



The 2026 Detroit Policy Conference brought together nearly **1,200** business, government, and community leaders to discuss **A New Leadership Era**.

50 state and regional voices spent the day discussing the efforts underway in the Detroit Region as its path is charted through major leadership transitions. The Conference fostered constructive conversations and generated actionable strategies to build a more prosperous and equitable Detroit Region.

WHO ATTENDED?

60%

of attendees are employed **in the city of Detroit**.

40%

of attendees are employed **outside the city of Detroit**.



BUSINESS

55%



GOVERNMENT

11%



EDUCATION

10%



MEDIA

5%



PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFIT

18%

**These numbers have been rounded to the nearest number.*

A Conversation With Joi Harris

Moderator: **Jason Colthorp**, Anchor and Reporter, WDIV-TV 4, NBC

“We’re ensuring that our infrastructure is in good shape. We’re making huge investments, but we’re actually using Michigan companies to help us. We’re investing in Michigan companies to really help us build the grid of the future.”

Joi Harris

President and Chief Executive Officer,
DTE Energy



Keynote Address: Jared Fleisher



“If each policy is itself smarter, then it’s a win in making our tax structure more efficient and more pro-growth — and make no mistake, this idea of having an overall structure that’s more pro-growth, that’s the ultimate answer for Detroit.”

Jared Fleisher

Chief Executive Officer,
Bedrock

**HENRY
FORD
HEALTH**

The Future of Health

Moderator: **Roop Raj**, Evening Anchor and Host, The Pulse, Fox 2 Detroit



“When you bring together a great health care system like Henry Ford Health with one of America’s leading research universities like Michigan State University, that convergence in a great city like Detroit that is really coming back to do great things . . . it’s going to help drive the economy.”

Kevin M. Guskiewicz
President,
Michigan State University

“Big dreams are a lot more contagious than small dreams. And so, if you start with something really big that’s relevant, that everyone can see themselves in, in some way, shape, or form, it will be contagious.”

Bob Riney
President and
Chief Executive Officer,
Henry Ford Health

“[Tom Gores and I] wanted to be here not just to play games, but to be really part of the city. We shared the same goals and vision of making a difference in this community and being civic-minded first. It really was about . . . participating in the city’s well-being. And Henry Ford had that same vision. It was just a match. We were both aligned, and that really is the key to a partnership.”

Arn Tellem
Vice Chairman, Pistons Sports
and Entertainment;
Chair Emeritus, Board of Directors,
Detroit Regional Chamber

Making Detroit a Destination for Tech Innovation and Investment

Interviewer: **Glenn Stevens Jr.**, Executive Director, MichAuto; Chief Automotive and Innovation Officer, Detroit Regional Chamber

“You don’t have to have a master’s degree . . . you can be off the street with common sense and be a player in the AI space.”

André Gudger

Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Eccalon



The Importance of Data Centers in Michigan’s Economy

Interviewer: **Sandy K. Baruah**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Detroit Regional Chamber



“Populations move to where the best jobs are. In addition, technology is where our children and their children are going to migrate to. So, this is another opportunity to keep, attract, train, and teach the next generation, and have this talented pipeline for companies like Google, OpenAI, and Meta to come to our state and to help us grow into the 21st-century state that we should be.”

Ambassador John Rakolta Jr.

Chairman,
Walbridge

"The House is on Fire": Solving Michigan's Education Crises

Moderator: **Stephen Henderson**, Executive Advisor, BridgeDetroit; Host, Detroit PBS



“If we can use our precious, financial resources as a state to actually move the needle on college access and attainment, we should do that, regardless of if we’re on the Republican or Democratic side.”

Sarah Anthony

Michigan Senator (D-Lansing)

“It’s not just about educating our own residents and ensuring they have the skills needed to secure high-paying jobs or create those jobs here. It’s also about attracting people to the state.”

Jeff Donofrio

President and Chief Executive Officer,
Business Leaders For Michigan

“If you stack up states or regions and rank them by their per capita income, that’s what their postsecondary attainment rate is. There is no such thing as a state that is not highly educated or a region that’s not highly educated that is prosperous.”

Greg Handel

Chief Education and Talent Officer,
Detroit Regional Chamber

“I think you’re only limited by your imagination, and we’ve gotten very aggressive in creating partnerships and pathways for things that we want to be involved in.”

Donald B. Taylor

President,
University of Detroit Mercy



Philanthropy's Role in Detroit's Economic Ecosystem

Moderator: **Megan Spanitz**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Strategy Officer, Detroit Regional Chamber



“We have to measure what matters, and we have to give ourselves time and space to be able to really see something through, like educational outcomes or housing stability — it doesn't get solved in a month or a year. Let's think about 10-year time horizons instead of our short quarterly projections.”

Laura Granneman
Executive Director,
Rocket Community Fund and
Gilbert Family Foundation



“Our business culture has felt under pressure to respond more and more and more to owners and shareholders, but I feel like, as a society, we have to get back to serving community. And from a business perspective, that means centering customers more and not just in a sort of finite way, but in a kind of more holistic well-being way.”

Kate Levin Markel
President,
McGregor Fund



“We really need to be thinking about an education system that supports [young people]. When they feel supported and engaged and excited, that is going to benefit all of us; it's going to benefit the Region.”

Sarida Scott
Vice President, Program,
The Skillman Foundation



Rise Higher Detroit: The Transition to Detroit's New Leadership

Interviewer: **Chuck Stokes**, Director, Editorial and Public Affairs, WXYZ-TV



“ Mayor Sheffield indicated that she wanted this to be not just smooth, as we indicated, but the most community-driven transition in Detroit’s history. I don’t know that there’s ever been one like this in the city. I don’t know that there’s ever been one like this in the United States. ”

Melvin “Butch” Hollowell

Board Chairman, Rise Higher Detroit,
Mayor’s Office, City of Detroit;
Managing Partner,
The Miller Law Firm – Detroit



A Video Message From Mary Sheffield

Mayor, City of Detroit



“ Sometimes we all hear the narrative that there is either an either-or choice between supporting our businesses or supporting our neighborhoods ... that reality is exactly the opposite. Businesses need strong, vibrant neighborhoods and thriving neighbors to be successful. Neighborhoods need businesses in order to be strong and vibrant. ”



Detroit's Last Word With City Council

Moderator: **Lloyd Jackson**, Co-Host, JR Morning, WJR 760 AM;
Voice of the Detroit People Mover



“It is my responsibility to make sure residents’ voices are heard, and that the residents, along with the [Sheffield] administration, can come together to identify solutions that we’ll all feel good about.”

Latisha Johnson
Member,
Detroit City Council, District 4



“Constant conversation and engagement is incredibly important so that our constituents know what’s going on. But we also have to make sure we are solving these problems. I don’t want to say that we’re solving problems and not actually solving it. I think that adds to frustrations and distrust from the public.”

Gabriela Santiago-Romero
Member,
Detroit City Council, District 6



“There’s absolutely no way that we can have a strong city when we have a weak mayor [and] a strong Council, or a strong mayor and a weak Council. We have to work collaboratively.”

James E. Tate Jr.
President,
Detroit City Council, District 1



“To have professionals in [City Council] who are about the city’s business, but to be able to both agree and disagree amicably ... it’s such a blessing.”

Coleman A. Young II
President Pro Tem,
Detroit City Council



A Conversation With Mike Duggan

Interviewer: **Sandy K. Baruah**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Detroit Regional Chamber

“There is no way in a partisan, purple state where you split every two years — it goes back and forth — to make any kind of long-term change. And I thought, ‘Was there a path to make long-term change in the state, and is this something I contribute [to] that would be unique?’ And that’s what I’m trying to do.”

Mike Duggan

Independent Gubernatorial Candidate for Michigan



A Word From Southeast Michigan’s County Leaders



“These are businesses and attractions that help define our unique and vibrant communities across Oakland County and employ our neighbors and friends. They are part of the economic engine that makes and keeps Oakland County strong.”

David Coulter
Executive,
Oakland County

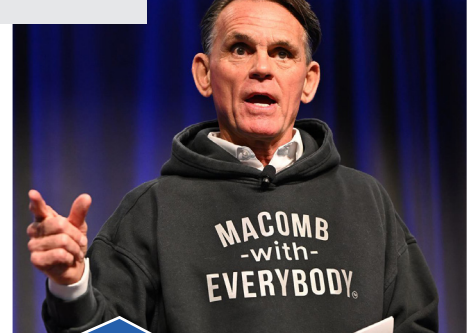


Interviewer: **Carol Cain**, Senior Producer and Host, Michigan Matters, CBS Detroit; Columnist, Detroit Free Press



“Economic development and the further growth of this Region are of critical importance. What we as government officials have to do is make sure that we’re doing all of the things we can to create the workforce that’s necessary to create the job opportunities.”

Warren Evans
Executive,
Wayne County



“Early on, I kept looking at and talking with our Department of Roads, saying, ‘If we could just fix the funding, we can fix the roads.’ We at Macomb County were at the forefront of this conversation, not politically, obviously working with those who are elected leaders, but we also realized we have to get away from this partisan divide because we’re getting nowhere.”

Mark Hackel
Executive,
Macomb County

A Conversation With Duncan Aldred

Interviewer: **KC Crain**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Crain Communications

“It really feels like [General Motors is] part of the fabric of the city . . . We want it to be a place where people can collaborate, innovate, and really use the space to form activities as well.”

Duncan Aldred

Senior Vice President and President, North America,
General Motors



A Conversation With Mark de la Vergne and Ned Staebler



“We’ve created a culture where being able to deal and gossip and essentially put people down is a way to work your way up. Trust is a necessary currency, from an individual deal all the way out to an ecosystem, all the way out to a global economy. If you don’t have trust, it just won’t happen.”

Mark de la Vergne

Director, Economic Innovation and Policy,
Michigan Central

“I’m going to commit to not go after a grant by ourselves if we can realistically go after it with a partner. I really do believe that two plus two can equal five and that we can grow this together if we get out of the scarcity mindset.”

Ned Staebler

Vice President, Economic Development, Wayne State University;
President and Chief Executive Officer, TechTown



Power Perspectives



“ For our economic future and our kids, let’s make this year about fixing our schools. ”

Jeff Donofrio

President and Chief Executive Officer,
Business Leaders For Michigan



“ How do we build a space where nobody is left behind? For me, that answer is fairly simple: Build spaces that are accepting, create a community, and lead like a teacher. ”

Ellen Gilchrist

Chief Executive Officer,
BasBlue



“ Detroit’s an incredible city to start a business, but maintaining it takes a whole lot of work. One of the things I always say is ‘just keep swimming.’ ”

Amy Peterson

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
Rebel Nell



“ The future of the Detroit Region is fundamentally connected to the future of Detroit neighborhoods. ”

Diallo Smith

President and Chief Executive Officer,
Life Remodeled

Highlights From THE KRESGE FOUNDATION Theatre

accenture

Leading With Human-Centered AI: From Skills to Scale

Moderator: **Shatica McDonald**, Managing Director, Michigan Office and Lead, Global Health and Public Service, Accenture Song



“ Leaders being the champions and adopting the technology first is the difference. It’s hard to trust technology when you don’t understand the technology, and AI technology really requires a layer of trust. ”

Sarah Dugan

Lead, Global IT Change and Adoption, Accenture



“ Invest as much, if not more, in the people side than you do in the technology side. Because we get the value when we bring the people along, and that’s the harder part. ”

Ronja Kruse

President and Chief Executive Officer, OpTech, LLC; Co-Founder, Digital Lakes



“ IT is a skill in almost every single organization that exists in our city. We focus a lot on skill building in those areas so that they can have that baseline information to be able to move forward. ”

Dana L. Williams

President and Chief Executive Officer, Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation

Highlights From THE KRESGE FOUNDATION Theatre

NeighborHUB Announcement and Discussion

Moderator: **Dorian Grey**, Senior Director, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation, Detroit Regional Chamber



“ A cornerstone of our business is to understand others’ experiences through their stories. So, in that action of hiring that first employee, going through the process gave us a lot of experience and to be able to demonstrate how we could be leaders in that community. ”

Jay Williams
Co-Owner,
Next Chapter Books

“ Being part of NeighborHUB helped advance my leadership and capability and allowed me to show up the way I wanted to. It also gave me the opportunity to widen what the experience could be. ”

Karlyta Williams
Founder,
Mockery Zero Proof

Expanding Wayne County Transit

Moderator: **Brian J. Shoaf**, Vice President, Public Policy and Business Advocacy, Detroit Regional Chamber



“ When we have that locally based funding, and it’s strong and it’s consistent across the board, then we go to the state — they match more dollars for us to provide more service. ”

Tiffany J. Gunter
General Manager and Chief Executive Officer,
SMART

“ It all starts with transit . . . Transit is the key to unlocking so many opportunities in this Region. ”

Assad I. Turfe
Deputy Executive,
Wayne County



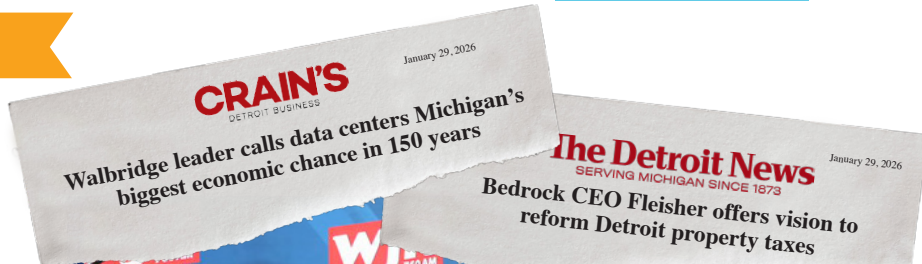
Exhibit Hall



SHARING THE STORY

In the Media:

60 credentialed media attended, earning media placements across broadcast, print, and digital platforms. These included stories in Bridge Detroit, Corp! Magazine, Crain's Detroit Business, Daily Detroit, Detroit Free Press, Detroit is Different, Detroit PBS, El Central Hispanic News, Michigan Business Network, Michigan Chronicle, Michigan Public, The Detroit News, and WJR-AM.



External Engagement:

 **Youtube:**
880 Post-Event Views
200 Views on Highest-Viewed Video

 **Livestream:**
1,693 Viewers



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