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## Sen. Tom George (R-Texas Chtr. Twp.)

Michigan is changing—and to succeed, Sen. Tom George believes that local and state governments must change right along with it.

As the state endures budget struggles and an economic downturn unlike anything experienced in decades, George believes that no stone can be left unturned in trying to put the “great” back in the Great Lakes State.

“Today, Michigan is changing,” said George, who represents the residents of the 20th Senate District in Kalamazoo County, as well as **Antrim** and **Paw Paw Townships** (Van Buren Co.). “All of Michigan’s institutions and units of government will need to re-examine their purpose. With Michigan’s economy in crisis, its population shrinking and revenue falling, there will be increasing demands on all units of government to consolidate services and justify their existence.”

That justification includes the form of government closest to the people: township government.

“Townships are no exception,” George said. “Townships are on the front line in providing services and interacting with Michigan’s citizens. Though Michiganders have grown accustomed to this role, our economic challenges will require townships to defend themselves. On issues ranging from land use, to public safety, to managing elections, townships will need to demonstrate that they remain the most logical home for these services.”

Looking at innovative methods to provide services is among the ways that townships can continue to prove their worth, according to George. “For townships to survive, I would advise them to be proactive,” he said. “Townships need to demonstrate through intergovernmental cooperation, shared services, pooling of resources, etc. that they are responding to the demands of the times. If they can successfully adapt to the challenges of the day, I believe they can play a great role in brightening Michigan’s future.”

On the state level, there is no shortage of reforms that must be undertaken, according to George, who believes that a key to the state’s success is putting Michigan’s residents back to work. Although state government itself does not create jobs, it can play a role in creating an employment-friendly environment.

“There are several things the state must do to be more job-friendly,” George said. “Reforming Medicaid, adopting an energy policy that favors affordable and reliable energy sources, creating a redevelopment authority for metropolitan Detroit, and fixing the budget process, are some examples.”



Sen. Tom George (R-Texas Chtr. Twp.) says that Michigan is changing—and state and local government must change right along with it.

George, a **Texas Charter Township** (Kalamazoo Co.) resident, attributes the state’s budget problems to “open-ended social programs that are providing services to more people than the state can afford,” he said, noting that Medicaid enrollment has increased this decade from one million to 1.7 million citizens, while non-Medicaid welfare caseload has doubled from 600,000 to 1.2 million over the same time period.

“These programs are simply not sustainable at that rate of growth,” said George, a practicing physician. “They are diverting resources from other priorities, such as education and infrastructure needs, and must be reformed.”

As he continues to tackle the challenges of the state, this husband and father of three has his sights set on achieving his overriding goal as a state elected official: “to work with my colleagues to create the best quality of life possible for the residents of the 20th Senate District and for the people of Michigan,” he said.

## Sen. Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing)

Sen. Gretchen Whitmer knows the value of hard work. As soon as she was old enough, she says, she started working—from babysitting to mowing lawns to refilling food at a restaurant buffet.

“Through each of these, I learned valuable lessons about the power of earning a paycheck, financial independence, and just how good it felt to have earned the money in my pocket,” said Whitmer, who represents Ingham County residents in the 23rd Senate District.

She would like to ensure that all Michigan residents can experience those same valuable lessons—and knows that state leaders must safeguard Michigan communities to make that happen.

“The transformational change Michigan is undergoing right now is necessary, but we’ve got to think it through,” she said. “The deep cuts to revenue sharing and education do not invite a better Michigan. If our workforce is not educated, our whole state will suffer. How are we going to compete with China, India—or even Indiana, for that matter—when Senate and House leaders want to balance the budget on the backs of our kids and communities?”

Whitmer believes that reforms are needed to ensure the safety of Michigan communities—and residents. “We certainly need to adequately fund revenue sharing for our local communities because at the end of the day, our families deserve strong police and fire protection,” she said. “Just as revenue streams for townships decrease so, too, do traditional funding sources for the state.

“To protect vital state services, we need to look at reforms to make systematic changes in state government, and reel in state spending. Both can be accomplished simultaneously, but we’ve got to have the courage to make decisions based on information about the future, not the past.”

The slashes to revenue sharing can jeopardize local governments’ ability to provide quality core services, and Whitmer hopes for a brighter future for local government funding.

“Townships have long played an important role in providing essential services, like police and fire protection, to those who reside in and around them,” she said. “I certainly hope that as the state’s economy rebounds, local revenue sharing will as well. It is too important not to.”

While she recognizes that cooperation and consolidation of certain services can result in cost savings, she is not in favor of forcing such actions on local governments. “Economic realities have forced local governments to do more with less, and that is a trend that will most likely continue,” she said. “I completely support collaborative efforts between voluntary partners



Sen. Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing) believes that “reforms to make systematic changes in state government and reel in state spending” are necessary to get Michigan back on track.

to more effectively combine resources to provide services. However, I do not support forcing certain units to combine against their will. As neighboring units realize they share common goals, they should also share resources and cooperate to reap the rewards—but that is their decision to make.”

In the past decade that this former corporate litigator has served in the Michigan Legislature, she has seen a great deal of change—especially in the political, economic and business sectors. What has not changed is the goal that Whitmer brought with her to public office: to make sure that government remembers to put people first.

“While an awful lot has changed over this decade, my focus has not,” she said. “Government must always evolve, but should never, ever believe its mission is something other than protecting and prioritizing its people first.”

*Capitol Profiles are designed to help the MTA membership become more familiar with key Michigan legislators. 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.*