MICHIGAN PROMISE GRANT UPDATE. The Legislature is currently working on a bill that would help more students receive the Michigan Promise Grant scholarship. The legislation would remove the requirement that state residents must graduate from a high school in Michigan to receive the scholarship. Currently, only students who graduate from a Michigan high school are eligible. This bill would allow students who reside in Michigan but attend parochial or other non-public high schools across the state line to receive the scholarship.

COUNTY FAIRS

- Cass County Fair Association
  July 30 – August 4
  590 N. O'Keefe, Cassopolis
  (269) 445-8265
- Berrien County Youth Fair Association
  August 13 – 18
  9122 Old US-31 Highway, Berrien Springs
  (269) 473-4251

FARM MARKETS AND U-PICKS. Farm markets are a traditional link between local food producers and consumers. The Michigan Farm Market and U-Pick Directory is a guide to over 255 farm markets, u-pick operations and agricultural tourism opportunities throughout the state. Visiting farm markets and u-pick farms is a family event that can be enjoyed all year long. Check out the ones in your area at www.mda.state.mi.us/market/u-pick

CAPITOL NEWS

FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE 21ST MICHIGAN SENATE DISTRICT

SUMMER 2007

COMMON CALENDAR. Intermediate school districts and their constituent school districts would be required to adopt a single, common calendar under legislation that passed the Senate recently. The common calendar would take effect with the 2008-2009 school year and must include the dates for a Christmas break, a spring break and professional development days. The schools and ISD would determine the dates. Each calendar would be required to identify these specific days-off for at least five years out.

Coordinating the major days off during the school year will help everyone including teachers, parents, students, bus drivers and administrators. The legislation would help ensure students receive the best education possible by synchronizing breaks so students who attend classes at an ISD do not miss class because of different spring break schedules. Having the same professional development days also will allow districts to save money by having all teachers present on one day for speakers or educational training and by not needing buses or food service that day.

Schools that operate on a year-round or trimester program would be exempt from the common calendar. School districts would still be allowed some individuality regarding to dates such as mid-winter breaks, which many schools take in February, or extended breaks around Thanksgiving.

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MICHIGAN BUSINESS TAX. To help Michigan's companies be more competitive both locally and globally, an historic agreement was reached to replace Michigan's expiring single business tax. The Michigan Business Tax is less complicated than its predecessor, is attractive to both small and large companies, will encourage job creation and provide incentives for businesses to locate in the state.

Highlights of the new Michigan Business Tax (MBT):

- Revenue neutral with a trigger to both reimburse taxpayers on a pro-rata basis and to reinforce the Budget Stabilization Fund.
- Includes substantial credits for research and development, compensation, investment and personal property.
- Two separate taxes: a business income tax levied at a rate of 4.95 percent and a modified gross receipts tax levied at a rate of .80 percent.
- Taxpayers with gross receipts under $20 million will see a substantial tax reduction.
- A significant exemption for small businesses. Under the "Michigan Entrepreneurial Exemption" (ME2) companies pay no taxes for up to three years if the business adds 20 jobs, makes an investment of $1.25 million per year, and claims less than $25 million in gross receipts.
- Generous personal property tax relief. Personal property tax credits and exemptions result in a 65 percent reduction in personal property taxes for manufacturers. Commercial businesses and telecommunications will see a 23 percent reduction.
- Local units of government and public schools are held harmless.
- Construction firms and general contractors can deduct payments to subcontractors, which overcomes problems caused by cascading.
- Flow-through entities, LLCs, etc., are granted a specialized treatment to address problems created by the relatively high rate of the business income tax.

UPDATING FOOD SAFETY LAWS. A comprehensive plan to increase rules on food preparation and help prevent the spread of food-borne illnesses has been introduced. The legislation would adopt the 2005 version of the federal food code that will provide increased protection for consumer health and uniform industry regulations. The Michigan Food Law, enacted in 2000, adopted the 1999 version of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's food code as the standard for grocery and food service establishments. It represented the biggest overhaul of Michigan's food safety laws in 35 years. The legislation has received support from many organizations, including the Michigan Department of Agriculture, Association of Food and Petroleum Dealers, Michigan Grocers Association and Michigan Restaurant Association.

IMPROVING BEACH SAFETY. Legislation to keep people safe while enjoying Michigan's beaches, piers and waterways was introduced recently. Michigan offers more than 3,000 miles of shoreline frequented every year by local residents and tourists who enjoy boating, fishing and swimming on the Great Lakes. However, fatalities over the past several years have led lawmakers and local officials to push for measures to further increase the safety of all people on Michigan's waterways. In a 2004 issue of *National Geographic*, Lake Michigan was identified as one of the most dangerous zones with undertows and rip currents. Over the past five years, more than 30 people have drowned off Southwest Michigan's coast alone.

The legislation would:

- include lifeguards in Michigan's Good Samaritan Act. It would protect lifeguards from any liability when they perform lifesaving emergency care, in an act of good faith, to a person who is in crisis.
- designate that providing access to safety and rescue equipment on a public beach is a governmental function and therefore the municipality providing the equipment falls under the governmental immunity laws. This would encourage counties to participate in the purchasing and placement of safety devices such as life rings and call boxes without fear of being sued if the equipment was vandalized or stolen.
- make pier jumping a civil infraction with a $500 fine. Currently it is a federal offense that can only be enforced by a federal officer. This bill would expand that to include local law enforcement officials who typically monitor the piers.

CAR INSURANCE PROTECTION FOR MILITARY MEMBERS. Legislation to protect military service members by not penalizing them for a lapse in auto insurance coverage while serving on active duty was passed recently. The bill would prohibit automobile insurers from refusing to insure or refusing to continue, limiting coverage, charging a reinstatement fee, or increasing premiums for a person whose insurance lapsed while on active duty in the Armed Forces.

Under current law, insurance companies can refuse to insure or limit coverage available to a driver who has not maintained "mandatory insurance coverages in force" during the six months immediately preceding the application for insurance. This can be problematic for service members in the military if their automobile insurance expires while they are on active duty. Individuals must certify they were on active military duty for at least 30 consecutive days and certify that the vehicle was not driven or moved during the lapse in coverage.

NO SMOKING ON PUBLIC BEACHES. Beachgoers would be prohibited from smoking at Michigan's public beaches under legislation introduced in the state Senate. The legislation aims at cutting back on littering of cigarette butts and reducing the impact of secondhand smoke. Since the Alliance for the Great Lakes held its first beach cleanup in Michigan in 1991, cigarette butts have been the number one trash item picked up by volunteers – making up 58 percent of all litter removed from Michigan shorelines in 2007.