

## What's the matter with Michigan?

Posted by [sdemas](#) May 23, 2008 07:22AM



Lake Michigan

"When are you going to leave Michigan?"

That's the question my exasperated parents ask me at least once a month.

It's their endearing effort to entice me to move back to Sweet Home Chicago, a magnet for Gen Xers in the Midwest and beyond. They really don't have to sell me on a city with stellar theater, independent cinema, museums, outdoor dining, urban parks and, of course, miles of beachfront along Lake Michigan.

Too bad I'm [head-over-heels in love](#) with the Wolverine State, a land of tragically flawed heroes, from Lewis Cass to W.K. Kellogg. It's home to perhaps the finest historical museum in the country, the sprawling Henry Ford, and the rare and used bookstore I could die in, John K. King's concrete paradise in Detroit. We have the unblemished side of Lake Michigan, thank you very much - not to mention three other Great Lakes that carve out our two peninsulas.

But in the eyes of my protective parents, Michigan is the rustiest of the rust belt states - a lumbering, rancid remnant of manufacturing's glory days.

What they see in the news is 6.9 percent unemployment - sadly the lowest rate we've hit in a year, which still tops the country. They shudder about crime rates in Detroit, Flint and Saginaw (not to mention their third-world infant mortality rates).

My Republican accountant father sighs at our business-unfriendly tax structure and my Democratic teacher mother shakes her head at our abysmal high school dropout and college graduation rates.

Those are the problems we've grappled with for years.

But lately, it seems Michigan is even more determined to become the laughingstock of the nation. If we're on tee-vee, you can bet you'll want to cover your eyes.

That's what happens when you're overrun by folks suffering from childhood regression and determined to take it out on Michigan.

There was our 11-month soap opera last year over a budget bleeding \$2 billion. We all knew how it would end thanks to our clueless, preening leaders, who at least [looked pretty](#) for the cameras before they shut the government down.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm (whose smile beat out two grownups in the 2002 Democratic primary) still had

to be the most popular girl in school and couldn't make tough choices. Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, tried to be the Big Man on Campus and lost badly, while House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, was a freshman trying to be student body president.

In the press box, I glanced up from rereading David Halberstam's "The Best and the Brightest" to [watch](#) rumple-shirted, sleep-starved senators screaming, pouting and almost busting into fisticuffs like 6-year-olds coming down from a sugar high on the playground. And I wanted to weep.

Then there was our January [primary](#), a glorified toddler tantrum by Democratic National Committeewoman Debbie Dingell and Michigan Republican Party Chair Saul Anuzis. (Nyah, nyah, Iowa and New Hampshire, you can't keep us down). Only Saul was smart enough to massage his national party, while Mrs. D flicked off the DNC and got the state's delegates yanked.

While the botched primary permits Hillary Clinton to throw her own [hissy fit](#) about seating the Michigan delegation (seriously, Hillz, it's like the struggle to free the slaves?) it really just makes us look stupider than 48 other states plus Guam.

And now Leon Drolet, still trapped in the moody adolescent phase of Ayn Rand worship that sets in when your sweetie says no to prom, wants to "make history" by [recalling Dillon](#). Evidently, the speaker raised taxes all by himself last year.

Boy, I just can't wait for national coverage of Libertarian Leon (neither can he) throwing the state into further chaos.

Fortunately, there is a small group of [thoughtful, committed citizens](#), as Margaret Mead would say, who want to change the world - or the state, more precisely. The Center for Michigan, an Ann Arbor think-and-do tank, on Thursday released its 35-page, common-ground [agenda](#) for the Michigan's Defining Moment campaign.

It's chock-full of priorities for the state to embrace leading up to the 2010 election, including education, bipartisanship, quality of life and economic diversification, thanks to hours of work from more than 1,800 citizens. And in the interest of full disclosure, I was one of the wonks who helped write part of the report.

More importantly, the campaign has real-world strategies and is a call to action. In a sense, it's a blueprint for how the Great Lakes State can come of age even with a hamstrung term-limited Legislature, dismal economy and outmoded, underfunded schools.

Newspaper magnate Phil Power started the center after he sold his company in 2005 and decided, "I'll be damned if I will let the Florida sand flow through my toes and stick my hands in my jacket pocket while my state is going to hell."

Former Gov. Jim Blanchard tells me he's optimistic: "I just can't believe the great state of Michigan can stay down."

That's why I love this state, why I want to fight for it. And that starts with my decision to stay put.

Categories: [Column](#)

## Comments

**letzgomsu says...**

Good Article Susan-spot on!! I was one of those Gen Xer's that had to leave the great state of michigan. I was born in Port Huron and I moved to Lansing after I got out of the military. In the year I was in Lansing, I could not find a good paying job and establish roots in the state-even with the two degrees I have from michigan public colleges. So i ended up moving to Southern California in Oct 07. But you know, I still love the state and have already applied for a transfer back to michigan. I hope i can get back there and fight to reform the state that I love and still call home! Keep up the good work!!

Eric

Posted on 05/24/08 at 2:44PM

Footer