



Michigan Influencers



Home of the Reagan Democrats, Michigan remains a state that deserves to be labeled not blue, not red, but purple. While voters here have given Democratic presidential candidates consecutive victories, both parties have had opportunities to guide the two peninsulas over the past two decades.

After major gains in last November's elections, Republicans will control the governor's mansion, the legislature and the state Supreme Court. But the issues Michigan faces, from a struggling economy still heavily reliant on the auto industry to a state budget hobbled by billion-dollar annual deficits, will have to be tackled by the GOP, Democrats and non-partisans alike. Our rundown of the political players who will be most important in guiding the Wolverine State through these difficult straits follows.

TOP 10 Republicans

Rick Snyder

The former Gateway CEO rode his “one tough nerd” outsider persona to a decisive win in November to become Michigan’s 48th governor. Snyder will set the Republican agenda in Michigan as the state struggles to recover economically.

Saul Anuzis

He’s the former state Republican Party chair and current national committee-man known for his technological savvy and his ability to get the grassroots juiced up. Anuzis ran unsuccessfully for Republican National Committee chair in 2009 and plans to challenge Michael Steele for the position once again at the RNC’s winter meeting this month.

Ron Weiser

The former ambassador to Slovakia turned state Republican Party chair, Weiser has a much lower public profile than Anuzis did, but he has made up for that where it really counts, in raising money. The party had \$28 million to spend on 2010 elections—and it showed in the results.

Dave Camp

Camp is the incoming chair of the powerful U.S. House Ways and Means Committee. He has represented Michigan’s 4th congressional district since 1991.

Bill Rustem

President and CEO of the think tank Public Sector Consultants and a long-time commentator on Michigan’s political scene, Rustem is now director of strategy for Governor Snyder.



Jase Bolger

After serving just two years in the state House, Bolger is the new speaker. He’ll herd a sixty-three-member Republican majority that reclaimed that chamber after four years of Democratic control while trying to work in tandem with his GOP counterparts: Governor Snyder and Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville.

Randy Richardville

Richardville has the most legislative experience of the top three Republicans in state government. He has served in the House and is now in his second term in the Senate where he leads the Republican supermajority.

Dennis Muchmore







Muchmore will run point in the Snyder administration as chief of staff. The former head of a lobbying firm, he got his start in Michigan’s capital city, Lansing, as a Senate staffer in the 1970s, so he knows plenty of people in town.

John Engler

The former governor may be president and CEO of the National Manufacturers Association, but his roots are in Michigan and he continues to be a major force both in public and behind the scenes. He’s often mentioned as a possible U.S. Senate candidate.

Doug and Sharon Rothwell

Doug Rothwell heads Business Leaders for Michigan, a group that represents the chiefs of the state’s major companies. BLM has become a major player in state politics after transitioning from a Detroit-based organization. Rothwell was tapped by Snyder to run his transition team, along with his wife, Sharon, vice president of corporate affairs for Masco. Both Rothwells served under Governor Engler: Sharon as chief of staff and Doug as head of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

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TOP 10 Democrats

Mark Gaffney

As head of the AFL-CIO Michigan, Gaffney has tremendous influence in the Democratic Party and on legislative policy.

Mark Brewer

Brewer is the longest-serving state Democratic Party chair in the country and, despite significant losses in November, is expected to remain at the helm.

Andy Dillon

Dillon, the new state treasurer, is the highest profile Democrat in the administration of Governor Rick Snyder, though as a social conservative, he differs on key issues with many in his party.

Richard Hammel

Hammel is serving his third and final term in the House and is leader of the minority Democratic Caucus.

Gretchen Whitmer

Whitmer is the Senate Democratic leader, also in minority status. She will remain a key player, though, as Governor Snyder is likely to need Democratic support to get some of his policies past the conservative legislature.

Debbie Dingell

The wife of U.S. Rep. John Dingell was a senior GM executive for three decades before starting D2 Strategies. She's an elected member of the Wayne State University Board of Governors and a major behind-the-scenes player.

Carl Levin

The state's senior U.S. senator wields tremendous power in Washington, D.C., but is also a key figure in Michigan's political sphere.

Jon Stryker

The billionaire heir to a medical supply company, Stryker raised his profile by creating the Coalition for Progress and has donated millions to advertise in support of progressive candidates seeking state office.

Mike Duggan

The CEO of the Detroit Medical Center has been Wayne County deputy executive under Ed McNamara and was on the short list of potential Democratic gubernatorial candidates in 2010, but ultimately sat out the race.

Jane Bailey

Head of the Michigan Association for Justice, Bailey oversees a major player in state Democratic politics. The group is also a large donor to the state Democratic central committee.

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More Republicans

Brian Calley

The new lieutenant governor was plucked from the legislature to give Snyder some conservative credentials. In this capacity, Calley will preside over the state Senate and act as one of the most important liaisons between the governor and lawmakers.

Rich Studley

Studley heads the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, always a force to be reckoned with on tax and economic issues. The group also throws its weight around come election season. Studley cut his teeth as policy director for Senate Republicans in the late 1970s.

Robert Schostak

Schostak is finance chairman of the state Republican Party under Ron Weiser, and the two have comprised a dynamic duo. Schostak, a commercial real estate developer by trade, now hopes to succeed Weiser.

Chuck and John Yob

Chuck, a longtime former Republican national committeeman, has teamed up with his son John to run the consulting firm Strategic National, which works with candidates running for office in Michigan and beyond. Most recently the firm worked on Rick Snyder's campaign.

Mark Murray

Murray is president of Meijer, a chain of supermarkets based in Grand Rapids. He's a former university president and state treasurer who was tapped by Rick Snyder to serve on his transition team.

Barb Listing

Listing heads Right to Life of Michigan, the state's lead anti-abortion group. While RTL took some hits for backing the wrong horse in the Republican gubernatorial race, as did the Chamber, Listing's organization still holds tremendous sway in the legislature.

Richard McLellan

A prominent attorney who was a key advisor to former Governor Engler, McLellan is often tapped as a liaison for

Republican candidates, including most recently running transition for newly elected Attorney General Bill Schuette.

John Truscott

Truscott was former Governor Engler's press secretary. After working in state government, Truscott formed a public relations firm and now represents major clients including Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Dick DeVos's 2006 gubernatorial campaign.

Suzanne Miller Allen

Allen has been chief of staff for several major legislative leaders over the past two decades and currently serves in that capacity for new House Speaker Jase Bolger.

Betsy and Dick DeVos

Betsy DeVos is the former state party chair and her husband, Dick, was the Republican gubernatorial nominee in 2006. The two are billionaire philanthropists who hail from the west side of the state. The couple created the Great Lakes Education Project, a pro-charter school group that goes toe-to-toe with the state's teachers union.

Steve Linder

Linder is a partner in the government and public relations firm Sterling Corporation. Most importantly, he's the main fundraiser for the group.

Joe Munem

A political consultant, Munem is a co-founder of the popular political podcast "Two Guys Named Joe" along with Democrat Joe DiSano.

Robert LaBrant

As senior counsel for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, LaBrant is a key player when it comes to election and campaign finance law.

L. Brooks Patterson

Patterson is the powerful Oakland County executive and onetime candidate for governor. He's known for his quick wit and feisty quotes to the press and continues to be a

major player in both the economic and political worlds of southeast Michigan.

John Rakolta Jr.

Rakolta is chair and CEO of Walbridge Aldinger, one of the nation's largest construction companies. He's a big political donor and is also active in Business Leaders for Michigan.

Candice Miller

The congresswoman from Mount Clemens is also the state's former secretary of state and is often mentioned as a possible statewide candidate.

Bob Young Jr.

The state Supreme Court justice fought off a spirited campaign strongly supported by state Democratic Party Chair Mark Brewer and will now return to the majority on the court, where the GOP holds four seats.

Jim Murray

Murray was on the House Republican staff before making his way to government relations for AT&T. He now heads the company's Michigan operations and has his ear to the ground on all things political.

Terri Lynn Land

The outgoing secretary of state jumped on the wrong bandwagon when she signed on as running mate to Mike Bouchard, who lost the 2010 GOP gubernatorial primary. Nonetheless, Land will continue to play a role in state politics and her name will remain on the short list of potential future public officeholders. She has also expressed interest in chairing the state party.

Steve Van Andel

Van Andel is chairman of Amway and is the oldest son of billionaire co-founder Jay Van Andel. Along with the DeVoses, the Van Andels are synonymous with west Michigan politics and business.

Dan and Colleen Pero

The Peros are top Republican political consultants who run their own firm. Both were aides to former Governor Engler.

Mike Bishop

The former Senate majority leader is interested in becoming the next state GOP chair after falling short of the attorney general nomination. With a Democratic governor and House over the past four years, Bishop has been the GOP's lead voice in state politics.

Tom Shields

Shields is the president of Marketing Resource Group, which is one of the top Republican consulting firms in the state. MRG is also a key source for polling information during elections.

Jeff Timmer

Timmer is a partner at Sterling Corporation. He's a longtime political strategist who served as executive director of the state Republican Party.

Rusty Hills

Hills ran communications for former Attorney General Mike Cox and prior to that was the state Republican Party chair.

Linda Gobler

A co-chair of Rick Snyder's gubernatorial inauguration committee, Gobler is also the president and CEO of the Michigan Grocers Association. She headed the Michigan Travel Commission for eleven years prior to that.

J.C. Huizenga

Huizenga is a big-time Republican political donor and entrepreneur from the west side of the state.

Greg McNeilly

McNeilly is a top Republican strategist who is tight with the DeVos family.

Gary Reed

Reed is a former finance director and

executive director for the Michigan Republican Party. He's a founding member of the lobbying firm Cusmano, Kandler and Reed.

John Pirich

Pirich is a partner with the law firm Honigman, Miller, Schwartz and Cohn and is a former assistant attorney general and past president of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. While his law expertise covers many fields, he's a go-to person when it comes to matters of election law.

Kathy Wilbur

Wilbur is vice president of government relations and public affairs for Central Michigan University and was director of the Department of Consumer and Industry Services under Governor Engler.

Cynthia Pasky

Pasky founded Detroit-based Strategic Staffing Solutions, which does business as far off as Europe, and is active in Business Leaders for Michigan. Pasky is a philanthropist and active donor to Republican candidates.

Stu Sandler

Sandler was tapped by Secretary of State Ruth Johnson to run her transition team and is involved with Robert Schostak's bid for state party chair. Sandler was heavily involved in Mike Cox's bids for attorney general and governor.

David Meador

Meador is the executive vice president and chief financial officer for DTE Energy and has involved himself in state policy issues, particularly insurance coverage for autism. He's also very active politically and is a donor to mainly GOP candidates.

Terri Reid

Reid is the legislative political director for the state Republican Party. She managed the party's successful efforts to retain the state Senate and retake a majority in the House.

Joseph Lehman

Lehman is the president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a conservative think tank that recently expanded its services by launching Michigan Capitol Confidential, a daily source of policy articles.

John Roberts

Roberts took over direction of policy matters for House Republicans after working in the administration of President George W. Bush. He's the son of former state Treasurer Doug Roberts and brother of Doug Roberts Jr., who heads up environmental and energy policy for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

Lori Wortz

Wortz is a partner at WWP Strategies where she handles strategic planning for policy and ballot issue campaigns, as well as grassroots activities. She's the former chief of staff to Lieutenant Governor Dick Posthumus and most recently was involved in the winning campaigns of U.S. Rep. Dan Benishek and Attorney General Bill Schuette.

James Nicholson

Nicholson is president and CEO of PVS Chemicals, as well as one of the movers and shakers of Business Leaders for Michigan. He's also a big donor to Republicans.

Joan Fabiano

Fabiano is one of the top Tea Party organizers in the state. She's affiliated with the group Grassroots in Michigan.



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More Democrats

John Dingell

The country's longest-serving congressman hails from Michigan's own Dearborn. Dingell is now in the minority in the U.S. House, but he remains one of Michigan's most popular politicians.

Bob King

King is the current United Auto Workers president. The union holds tremendous sway over how Democrats approach Michigan elections.

Dianne Byrum

Byrum is a former Democratic House leader who opened up her own public relations firm with top aide Mark Fisk after she left office in 2006 due to term limits. She is also on the Michigan State University Board of Trustees.

Jill Alper and David Katz

The head of Dewey Square Group, Alper is a top Democratic strategist who previously worked for the Democratic National Committee and is now a DNC member. She is an advisor to Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and was an advisor to outgoing Governor Jennifer Granholm. Her husband, Katz, is senior vice president for corporate development at the Detroit Medical Center and former Wayne County deputy executive.

Robert Ficano

Ficano is the current Wayne County executive and one of the top four leaders in southeast Michigan.

Denise Ilitch

Ilitch is a business executive and part of the family that owns the Detroit Red Wings, Detroit Tigers and Little Caesars Pizza. She's an elected member of the University of Michigan Board of Regents and was mentioned as a possible gubernatorial candidate in 2010.

Debbie Stabenow

Stabenow is the state's junior U.S. senator and often mentioned as a future gubernatorial candidate. She chairs the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee.

Colleen McNamara

McNamara lost her seat on Michigan State University's Board of Trustees during the 2010 Republican wave, but she's still a player in the party. Her father, Ed McNamara, was an influential Wayne County executive. She is also the head of the Michigan Cable Telecommunications Association.

James Curran

Curran is a lobbyist for Karoub Associates, one of the largest lobbying firms in the state. He's a former aide to U.S. Senator Carl Levin.

Ron Bieber

Bieber is the director of the United Auto Workers Community Action Program, which is the union's political action initiative. The UAW is one of the most influential unions in the Democratic Party due to the large role the auto industry plays in the state.

Phil Thompson

Thompson is treasurer of the Service Employees International Union State Council, which represents 80,000 workers in Michigan.

Lu Battaglieri

He's the executive director and former president of the Michigan Education Association, which is the state's largest teachers union.

Dave Bing

Bing is a former businessman and now mayor of Michigan's largest city, Detroit. Among his leadership credentials: He is a former star player for the Detroit Pistons basketball team.

Joel Ferguson

Ferguson is a wealthy developer who is a member of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees. He's a donor and behind-the-scenes player in the state Democratic Party.

Daniel Loepp

Loepp is a former chief of staff to House Speaker Curtis Hertel and now heads the state's largest health insurer, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan.

David Hecker

He's president of the Michigan chapter of the American Federation of Teachers.

Amy Chapman

A political strategist for two decades, Chapman is currently executive director of Grassroots Democrats. She ran the coordinated campaign in Michigan for Bill Clinton in 1996 and headed the Democratic National Committee's state legislative redistricting program in 2001.

Joe DiSano

A political consultant with Main Street Strategies, which handles Democratic candidates, DiSano is co-creator of the "Two Guys Named Joe" podcast along with Republican Joe Munem.

Jocelyn Benson

Benson is a rising star in the party despite her defeat for secretary of state in November. Her family is tapped into organized labor, and she is keeping a high public profile by working on a citizens' advisory group regarding legislative redistricting.

Bill Black

Black is the executive director of the Michigan Teamsters Joint Council 43.

Ed Bruley

Bruley is the longtime chair of the Macomb County Democratic Party, home of the Reagan Democrat.

Amanda Stitt

Stitt directs Michigan Voice, which represents fifty state and local progressive groups. She was previously constituency vote director for Barack Obama's campaign in Michigan.

James Blanchard

Blanchard became ambassador to Canada after leaving the governor's mansion in 1991, but then mounted a 2002 campaign to recapture the governor's office. He lost to then-rising star Jennifer Granholm, but he remains involved in the state's political scene.

Christos Michalakis

He's political director for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

Rev. Wendell Anthony

Anthony is the longtime chair of the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He also founded the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee, whose endorsement is coveted by metro Detroit politicians.

Mike Jackson

Jackson works for the state's largest construction trade union, the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters and Millwrights.

Chris DeWitt

DeWitt is a political consultant who worked on Governor Jennifer Granholm and John Cherry Jr.'s gubernatorial bids. He most recently advised Republican Rick Snyder's gubernatorial campaign, but remains a mostly Democratic operative.

Mark Fisk

Fisk is the second half of Byrum Fisk, a public relations firm that works for Democratic clients. He is a strategist for key state House races.

Ronnie Peterson

He is Washtenaw County commissioner and political director for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 25.

Mark Fox

Fox is president of the law firm Fraser, Trebilcock, Davis and Dunlap. He was part of the legal team on John Kerry's presidential campaign and was a key advisor to Governor Granholm as well as a political advisor to the state's two U.S. Senators.

Mark Hackel

Hackel is the new executive for Macomb County, becoming one of the Big Four leaders of southeast Michigan. He was previously the county sheriff.

Nell Kuhnmuensch

Kuhnmuensch is former chief of staff to House Speaker Gary Owen and now director for Governmental Consultant Services Inc., one of the state's leading multi-client lobbying firms.

Kerry Ebersole

Ebersole got her start as a legislative aide to a House member, but now is the CEO of Persuasion Link. She previously worked with the Granholm administration and Coalition for Progress and was GOTV director for the Michigan Campaign for Change.

Frank Kelley

The state's attorney general from 1961 through 1998, Kelley is now a partner in the lobbying firm Kelley Cawthorne.

John Cherry Jr.

The outgoing lieutenant governor may have stepped out of the race for

governor in 2010, but he's still a figure in the Democratic Party, and his family has strong sway in Genesee County (home of Flint), where his sister, a former state senator, is treasurer.

Dennis Archer

The former Detroit mayor and state Supreme Court justice is now a chair emeritus with law firm Dickinson Wright.

Ken Brock

Brock is a Democratic strategist who served as chief aide to outgoing Congressman Mark Schauer.

Charles Pugh

Pugh is a new face on the Detroit City Council and is the city's first openly gay officeholder. Pugh's political operation is still in its infancy, but he holds tremendous sway as president of the council—a position he attained by receiving more votes than any other City Council candidate.

Andy Levin

Levin is the former acting director of the state Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth. He's part of the Levin dynasty and, though he lost a state Senate bid in 2006, he is a possible candidate for office in the future.

Eric Barren

Barren runs Michigan Liberal, the go-to blog for left-leaning discussion on Michigan politics.

Miscellaneous

Kelly Rossman-McKinney

She runs the Rossman Group, a high-profile public relations firm that handles several legislative issue campaigns.

David Joos

Joos heads CMS Energy, one of the state's largest utility providers. He's also chair of Business Leaders for Michigan.

Bernie Porn

Porn heads EPIC/MRA, which is the state's most sought-after political polling firm.

Tim Skubick

Skubick is the senior Capitol correspondent who reports for several television, radio and print media outlets.

Tony Earley

Earley heads DTE Energy and was instrumental in shaping the state's energy reform legislation in 2008.

Manuel "Matty" Moroun

Moroun owns the Detroit International Bridge Company, owner of the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit to Windsor, Ontario in Canada. Moroun

has donated heavily to lawmakers in both parties in an attempt to prevent construction of a second, competing span over the Detroit River.

Phil Power

Power is a former Democratic regent on the University of Michigan board, but has now turned his attention to finding solutions to the state's problems from both sides of the aisle as head of the Center for Michigan.

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