

Capitol Profiles

Jennifer L. Hoff | MTA Public Affairs Liaison

Sen. Michelle McManus (R-Lake Leelanau)

Public service was something Sen. Michelle McManus always wanted to do. A second-term senator, serving the 35th District in northwest Lower Michigan, she served in the state House before being elected to the Senate. Prior to running for public office, McManus served as director of then-Gov. John Engler's northern office.

As Michigan's economy continues to struggle, McManus, like all residents, is looking for solutions.

"The most crucial element to our economy is jobs," she said. "Michigan currently has the highest unemployment rate in the country. Michigan needs to create a business-friendly environment that will allow more room for jobs. Michigan needs to allow for business innovation and development by allowing its people to freely create an environment that spurs economic growth, not the opposite."

As chair of the Senate Campaign and Election Oversight Committee, McManus has strong feelings about voting. "The right and responsibility of voting is a core principle of our democracy," McManus said. "Maintaining the integrity of elections in Michigan affects all citizens."

Although, as the economy drags, Lansing is looking at any and all options to find relief—including consolidation—McManus continues to believe in the value of local authority.

"I believe in local control, local government and local decision-making," she said. "I believe local units of government are in the best position to determine how to deliver services to their residents. Cooperation among townships and other local units of government benefits everyone, but it's up to those local units—not the state—to decide how best to make that happen."

Representing 144 townships, McManus has a deep understanding of how township government affects Michigan residents.

"I know what a critical role township government plays in the lives of my constituents," she said. "Township residents rely on their local government for a wide range of services, and I don't see that changing any time soon."

Since coming to Lansing, McManus has worked on a variety of issues. As co-chair of the Michigan Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus, dedicated to promoting the outdoors through conservation and education, she has sponsored many pieces of legisla-



Sen. Michelle McManus listens as a local government official testifies before the Senate Local, Urban & State Affairs Committee in support of Senate Bill 658, which allows local governments to invest trust funds in the same range of securities and bonds as state pension funds.

tion that are now law, including establishing an apprentice hunting program and banning Internet hunting.

In 2003, McManus began the struggle to pass the Legal Birth Definition Act, which defined the moment at which a person is "born" and therefore eligible for the full protection of the law.

McManus is a graduate of Central Michigan University, where she majored in political science. She and her husband, Keith Nelson, live in Lake Leelanau with their two daughters.

As McManus serves her final term in the Senate and reflects upon her career, her thoughts turn to her years of service and her record.

"The only legacy I wish to have is that I was responsive to my district's needs, and that I was accessible to my constituents," McManus said. "Other than that, I hope my voting record will speak for itself."

Sen. Gilda Z. Jacobs (D-Huntington Woods)

Sen. Gilda Jacobs is in her second and final Senate term representing the people of the 14th District in southeast Michigan.

A graduate of the University of Michigan, Jacobs worked as a special education teacher in the Madison School District. Drawn to public service, she was the first woman elected to the Huntington Woods City Commission, where she served from 1981 through 1994. From 1995 through 1998, Jacobs served on the Oakland County Commission. In 1998, she was elected to the state House. While serving in the House of Representatives, she again made history as the first woman floor leader in either house of the Legislature.

With a strong background in local government, Jacobs believes it is important to look at all levels of government in order to find better efficiencies.

“We are at a critical time in Michigan when we must assess the future role of all levels of government—cities, townships, counties and state,” Jacobs said. “A thoughtful and fiscally responsible plan must be put in place as our state struggles to provide the best level of service with limited resources. While I don’t advocate or support eliminating township government, we have to be open to doing things differently.”

As the buzz in Lansing seems to increasingly focus on regionalism and consolidation, Jacobs recalls first coming into local government more than 25 years ago, when she recognized then that consolidation of services would need to be considered.

“The concept of regionalizing services is important if we are to survive economically,” Jacobs said. “The challenge, of course, is maintaining separate identities while saving money and increasing efficiencies.”

Surviving economically is a question many residents are asking. Jacobs believes there are many avenues that can be pursued to revitalize the state, including retraining workers who have lost jobs; expanding the number of college graduates; investing in continued research and development, alternative energy and stem cell research; and investing in the state’s future by expanding preschool education for children.

“We also need to reach some common goals that people on both sides of the aisle can agree upon, and work toward those as well,” Jacobs said. “And most importantly, we need to put aside partisan bickering and just work to get the job done.”

As minority vice chair of the Senate Campaign and Election Oversight Committee, Jacobs believes the committee’s work can positively affect the entire state, and she says that she is working to “get some true campaign and elections reforms.”



Sen. Gilda Jacobs addresses her colleagues on the chamber floor.

Jacobs added, “I am most interested in reforming the methods for collecting signatures for ballot proposals and recalls, as well as making it easier for people to vote.”

One of Jacobs’ priorities is to ensure that her constituents get the best possible service. Over the years, she has helped residents with adoptions, wheelchairs, heat, utilities, insurance issues; the list goes on and on.

Reflecting upon how she hopes to be remembered when she leaves the Legislature, this wife, mother of two daughters and owner of “a politically savvy dog, Jake” hopes “to be remembered as a legislator who was fair, open and honest.”

Capitol Profiles are designed to help the MTA membership become more familiar with the chair and minority vice chair serving on House and Senate committees that tackle issues important to townships. Each member was asked the same series of questions and their answers were the basis for each profile. The profiles were compiled in cooperation and with the approval of each member.