



THE SENATE  
STATE OF MICHIGAN

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Dear Neighbor,

You deserve to know what has been happening at your state Capitol in Lansing. The Legislature recently passed the state budget, one of the largest in state history, and it is a total disaster in my opinion.

Within months of taking power last year, the governor and majority in the Legislature spent the state's historic \$9 billion surplus on things like swimming pools and pickleball courts.

Now, in order to maintain their spending levels, they've passed a budget balanced by a \$700 million income tax increase that the governor's administration and attorney general supported and divested millions from the teacher retirement fund.

The fiscal year 2025 spending plan significantly increases the size of government and corporate welfare without providing much-needed tax relief to those struggling to make ends meet. The school aid fund fails to address the needs of students with devastating cuts to school safety and student mental health when compared to last year's budget.

For the first time in over a decade, there was no foundation allowance increase, and school groups have said the cuts to education funding will lead to layoffs.

You may be asking what taxpayers got in return. From my perspective, it's clear: an utter lack of transparency. Over \$82 billion in spending and lawmakers are expected to review the hundreds of pages of these bills in a mere matter of hours to approve the majority's spending plan. I believe that is outrageous.

Michigan taxpayers deserve better. You should know how the Legislature is planning to spend your money before we vote, not after. This creates over 450 new government positions, piling on future costs. And it's filled with special projects like taxpayer-funded Wi-Fi for casino-goers in Detroit, minor league baseball fields, museums, a zoo and a boxing gym.

But who is asking for these requests? That's another good question. Even after passing the bill, there were questions raised about why taxpayer dollars were awarded to a private club connected to a lawmaker or for the rehabilitation of a Detroit building whose ownership is in question. This is why we need more time to review the bill before voting.

Your hard-earned dollars should be fixing our roads and bridges, not funding these pet projects. This kind of spending, I believe, is irresponsible and will cost Michigan taxpayers in the long run.

**CHANGE IS NEEDED IN LANSING.**

The current appropriations process, I fear, is one shrouded in secrecy with decisions made by a select few in the dead of night. Michigan stands as the least transparent state in the nation, a state where private companies can receive contracts without any sort of competitive bidding — leaving the public in the dark about who is benefiting and who is sponsoring these requests.

There should be a minimum of 72 hours for the entire appropriation bill to be finalized and delivered, ensuring transparency about who is making these project requests.

Yet, the Legislature recently passed a budget just before dawn in a marathon session, which included over \$400 million in earmarks for lawmakers' pet projects without any of them having to put their names on any project requests.

This issue, I believe, is symptomatic of a larger problem with the current budget process, where lawmakers tuck in numerous pet projects — often revealed to the public mere hours before the budget's passage. The recent 19-hour session that resulted in this budget's approval at 5 a.m., as far as I'm concerned, is a perfect example of the lack of transparency that undermines public trust.

I don't think this is a proper way to handle public tax dollars, and everyone deserves to know how their hard-earned dollars are being spent.

Transparency and accountability should guide our spending practices. That's why I introduced legislation to mandate transparency, oversight, and accountability in the governmental process.

My reforms would require every legislator to put their name to an appropriation request, including a statement on any special project and enhancement grant requested for their district; outline who will receive funding, how the money will be used, and demonstrate community support for the project; explain why the people of Michigan should fund it; and verify that neither they as legislators nor immediate family members will benefit from this spending.

Citizens deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent, and they should have ample time to review and provide input on budget allocations that impact their communities.

This type of what I consider to be "horse-trading" compromises the integrity of the budget process and does not address the most pressing needs of our state. Essential services such as infrastructure, public safety, education, and health care should take precedence over these discretionary projects.

Disclosure before a budget vote should be a minimum. Requiring transparency about how lawmakers are spending the people's money shouldn't be controversial.

My vote against this budget was driven by the need for greater accountability and transparency in how taxpayer funds are allocated. I will keep working on behalf of my constituents to demand a more transparent and equitable budgeting process that prioritizes essential services that truly benefit all Michiganders.

Fighting for you,



Senator Jim Runestad

*"Serving the 23rd State Senate District"*