026 Annual Conference to discuss the current legal, technical and political realities involving data centers and counties' role in that process.

Members of the panel were: Daniel Mahoney of DTE Energy, Lindsey McGuirk of Consumers Energy, Eric Paul Dennis of the Citizens Research Council of Michigan and Jeff Zilke of Access Michigan. Lois Tomaszewski, Executive Editor of Shoreline Media Group in West Michigan, moderated the panel.

Excerpts from the conversation are shared below.

Tomaszewski: This is an extraordinarily complicated issue, and local officials are being asked to get up to speed on it very quickly. So that's the perspective I'd like to bring to our discussion this morning. What do county and local officials need to know to make informed decisions about data centers?



MODERATOR

Lois Tomaszewski, Executive Editor of Shoreline Media Group in West Michigan

Let's start with a question about what exactly we're talking about. ... **What is this new generation of data centers now that are looking at Michigan compared to what we have already in place, and what would people see on the ground if this kind of facility comes here?**

Zilke: OK, I'm going to unpack that a little bit. I think one of the big issues we have is that data centers have evolved over time, especially over the last probably 12 to 18 months, and what that means. So historically, probably most of you folks at the county level have



PANELIST

Jeff Zilke of Access Michigan

some sort of data center, as we would define it historically, right? A small IT room or a server room, and we're calling that a data center, and we're also calling a gigawatt hyperscale site a data center. So, I think for the context of this conversation, I think we're really worried about hyperscale space. So, quick show of hands. Everybody know the difference between a kW and a gigawatt? So, I think it's important to get into the context and the definition of what those things mean because we can talk at a high level about it, but if we don't know what those things mean, I think we need to define that. So I don't know if you guys agree on that or not, but historically, data centers were like a. Well, let me back up here. All data centers exist to power IT hardware, and that IT hardware exists inside of a rack. Racked entities used to be five to seven kW, and that was pretty standard across the industry. As we move towards hyperscale, we're getting into 100 kW per rack, right? And as. We look at a that's not up there. This picture about the data center that we're looking at, 100 kilowatt per rack across a campus like that gives us gigawatt-scale capacity. So that's a high-level overview of what we're talking about when we look at capacity.

Tomaszewski: Let's look at the electricity demand for those now.

Mahoney: Take for instance the power that we're going to provide to the Saline Township project for Oracle and OpenAI. That is a 1.4-gigawatt or 1,400-megawatt campus in terms of power demand, it's equal to the



power that we would provide to about 1 million households across our service territory, which is a lot, right?

The way I kind of think about it is, if Michigan had a million people move here and our population started to grow, that would be a net positive for us as a state. Our incomes would rise, our resources, our tax resources would increase, et cetera, et cetera. But there'd be some there'd be some burden, right? Our roads would take more use, etc. Data center usage has the ability to provide economic impacts in the perspective of the electric utility without those secondary burdens right on our communities. So, we can sell a lot more electricity to one single customer. We can take that new revenue that we're going to collect from that one customer, and we can use that new revenue to pay for all of the investments we need to make in our distribution system, and our and our generation fleet, and not have to come back to our existing customers to fund those projects in the future. That, in the simplest way, is the benefit of the moment we have here ...



PANELIST
*Daniel Mahoney of
DTE Energy*

McGuirk: We are obligated to serve, whether it's a new manufacturer, a data center or anything in between. When they come to us, we have to be equitable and fair for any customer to serve. What that does mean is, pending the size, its cost and timeline in which we can serve that power.

So, with these large data centers, if we we we may have available capacity today to serve portions of their load, but it may also require new generation. Just important to know that we will not hook any customer up to the system without adequate protection, safety and the supply required for that project to to safely join the grid. ... So, when these customers do come, they're actually going to be helping strengthen the backbone of the grid. ... So, if these customers, we're collecting upfront capital payments to make sure that they're footing the bill for all of the infrastructure required to serve them. That includes the generation assets to the distribution and transmission to serve their sites.

We also know that if if they use less than what



PANELIST
*Lindsey McGuirk of
Consumers Energy*

they say that they were going to use, which is very common across businesses, you don't know what you need until you're fully operational. There are protections in place so that if they use less, they're still going to be paying the full cost of what we built to, so to ensure there's no stranded asset costs. There are long-term contracts. There's X fees. So, there are a lot of protections in place to ensure all of us are protected.

Tomaszewski: What does a data center company look for in choosing a community that it would want to locate in?

McGuirk: Michigan has been a favorable spot for data centers. One, we have very cool climates in the wintertime. That's great for their cooling needs. We have low risk from the environmental perspective. ... But what opened up Michigan to be truly a viable location for these projects is that sales and use tax exemption that was passed that helps remove the sales and use tax for purchasing the equipment inside the building....

Mahoney: I think the only thing I would add to what Lindsey said, which I totally agree with, is powered land.

Data center companies look for land that has high voltage transmission lines that's very accessible to them. Often running directly through the property or adjacent to the property, these facilities connect directly to the transmission system, not the local distribution system that DTE or Consumers own and operate right, so that proximity to high voltage is incredibly important because without that connection, the facility can't truly be powered....

Dennis: Yeah, that's the main thing: power and land. ... They also want fiber, like internet backbone fiber, somewhere nearby. But it's a lot easier to run fiber than it is to build new transmission lines. The water thing isn't that big of an issue. Actually, if they're using



PANELIST
*Eric Paul Dennis of the
Citizens Research Council
of Michigan*

closed-loop systems, they don't need a lot of water.

A lot of the data center developers do really want to be good neighbors. They want to find communities that work with them. But not everyone's a good actor in this space. Some of them will fight you if you don't want it, but you have a really good site. ...

Zilke: That's not just a Michigan activity. We are involved with projects that are across the country in land, power and, to (Dennis') point, access to fiber. As we are moving right now, we're in the AI learning phase, where a lot of the hyperscalers are building these. ... After this, we're going to be moving into what they call an inference phase, where you're going to have smaller data centers, but they're going to need to be closer to potential fiber networks ...

Tomaszewski: Do you think we are close to a data center bubble?

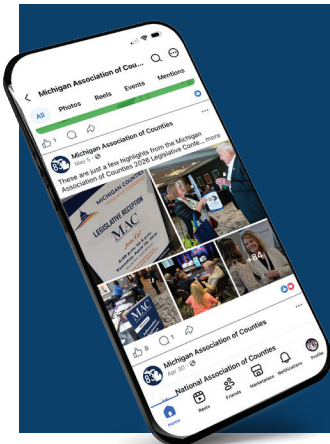
Zilke: Maybe.

Dennis: There's a risk. I don't know about a data center bubble. So, the AI part of the data center phenomenon, though we might be at a peak. There might be a bubble. There's a lot.

What is for sure is there's a lot of speculative investment. There's a lot of weird circular debt financing behind these things. So, if, and this is one thing to consider as a local community, these developers start having trouble raising debt, some of these projects might be put on pause with very little warning for an indeterminate amount of time. They might change hands before continuing.

I don't think there's much risk at all of having empty data center sites. I think that the demand for computing power is going to continue for the foreseeable future. A couple of wildcards, like if someone gets quantum computers working, maybe that or some next crazy thing in AI that we're not expecting. But I think we can assume that data center sites will be used if you have the power, you have connection to fiber, that site's going to be valuable. But there might be some weird industry stuff going around for the next few years. I don't think the industry is going to collapse. It's not an entire bubble, but there are some elements that aren't as solid as they might initially seem.

Mahoney: I think we are at an interesting moment because the rhetoric around data centers is so aggressive that you do risk the opportunity. You do risk the state missing out on a significant opportunity to change the economic trajectory of our state. ... Should we stop and think about this, or should we run full steam ahead and capture this moment? And I think that's the bubble that is possible here in the state of Michigan is that we, as a state, miss this opportunity to attract the next innovation and the benefits that come along with it. And I don't want to say that it's only benefits and there's no risks and there's no downsides, but like you really got to stop and you got to think and you got to ask the people who are talking about this issue and framing this issue for the public. ♦



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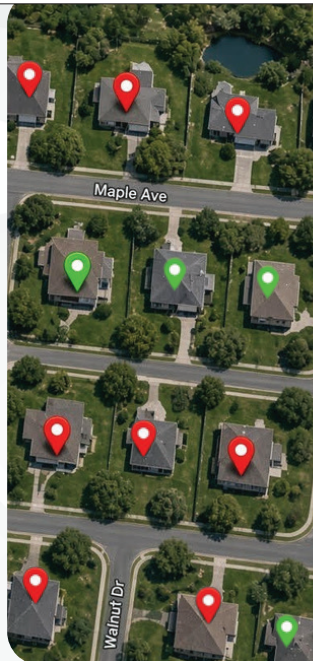
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Election expert reviews convention, campaign finance proposals on November ballot

Editor's Note: Chris Thomas, who spent more than 35 years as Michigan's elections director, addressed the 2026 Annual Conference on Sept. 10 to review the ballot proposals on the General Election ballot. Excerpts are shared below.

"There's no timeline for them to finish, but when they do finish, they can:

- 1. Vote to revise the Constitution and present that to the people; or**
- 2. Present amendments to the current constitution; or**
- 3. Agree to not do anything and just go home."**

Proposal 2026-1: Convene a constitutional convention

So, our first proposal is for a constitutional convention. The question is, basically, do you want to elect delegates to convene as a convention to revise Michigan's Constitution? This is put on the ballot every 16 years, whether we like it or not, and so far, it has not prevailed. ... It's gotten nowhere close to passing.

Not all states are that way. I noticed an article the other day in Kansas where the governor is pretty upset because they have a similar requirement that the legislature has never implemented, and they've gone many years now without putting this on the ballot. So, ours goes automatic. The legislature's got no say in it. ...

If it were to pass, what would happen? Well, what would happen? It triggers an election in each state house district. There will be one delegate election elected, and each state senate district, there'll be a delegate elected for a total of 148 delegates, and they will convene on the first Tuesday in October, which is Oct. 5, 2027.

There's no timeline for them to finish, but when they do finish, they can:

- 1. Vote to revise the Constitution and present that to the people; or**
- 2. Present amendments to the current constitution; or**
- 3. Agree to not do anything and just go home.**

So that's a possibility — if they were to convene.



Chris Thomas, who spent more than three decades leading Michigan's elections bureau, reviewed ballot proposals for the November election during a Sept. 10 plenary session of the 2026 Annual Conference.

Proposal 2026-2: Law to prohibit campaign contributions from certain regulated utilities and government contractors and apply campaign finance laws and regulations to additional types of political communications

The second one is the more complex issue. This is an initiation of legislation on campaign finance. This is initiating a law, not a constitutional amendment.

The interesting thing is (in these cases) is when it's originally filed and certified, and delivered to the Legislature, lawmakers can just enact it, or they can put an alternate proposal on the ballot should they wish to do so. They did not, so this now goes to the ballot.

And if this passes, it cannot be amended by the Legislature, unless there is three quarters of vote of each house to amend it, which is tough. ... So, if it gets ensconced in law, it will be very difficult to change. ...

I'm just going to preview what I think are going

to be a lot of sessions that you're all going to be doing next year in preparation for this after it passes.

So, it doesn't go into effect for 18 months after it passes ... but it's going to affect particularly counties and a lot of other jurisdictions.

So, we're talking about contracts. This is a very broad definition in this proposal. It deals with everything: services, goods, construction, land purchases, land leases. ... It's contracts of \$250,000 or more in the aggregate in a calendar year. ... There's going to be a lot of questions on this. Lawyers are going to really have a heyday because (of) multi-year contracts. ...

It basically says state contractors cannot contribute to state elective candidates and office holders. So basically, in Michigan, under the Campaign Finance Act, if you're an office holder, as (county commissioners) are, you're a candidate automatically. So, this deals with both the officials and people running for the offices. ...

It raises a lot of questions about how who's going to know who all these contractors are, so that when you're receiving contributions, you know who to take them from and who not to take them from, and this ban applies to committees that support you, so political party committees, PACs that support you. They cannot contribute to them either. So, it really locks them down on where they can go. ...

Citizens United was decided in 2010 by the U.S. Supreme Court. It said that corporations can spend money to speak in support or opposition to candidates running for public office, and a case right after that said not only that, but corporations can contribute to other committees that are doing that, and that was a huge sea change in the United States in terms of allowing corporate money in. And so, what has happened?

You don't see Ford Motor Company out there spending a lot of ads, for example, opposing somebody or supporting somebody. But they may well be giving money to these nondescript committees for good government, who are doing that, so they can continue to do this. Your contractors are not prohibited from doing that.

On the future of ballot proposals in Michigan

What does the future hold for ballot proposals?

Did you know?

During his review, Thomas noted an often overlooked piece of Michigan election law:

You only get one signature

“(In one of the challenges to signatures, the state found) 59 that were duplicates. In Michigan, we have a draconian answer to that: We don't just discard the duplicate one, we discard both of them.

“That's if you sign more than once. If they find out, you're going to get both your signatures knocked off.

“(In this case), they had one person sign 39 times. This is not fraud. This is an organization that had different groups, and they were circulating in the same place. They'd go back to the same place. People sign. Someone sticks it in front of them. They sign it.”

I've been involved in a couple ballot proposals. I'll be honest with you. I was involved in the 2018 and the 2022 ballot proposals on elections, and you know, a lot of people have complained about those, saying, "Well, these are just things that the Legislature never passed, so now we've stuck them into the Constitution and they don't really belong in the Constitution.

And ours that we put in, we put them in basically as rights that the voters have, and that's how they went in. People can disagree with that if they like, but I do think that going back to Proposal 1, the constitutional convention, if this continues and we keep seeing (this) ... I think that there's got to be some limit someday, and where people say, you know, some court cases are going to say, you know, this really doesn't belong in the Constitution. This is statutory, but this is direct democracy, right?

In a sense, this is the people. But what are they really? I mean, it takes money to put one of these on the ballot. This takes millions of dollars to get the signatures. We're no longer in the time when these are volunteer circulators. There are some, but most of these that are successful, they pay for those signatures. ♦

County participation in renewable energy siting proceedings

BY MATT NORDFJORD / MANAGING SHAREHOLDER, CST MUNICIPAL LAW

“The designation as an ALU carries important procedural rights. Under MCL 460.1226(3), an ALU may intervene by right in an MPSC contested case. Intervention allows the county to participate as a party, conduct discovery, present testimony and evidence and make legal and factual arguments concerning the relative impacts of a proposed facility.”



Michigan counties may have a significant role in utility scale renewable energy siting proceedings under Public Act 233 of 2023 (the “Act”). The Act established a state level certification process through the Michigan Public Service Commission (“MPSC”) for certain large wind, solar and energy storage facilities. When a developer seeks an MPSC siting certificate, a county should promptly determine whether participation is warranted to protect identifiable county interests. In evaluating the application through the contested case process, the MPSC must consider the statutory factors in MCL 460.1225(1)(n), and it may impose conditions authorized under MCL 460.1226(6).

A threshold question is whether the county constitutes an “affected local unit” (“ALU”). MCL 460.1221(a) defines that term as a unit of local government in which all or part of the proposed energy facility will be located; “local unit of government” expressly includes a county. MCL 460.1221(n). The Court of Appeals recently held in *In re Implementing Provisions of Public Act 233 of 2023*, published opinion of the Court of Appeals, issued May 7, 2026 (Docket No. 373259), that the statutory definition of an ALU includes local governments that lack zoning authority over the project. Under the Act, a county qualifies as an affected local unit even when the relevant zoning authority rests with one or more townships.

The designation as an ALU carries important procedural rights. Under MCL 460.1226(3), an ALU may intervene by right in an MPSC contested case. Intervention allows the county to participate as a party, conduct discovery,

present testimony and evidence and make legal and factual arguments concerning the relative impacts of a proposed facility. Further, under MCL 460.1226(1), upon filing an application, an applicant must provide each ALU a one-time grant determined by the MPSC to cover the costs of intervention, capped at \$75,000 per local unit and \$150,000 in total. When the funds are received, an ALU must deposit the grant in a local intervenor compensation fund and then use it only for costs associated with participating in the contested case proceeding. Where this occurs, a county should track expenditures and determine early whether anticipated legal, technical, and administrative costs may exceed the grant.

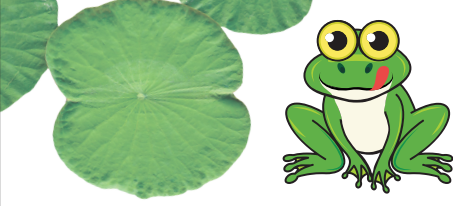
However, counties should note that intervention in a contested case is not mandatory. A county may reasonably decline to participate if another municipality is better positioned and willing to protect similar interests. Separate participation may be warranted when county concerns differ from municipal zoning issues, particularly regarding roads, drains, emergency response, public safety, infrastructure, or responsibilities among affected jurisdictions. A county should weigh the likely value of participation against its anticipated cost and available witnesses or technical support, document the decision, and revisit it if the project scope, procedural schedule, or other parties’ positions materially change.

Timing matters because MPSC siting cases proceed as contested cases under Michigan’s Administrative Procedures Act. Upon receiving notice, the county should promptly identify the prehearing conference and intervention

deadlines and coordinate with affected townships, neighboring counties, project representatives, and other participants to determine whether county interests are already properly addressed.

Further, pursuant to MCL 460.1227(1), a certificate applicant must enter into a host community agreement with each affected local unit requiring the facility owner, upon commencement of operations, to pay \$2,000 per megawatt of nameplate capacity located within that unit. The payment must fund police, fire, public safety, other infrastructure, or projects agreed to by the local unit and applicant. If an affected local unit refuses an agreement after good faith negotiations, the applicant may pursue a community benefits agreement under MCL 460.1227(2). These negotiations may proceed independently of the county's intervention decision.

A county receiving notice of an MPSC renewable energy application should act promptly but deliberately: confirm its ALU status, identify county specific interests, coordinate with other governmental units, assess whether intervention is warranted, safeguard intervenor funds, and begin any required host community discussions. Because each project and procedural schedule differs, the county should consult legal counsel early and should not assume that another ALU's participation will fully protect its interests. ♦



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Taking county government on the road: The Lenawee County Connect story

BY KIMBERLY L. MURPHY / LENAWEE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

“While surveys, emails and public comment periods provide important feedback, there is something different about hearing directly from residents about their experiences, concerns and priorities”

On a spring evening in rural Lenawee County, a group of residents gathered inside a township hall surrounded by fields and country roads. About two dozen people filled the room. Some came with questions about roads and infrastructure. Others wanted to learn more about public safety, parks, taxes, or county services. A few may have simply been curious to see what county officials actually do all day.

There was no formal agenda, no gavel, and thankfully, no PowerPoint presentation.

Instead, there were conversations.

That simple concept has become the foundation of Lenawee County Connect, an ongoing series of community meetings designed to bring county government directly into the communities we serve.

Like many counties, Lenawee County works hard to keep residents informed through public meetings, livestreams, websites, newsletters, and social media. Those tools are important, but they all share one thing in common: they require residents to come to us.

Lenawee County Connect was built on a different idea. What if we went to them?

The goal was simple. We wanted to create opportunities for residents to meet face-to-face with county leadership, ask questions, share concerns, and learn more about the services and responsibilities of county government. More importantly, we wanted to have those conversations in the places where people already gather and feel comfortable.

One of the unique aspects of the program is that no two events are exactly alike.

Rather than creating a rigid format, each commissioner works with local partners within their district to determine what makes the most sense for their community. Some meetings have been hosted in township halls. Others have taken place in libraries or as part of existing community gatherings. One lesson we learned quickly is that

there is no single formula for public engagement.

The result is a setting that feels less like a government meeting and more like a conversation among neighbors.

The discussions themselves vary. Residents have asked about everything from roads, public safety, and emergency preparedness to parks, senior services, housing and economic development. Some questions are highly local; others focus on countywide issues. Occasionally, someone begins with, "I've always wondered ..." and that leads to a discussion nobody expected but everyone finds interesting.



For the commissioners and me, these conversations have been equally valuable. While surveys, emails and public comment periods provide important feedback,

there is something different about hearing directly from residents about their experiences, concerns and priorities. Those conversations often provide context and perspectives that are difficult to capture through traditional engagement methods.

The meetings also create opportunities to explain the role of county government. Many residents are surprised to learn about the wide range of services counties provide. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Residents consistently tell us they appreciate having direct access to county leadership and the opportunity to ask questions in a comfortable environment. Commissioners value the chance to connect with constituents outside of formal board meetings. Most importantly, the conversations help strengthen relationships between local government and the communities we serve.

Kimberly L. Murphy is administrator for Lenawee County and a member of the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers, a MAC Affiliate. ♦



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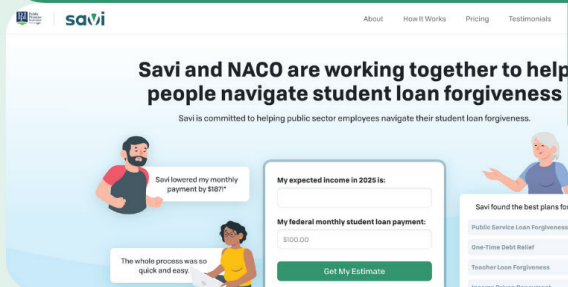
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Sen. John Cherry

LEGISLATOR Q&A

What would you say is your biggest legislative accomplishment thus far?

My greatest legislative accomplishment so far is likely the unemployment insurance reform and update package, which brought Michigan back to national norms on our unemployment benefits and made a series of changes to the process to improve the experience for claimants and improved flexibility for employers to utilize work share.

What are you hoping to accomplish in this next legislative term?

I have a variety of priorities that I would like to accomplish next session, including establishing the Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, passage of the hunting and fishing license restructuring package, passing the legislation to restore retirement benefits to corrections and conservation officers, making the local prosecutor support grant program permanent and, if it is not finished this term, passage of the manufactured housing reform package. We also have a variety of opportunities the exist in the district to expand economic development and prosperity for residents that I will be focused on.

County officials often say the state needs to better understand the local financial and operational impacts of legislation before it is enacted. What should the Legislature be doing differently to make sure those impacts are considered?

My work on the local prosecutor support program was preceded by a number of different conversations with my local county prosecutor, learning the challenges the office was facing and riding along with my local State Police Troopers to learn about challenges facing public safety operations in my community. Engaging closely with elected officials at home is extremely important in developing policies in a way that improves the situation facing local government, as opposed to creating more challenging situations.

What is something about county government that you understand differently today than you did when you first entered the Legislature?

Early in my time in the Legislature, I did not fully understand the interplay between court funding, indigent defense funding and the growth of problem-solving courts. Today, I have a much greater appreciation for how those decisions affect the day-to-day operation and financing of our locally funded criminal justice system.

What county issue do you believe is receiving the most attention in Lansing right now?

The two most prominent issues are enacting a Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, which passed out of the Senate for the first time this year, and the low revenue collections associated with the roads deal that was passed last year, which will need to be addressed. ♦



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Sen. John Cherry

District/counties:

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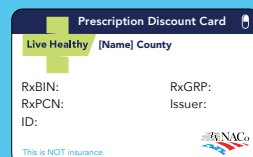
- **Save up to 80%*** on generics and **up to 40%*** on brand-name prescription medications for residents and their pet

Low-fee health discounts nationwide.

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Letter from the President

Finding common ground, getting things done.

FROM PAGE 5

government should be run. Never a “knockdown, drag out” brawl but certainly some lengthy and repeated discussions. In the end, we can sit down together and enjoy each other’s company and maybe a mug or two of a foamy beverage.

Even my wife of 39 years has canceled me out at the ballot box!

The important thing is to remember a disagreement should not be life-altering. We are all here with a common goal, and that is the betterment of our community, our county, our state and our nation, which all leads to the bettering of our own lives and that of our family.

Our NACo Past President, JD Clark, had a theme that we all have a story to tell. That is certainly true. Some of those stories are local. Maybe a single mile of road we want to get paved. Maybe a specific department that we want to change. Maybe a set of Consumers Power dams we want to keep around.

Some of those stories ring statewide, such as securing court funding or obtaining health care for the inmates in the jail. It may even be a nationwide story, such as the desire to know that when we get a federal grant it will not be suddenly pulled at the whim of a group in Washington.

It’s important to tell those stories in the manner we can best get them out.

That brings me here to MAC. I am proud to be involved with MAC and to be able to tell my story from a rural county perspective.

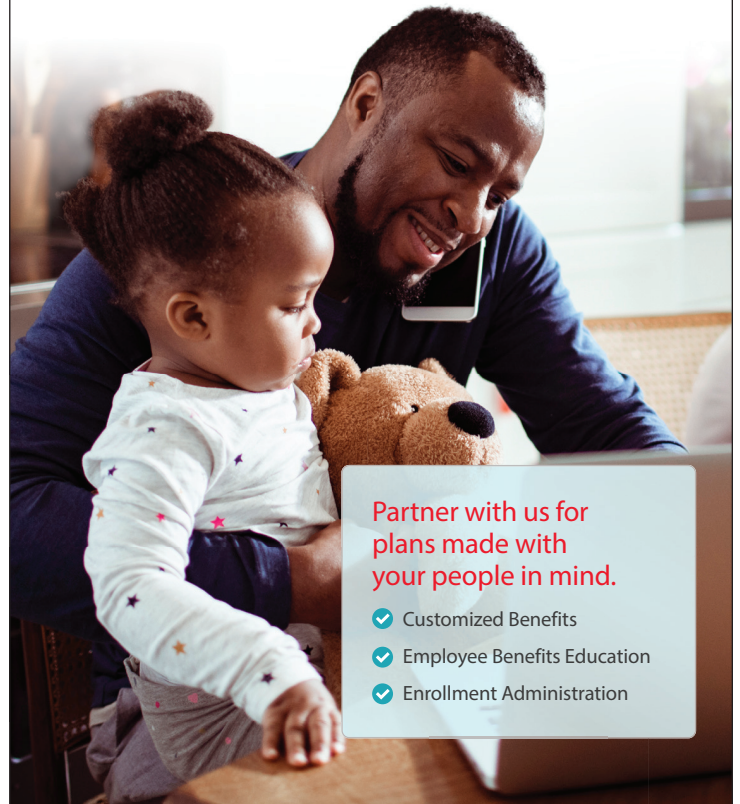
I am also proud of the way that MAC listens to us and brings our voice to the Lansing theater. I am proud of being here, together, with all of you, working together — yes, working together — to make our stories heard and known.

In the words of Col. Chris A. Hadfield, “Our job is to work together, making it possible for individuals in the future to do impossible things.”

In the end, those of us in county government don’t flinch. We fill the potholes. We answer the 911 call. We open the courthouse doors.

All of it working together. ♦

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