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Michigan Good Government Project Shows How Bipartisanship Produced Landmark Public Policy, Better Politics

New Website Presents Stories of Republicans & Democrats Working Together to Benefit Michigan

LANSING, Mich. -- Concerned about the bitter partisan divide across the United States, a bipartisan group of experienced Michigan political leaders today unveiled a website with dozens of stories of Democrats and Republicans working together to enact landmark public policy through mutual respect, leadership and compromise.

The Michigan Good Government Project and its website, MIGoodGovernment.com, is the brainchild of two former political staffers turned Lansing lobbyists, Charles “Fritz” Benson and Mike Ranville. Over five decades, Ranville and Benson worked with hundreds of state and federal elected officials, including governors, members of the Michigan Legislature, members of the U.S. Congress, and Supreme Court justices. Benson and Ranville were involved with political activities that featured Republicans and Democrats working together to solve problems, address tough issues, manage crises, and make Michigan better.

On MIGoodGovernment.com are dozens of stories and commentaries written by some of Michigan’s most famous and accomplished elected and business leaders, political operatives, and journalists of the past half century. Among the many story contributors to the site are former gubernatorial adviser Richard McLellan (R), former state Rep. David Hollister (D), former House Speaker Paul Hillemonds (R), former lobbyist and state Rep. Dennis Cawthorne (R), businessman Dan Loepp, former Senate Majority Leader Dan DeGrow (R), former Senate Minority Leader Bob Emerson (D), former state Sen. and U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz (who served as a Republican but now considers himself an independent), former gubernatorial chief of staff Dennis Muchmore (who worked for Democratic and Republican elected officials) and former Lt. Gov. John Cherry (D) – an all-star group of Michigan political leaders who reject the excessive partisanship that characterizes too much of American politics today.

“Our goal is to show today’s elected officials from both parties specific examples of how people can reach across the aisle to achieve policies that are wins for both sides – but in particular, for the people of Michigan. Too often partisan bickering, aimed at winning polarized electoral districts, stands in the way of good public policy that can make Michigan overall a better place to live, work and play,” said Ranville, who spent nearly 30 years working for the Michigan lobby firm Karoub Associates.

“My decades of experience working on tough legislative and administrative issues showed clearly that bipartisanship and compromise are the best ways to create meaningful public policies for the state,” said Benson, who worked 36 years in and around Michigan politics, most notably for the lobby firm Michigan Legislative Consultants. “Mike and I have decided to collect these stories in one place and offer our ideas and years of experience to Michigan elected leaders and staff about how to re-create a less divisive, more cohesive and more successful political atmosphere for Michigan.”

The website is launching today with 17 stories, with dozens more to be added in the coming months. Among the stories are pieces on key public policy disputes (reforming education funding, revising workers compensation laws), how humor and good will can ease tensions (a look at former Gov. William Milliken’s light touch, how lawmakers of both parties forged lasting friendships), a look at how to avoid demonizing “different” people (a tribute to former state Rep. Jim Dressel) and more. While many stories recount major policy achievements, others present examples of courage, leadership, humor, mutual respect, friendship and civility among Democrats, Republicans, journalists and others who have worked in Michigan politics over the past half century.

“All of us hope these stories will bring more respect and open communication among those involved in the political process today who know that acrimony, hate speech, and the mandating of strict partisan voting practices are not the way forward,” Benson said. “We know many lawmakers are pushed, often on many fronts, away from their better instincts. All of Michigan would be better off if our politics had less bickering and partisanship, and more productive and thoughtful compromise.”

Benson and Ranville said they and other contributors are willing to meet with lawmakers, caucuses, staff and organizations concerned about excessive partisanship and harsh attacks to offer their insights on how “Good Government” might become the practice in Michigan.

The Michigan Good Government Project is a 501c (3) non-profit funded by its founders and supporters. All revenues support the creation, maintenance and promotion of the website, with no salaries or compensation of any kind to the project founders and the organization’s board. Anyone interested in donating to the project contact Fritz Benson at bensonfritz@gmail.com.

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