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CONTACT: John Bebow, executive director, The Center for Michigan
734-769-4625 (o) | 734-474-0166 (c)
jbebow@thecenterformichigan.net

Great Debates 2010 launched by large coalition of Michigan interest groups

Seeks gubernatorial & legislative debates on public TV & online

LANSING, MI -- Michigan citizens will get an in-depth, issues-oriented look at the candidates for governor and dozens of important Michigan House and Senate seats through a new bipartisan initiative called **Great Debates 2010**.

An unprecedented partnership of 19 leading trade organizations and numerous public broadcasters across the state, Great Debates 2010 aims to provide:

- Three, one-hour gubernatorial debates (one in each major party primary and one during the general election cycle).
- 50, half-hour legislative debates (during the general election cycle);
- Several multi-candidate legislative forums in both the primary and general cycles.

Altogether, the Great Debates program is expected to run from July thru Election Day (November 2).

The Debates will be broadcast on public television and freely distributed in video format for “on demand” online viewing across the state. For example, the Great Debates videos will air, free of charge to viewers, on MiVote.org, a co-production of UM-Dearborn and Detroit Public Television. MiVote.org uses candidate interviews and person-on-the-street interviews to engage and educate Michigan voters.



“This is the most important Michigan election in a generation,” said Rich Homberg, president and general manager of Detroit Public Television which conceived Great Debates 2010 with the nonpartisan think-and-do tank, The Center for Michigan. “We think we can provide a crucial service by helping the citizens understand the crucial issues.”

Those crucial issues include: 1) economic growth; 2) talent & education; and 3) efficient, effective, and accountable government. Those are among the issues the 19 Great Debates underwriters outlined in an invitation provided to all gubernatorial campaigns. The invitation was emailed and postal mailed on Tuesday. A copy is attached.

“These issues are not partisan,” said Iris K. Salters, President of the Michigan Education Association. “These issues are central to Michigan’s survival and we have to engage in meaningful conversations about them in order to move our state forward.”

Legislative candidates will be invited immediately following the candidate filing deadline in early May.

Collectively, the diverse Great Debates underwriters listed on this press release represent literally millions of Michigan residents, including corporations and business owners, educators, medical professionals, local government leaders, organized labor, attorneys, retirees, and arts and cultural leaders. Individually, we bring distinctly different perspectives to the public discourse. But, collectively, we agree that greater public participation in this year’s important electoral process is good for the entire state.

We are working with WTVS (Metro Detroit), WGVU (West Michigan), WCMU (Central Michigan and tri-cities), and WKAR (Lansing/East Lansing) to televise the Great Debates. In addition, we are working with Interlochen Public Radio to provide radio coverage of candidate forums in northern Michigan. Collectively, those five stations are available to the vast majority of the Michigan population. Additional online access to debate videos will assure that any Michigan resident can enjoy “on demand” viewing of the debates throughout the election season.

"WGVU is pleased to play a part in bringing The Great Debates 2010 to the voters of Michigan, said Michael T. Walenta, general manager of WGVU, which provides public television to the Muskegon area south to the state line. “This

dialogue will likely shape the future of our State. We're proud to join with The Center for Michigan and our public broadcasting partners in providing this important service."

We recognize there will be intense competition for candidates' time throughout the campaign season. That is why we have developed such a diverse and far-reaching coalition of Great Debates sponsors. We believe the diversity and bipartisanship represented on this letterhead assures a fair and credible atmosphere for debates this year.

"This is how democracy should work," said Rob Fowler, President & CEO of the Small Business Association of Michigan. "Sometimes, organizations in Lansing get accused of being 'special interests.' We think this effort dispels that notion. We represent many different perspectives. We give voice to many parts of the Michigan economy. We've joined together to offer the Great Debates because we want to make sure the people of Michigan get to hear candidates' perspectives on the major issues in this very important election year."

Jennifer H. Goulet, president of ArtServe Michigan, agreed, saying, "This is a great opportunity to reach across our special interests to define the issues that must be 'on the table' as voters consider the best qualified candidates to lead our state forward."