Dear Neighbor,

I hope this year-end newsletter finds you well. Looking back at the year’s work, I’m mindful of my solemn responsibility to represent you in Lansing.

The policy decisions we make at the state Capitol have consequences. Every vote has an impact on the lives of Michigan residents. My priority will continue to be legislation that will positively affect the hard-working people of our local communities, and be of benefit to our state as a whole.

For example, we can make life better by limiting the size of government and rejecting the failed budget tricks of the past. Once again, we’ve reduced the state’s overall general budget spending so we can continue to pay down debt. That’s good policy.

In addition, we are making life better by dedicating a record amount of funds to fix roads and bridges, which will not only improve our daily commutes, but strengthen the state’s economy. The funding we allocated this year for K-12 public schools is the most in our state’s history, giving all students a greater chance at success.

Because our state can’t be successful if our cities, towns and rural areas aren’t healthy, we will continue to look for ways to help them with their challenges addressing health care, infrastructure and legacy costs.

And because some of our best ideas come from you at home, I’ll keep listening. Inside you can read about how a local need has turned into a legislative remedy that may end up helping folks elsewhere in Michigan. See “Solving staffing problems at juvenile residential facilities”.

The people in our community are on the front of my mind before taking every vote. It makes no difference whether it’s a Republican or Democrat idea. If it doesn’t make life better for the people I proudly represent, it doesn’t get my vote. Period.

Sincerely,

ERIC LEUTHEUSER
State Representative

Michigan is the third largest producer of real Christmas trees in the United States and 10% of the nation’s Christmas trees come from Michigan. That’s close to 3 million trees.

For every Christmas tree harvested Michigan Christmas tree farmers plant approximately three new trees!

More varieties of Christmas trees are grown in Michigan than any other state! The top selling varieties are Scotch Pine, Douglas Fir, Balsam Fir and White Pine.

There are records of Michigan Christmas trees being sold in Chicago as early as 1887.

Did You Know?

CHRISTMAS TREE FUN FACTS

SOLVING STAFFING PROBLEMS AT JUVENILE RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

For every 100 inmates at the Michigan’s juvenile correctional facilities, there are approximately 50 staff. State law mandates a 2:1 ratio. The result is that we’re paying far too much for far too few inmates. Today, we’re working on a legislative solution that will bring us back in line with the law and make every dollar count.

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Did You Know?
Legislation for a better tomorrow

As a member of the committees on Workforce and Talent Development, Regulatory Reform and Financial Liability Reform and the chairman of Commerce and Trade, I've been working on legislation to encourage economic growth, remove barriers to job creation and address our state's long-term fiscal health. Besides committee work and analyzing legislation coming before the full House, some initiatives I've personally sponsored or cosponsored this year include:

HB 5411: Allows school districts to hire career and technical education (CTE) teachers if those individuals possess a high-school diploma and hold a professional license or certificate in the subject or field they would be teaching. Michigan schools are facing a critical shortage of instructors in the skilled trades, and students can learn more than a skill when they have an instructor with life experience and a desire to pass on their expertise to the next generation. This bill will help more students on their path to a successful career.

HB 4115: Makes it easier for local non-profit organizations like churches, schools and hospitals to raise money through fundraisers by increasing the annual amount exempted from state sales tax. The current ceiling has not been adjusted for decades. This is another common-sense issue brought to my attention by local residents.

HB 4829: Ensures that recipients of state nursing scholarships are American citizens. This is part of a package of bills introduced in the House to ensure hard-earned tax dollars only reach properly qualified recipients.

HB 4533: Creates a three-day, small-game hunting license designed to encourage weekend hunting trips and increase tourism. Hunting fees provide funding for the protection, preservation and management of Michigan's natural resources. But because many sportsmen can't justify a longer, more expensive license, the state is losing out. This affordable option will give more residents and their friends and relatives the chance to enjoy a hunting memory.

HB 5111: Protects the confidentiality of birth mothers who surrender their babies under the Safe Delivery of Newborns Law. Many women are forced to surrender their children for their own safety because of an abusive relationship or other circumstances. This legislation ensures their identity is protected. Since the passage of the original Safe Delivery Law over 175 babies have been provided safe homes.

Reform plan that would cut auto insurance rates, give drivers more choice

This fall I fought for a bipartisan plan to fix Michigan's broken car insurance system and significantly lower rates for all drivers.

Michigan requires the most generous auto insurance benefits in the nation. But those benefits come at a high cost. The legislation would have lowered the cost of car insurance by offering motorists more coverage options, reinsuring in medical costs and fighting fraud.

Michigan's average full coverage auto insurance premium cost – nearly $2,400 per year – is 82 percent above the national average and twice as high as those in neighboring states. The plan ensured that Michiganders already receiving lifetime health care benefits after a catastrophic traffic accident would continue to receive them. The plan would have also given motorists the option to continue to buy the unlimited personal injury protection (PIP) coverage or more affordable alternative coverage plans.

This bipartisan solution unfortunately failed on the House floor. The legislation wasn't perfect, but it was a start. It also was not my last try. Make no mistake, my fight for the residents I represent is not over. I will continue to fight until we have a solution.

I was grateful to be joined by Hillsdale County Juvenile Court Administrator Megan Stiverson, left, and Hillsdale County Probate Judge Michelle Bianchi, center, to testify before the House Judiciary Committee about the staffing problem. The legislation has since passed the House and I look forward to seeing this advance to the governor's desk.

Controversial driver responsibility fees eliminated under legislation

I supported recent legislation to eliminate Michigan's misguided and ineffective driver responsibility fees.

Driver responsibility fees were initiated by politicians in 2003 as a way to plug a hole in the state budget. Since then, hundreds of thousands of Michigan residents have been burdened with the excessive fees, which have either taken them out of the job market or forced them to drive illegally to support their families.

This is a bad law that should never have been passed in the first place. It did nothing to improve driving skills and it's time we end this failed policy. The elimination of driver responsibility fees and restoration of driving privileges will help people get back to work so they can earn a living and provide for their families.

The House legislation would forgive the outstanding penalties owed by more than 300,000 Michigan drivers and the ineffective program would end completely by Oct. 1, 2018.