



"The right to criticize government is also an obligation to know what you're talking about."

Lent Upson, First Director of the Citizens Research Council

September 29, 2023

Research Council's Work on Michigan's Future Challenges and Opportunities Take Center Stage at 2023 Public Policy Dinner

The Citizens Research Council celebrated its 107th year of providing objective, nonpartisan public policy research to Michiganders on the evening of Wednesday, September 27 at its annual fundraising dinner held in Plymouth. The night centered around saluting the distinguished history of the Research Council's work, reflecting on current key challenges facing the state and its residents, such as addressing that state's stagnant population growth and increasing the number of residents with a post-secondary degree or credential, and honoring a remarkable public servant.

Celebrating the Research Council always involves a focus on its published research reports and the recommendations offered. At this year's dinner, attendees' attention was squarely on two of the organization's major research efforts this year. This included the Research Council's first report released in 2023, an in-depth analysis of the major cost drivers associated with obtaining a post-secondary degree at Michigan higher education institutions (*Out of Reach: Examining the Price of Higher Education in Michigan*) as well as the widely covered five-part series on Michigan's Prosperous Future. Subsequent to their release, both reports became foundational motivations behind Governor Gretchen Whitmer's creation of the statewide, bi-partisan Growing Michigan Together Council.

The Research Council's work then took center stage during the event for a thought-provoking panel discussion on the challenges and opportunities ahead for Michigan's higher education institutions. The panel included perspectives from a cross-section of schools, including both public and private institutions as well as four-year universities and community colleges. Panelists included Dr. Rose Bellanca, president of Washtenaw Community College, Dr. Ora Pescovitz, president of Oakland University, Dr. Bill Pink, president of Ferris State University, and Dr. Donald Taylor, president of the University of Detroit Mercy. The discussion was moderated by Chuck Stokes of WXYZ-TV/Channel 7.

A couple of common themes emerged from the panel. One shared message honed in on the varied benefits of attaining a post-secondary degree, including benefits that accrue to the individual, but also those enjoyed by society writ large. A healthy functioning democracy depends on the attainment of knowledge rather than the hyper-partisan, petty grievances that drive much of the public debate today. Several panelists also noted that today's workplace is significantly different from the workplace of old. Higher salaries and wages are increasingly reserved for those with advanced skills that are most commonly associated with a college degree. Also, all the panelists reinforced the point that a post-secondary degree prepares an individual for a career, not merely a job, thus helping those with a degree plan for their future. Finally, each leader acknowledged that it was their obligation and duty to dispel common misperceptions about access and affordability at their institutions, including providing access to segments of the population that have traditionally viewed a degree to be out of their reach.

In addition to celebrating the work of the Research Council and hearing from the state's key higher education leaders, the annual policy dinner provides an occasion to honor an outstanding Michigan resident for their commitment to public service and civic engagement. This year, the Eugene A. Gargaro Jr. Public Service Award was presented to Dr. Ora Pescovitz. Among her many accomplishments, Dr. Pescovitz was recognized for her school's efforts to increase academic success, scholarship, and community engagement and particularly for championing the university's civic engagement and civility initiatives on diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability. During her remarks, Dr. Pescovitz commented on the high stature of those previously recognized with the award and shared the acceptance with her team at Oakland University.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Thiel - Research Director



Craig is the Research Council's Research Director and primary researcher of education and school finance issues. Prior to becoming Research Director, Craig served as the Director of State Affairs and as a Senior Research Associate. During his graduate school studies, he worked for the Council as a Lent Upson-Loren Miller Fellow from 1993 to 1995. Before joining the Council in 2006, Craig worked for ten years as a fiscal analyst at both the Senate Fiscal Agency and the House Fiscal Agency. He previously worked for the Michigan Department of State, Office of Policy and Planning and the United States Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago.

Craig holds a B.A. in Economics and Political Science from Kalamazoo College and a Masters in Public Administration from Wayne State University. He holds positions on various professional, nonprofit, and local government boards/associations.

Founded in 1916, the Citizens Research Council of Michigan works to improve government in Michigan. The organization provides factual, unbiased, independent information concerning significant issues of state and local government organization, policy, and finance. By delivery of this information to policymakers and citizens, the Citizens Research Council aims to ensure sound and rational public policy formation in Michigan. For more information, visit www.crcmich.org.

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