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Call to action: Focus on youth, education, bipartisanship

By [Daniel Duggan](#)

MACKINAC ISLAND — Three analysts during the **Mackinac Policy Conference** laid out a vision for Michigan's growth, focusing on the public investment, the policy changes and the political organization that must take place.

While each had a specific take on the issues, there was consensus on a broad issue: Michigan needs to make changes if leaders expect the state to thrive.

"The bottom line — as a state and a region — either we get younger and better-educated or we get poorer," said Lou Glazer, president and co-founder of **Michigan Future Inc.**

Glazer kicked off the conference with a panel discussion that was a call to action. It featured Paul Hillegonds, senior vice president of corporate affairs at **DTE Energy Co.**, and Phil Power, founder and president of the **Center for Michigan**.

Glazer presented a study that lays out the goals Michigan should strive for and detailed the attributes of successful metro areas.

In an analysis of 10 prosperous states, he said, there are some counterintuitive conclusions. With the Denver, Minneapolis, Chicago, Boston and New York metros on the list, warm climates are not the key.

"Take cold weather off the table as an excuse," he said.

On the table, he said, is the number of college-educated residents and the percentage of wages coming from knowledge-based industries such as software and telecommunications. Of the 10 metro areas he studied, eight are on the national top-10 list for the number of people with a four-year degree.

"If there's any indicator of high prosperity or not, it's this," he said. Glazer said the Detroit metro ranks 34th in the country on four-year degrees.

Hillegonds said there are specific changes the state should seek in terms of policy and objectives for its investments.

With an expected \$6 billion budget shortfall by 2017, the state's structural deficit needs to be addressed, he said. Fixing the problems will require fundamental changes in spending on government and services.

"How we decide to deal with our long-term fiscal problems will show how, or if, we will compete in a knowledge-based economy," he said.

Public investments need to focus on education, specifically the early childhood, community college and university levels. The state must invest in cities, building up quality of life for recruitment and retention of talent.

"An investment by the state means support for education, but also the quality of life that the job-seekers are looking for," he said.

Power, former owner and chairman of **HomeTown Communications Network**, said a plan of action needs to include rallying activists and residents. Though there are challenges on the table, he said now is a time to make decisions that are only made once in a generation.

Those decisions, he said, should be based on bipartisan decisions and collaboration among leaders.



Power called on people to focus on the 2010 elections as a time to change the leadership of Michigan. With a new governor, attorney general, speaker of the House, senate majority leader — along with scores of state representatives and senators — there is a potential for a new political climate in Lansing.

"Our challenge in Michigan is enormous," he said. "It's a wonderful challenge that one or two generations face; the chance to control our own history."

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