

Student Association of Michigan Candidate Questionnaire

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1. What are your thoughts on the Legislature breaking their promise with the Michigan Promise Scholarships? How would you restore funding for the scholarships?

While they were called “Promise Scholarships”, and some legislators and the Governor may have promised to continue them forever, no legislative action is set in stone, and that is particularly so with year-by-year appropriations. The current fiscal situation of the state makes unpleasant choices necessary, and the scholarships were one of the things that were deemed not quite as necessary as the items remaining, such as public safety. Much cost cutting remains to be done.

My focus is improving the business climate to create jobs, as our main problem is that enough people are not working and paying taxes in Michigan. In the meantime, raising taxes to increase wages, scholarships, or other very worthwhile grants will retard the recovery of the state, so I will not be very anxious to do that. If we can get enough cuts in state employees and K-20 education employees’ wages and benefits, this may create enough room in the future to restore scholarships. Even then, I would be most inclined to make them needs based.

2. In the 1970s, funding to public universities was about 70% of their General Fund. Today, funding is less than 30% of their General Fund. What are your thoughts on the amount of funding going to Universities? How would you increase funding to Universities?

I would like to increase funding for all education. However, in the short run, that does not appear feasible without job killing tax increases. I want to see structural changes in the setting of wages and benefits for education employees before I am very favorable to increasing funding, because as long as the employees have the ability to suck up any increases into wages and benefits, students will not benefit from funding increases.

3. Currently, there is no accountability with the money that the Legislature gives to the universities. Do you think they should have a say in how the taxpayers' money is used? If so, how would you implement some accountability? Do you think that having a Constitutional Convention would be a good idea to implement accountability with the universities?

The Legislature is not prepared to govern the Universities, so delegation is necessary. The Legislature can request any information from the Universities that it wants. Further, the Legislature with the signature of the Governor can put whatever strings on funds granted that it

wishes, so the Legislature has a BIG say in how the dollars are spent.

Legislators need to take the time to get more familiar with education funding and spending. My seven years as a public school business manager will give me a head start on understanding those issues, as many of the same issues exist at the university level as at the K-12 level.

I do not support a Constitutional Convention being called to address this or any other issue.

4. What do you think about Eastern Michigan University freezing their tuition? What do you think the Student Association of Michigan and other organizations can do to pressure other University Governing Board to do the same?

EMU being able to balance its budget with 0-0-0 is admirable, and is paying off for EMU in increased enrollment. If every student would disenroll from every other university and transfer to EMU, that would send a message (but that is not realistic). Short of that, simply speaking up for the students' needs may have some effect.

5. Why is education being cut as much as possible (referring to the proposed 3.1% cut in the Senate)? What other things do you think should get cut before Higher Education? Where would you put Higher Education in a priority list?

Everything is being looked at carefully. With the pressure to reduce wage and benefit costs, and with about 85% of educational costs being wages and benefits, this looks like a place to cut. All other areas of the budget are not as easily reduced, such as Medicaid which is now forbidden to be cut by the National Health Care bill recently passed, due to the "maintenance of effort" provisions. With education being one of the "big three" areas of the budget (Education, Medicaid, and Corrections), you need to look at these three areas if you are going to save any considerable amount of money. \$1.7 billion is a lot to find to balance a budget without tax increases, so you have to look in the big expenditure areas.

It is impossible to rank areas in terms of priorities, as each area needs to be broken down into sub-areas to make any sense at all. I do think higher education is important to position our state as a Top Ten state again, so I do rank it pretty high.

6. What is your plan to keep Michigan graduates from leaving the state?

My focus is improving the business climate to create jobs. Employment opportunities here in the state would help graduates remain in Michigan.

7. Do you support a tax increase to specifically fund Higher Education?

No. I do not favor tax increases at this time, and I particularly dislike earmarked revenues.

General Comment:

I realize my answers above are not what the Student Association of Michigan is hoping for. Setting budget priorities is a difficult and complex task. If legislators simply attempt to satisfy every interest group's desires, state spending would skyrocket (yes, even worse than it has in the

past).

When Michigan ranked as one of the top states in terms of per capita income, maybe we could afford to be generous. Now that we rank 37th (and expected to be 40th with the next report), we are no longer a rich state.

We must take dramatic action to reposition our state in terms of business attractiveness so that we can grow our way out of the economic mess we find ourselves in. Adopting the Michigan Turnaround Plan, or the many proposals similar to those in the plan, would be a step in the right direction. That is my focus. That, in turn, does not allow me to pander to every interest group whose support I would love to receive.

Education is near and dear to my heart. That, and hard work, is what got my 5 siblings and me out of poverty. I got my B.S. from MSU in three years while working 20+ hours per week, then completed the coursework for a Ph.D. at UC, Davis in two years while working on a half-time assistantship. I received my Juris Doctor from Stanford Law School in three years while working as a research assistant for a law professor one year and a law clerk for a local law firm my third year.

It is possible to graduate more quickly than most students do today, and to work while in school if one is focused on your classes and working. Students today who have luxuries far beyond what is necessary, while crying poverty and seeking further tax increases from struggling homeowners and families to fund scholarships, simply are not as high a priority as getting this economy going again. Once that is done, it may be possible to be more generous.

The Student Association for Michigan should feel comfortable contacting me to discuss issues at any time once I am elected. Please come prepared with facts, and both the pros and cons of your proposals, as I seek to hear all sides of issues.