

Eric Coleman

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Campaign Website: www.EricColeman.org

Birthplace: Chicago, IL

Photo via separate email

Family: Married to Judith (Judy); one son; three grandchildren

Current occupation: County Commissioner

Education/Degrees:

Bachelor of Fine Arts, The School of the Art Institute, Chicago, IL
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA

Civic Involvement:

Former Chairperson, City of Southfield's Parent Youth Guidance Commission; former President, Southfield-Lathrup Village Optimist Club International; former Lt. Governor, Michigan Optimist Club International; founder and former Advisor, Southfield Youth in Government; founding member and former First Vice President, South Oakland County NAACP; founder and former President, Southfield Schools Educational Foundation; former member, Southfield Community Foundation; former member, Citizens Advisory Council for Fiscal Responsibility and Policy; former member, Southfield-Lathrup Village Multi-cultural Coalition; founding member and President, Southfield-Lathrup Village Civic Citizens; founding member, Oakland County Political Action Coalition.

Recipient of numerous civic awards, including the prestigious Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Service Award and the State of Michigan Service to the Community Award.

Military:

N/A

Convictions:

None

What cars do you or your immediate family own?

Pontiac Transport, Lincoln Town Car

Endorsements:

UAW Region 1; AFSCME Council 25; Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO; Teamsters Joint Council 43; Greater Detroit Building and Construction Trades; Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers

Free Press Questionnaire

What is your Number 1 campaign issue?

Education: As a former President of the Southfield School Board, I remain a staunch supporter of the public school system. Stable and sustainable funding is needed for K-12, community colleges and public universities. I will fight to strengthen our schools and provide EVERY student with the skills they need to make them successful in a globally competitive environment. As State Representative, my initiatives include:

- Assuring that all school districts have equitable funding.
- Measuring student achievements more broadly than the current standardized test.
- Developing curriculums that prepare students for the jobs and careers of the 21st century.
- Building learning partnerships between businesses and schools.

Michigan's spending for Community Colleges is down by about one-fifth and general fund spending on universities is down by more than a quarter. In order to move our communities and families forward, we must invest in having a highly trained and skilled work force that can compete in a global economy. I will work to make training and education affordable and accessible for all.

What is your Number 2 campaign issue?

Jobs: My initiative for improving Michigan's economy is to create a business friendly environment where businesses can thrive and grow by:

- reducing the burdensome red tape and regulations that make it difficult for businesses to operate in Michigan.
- Linking university research and training with small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Putting an equitable business tax structure in place.
- Tax incentives for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

What is your Number 3 campaign issue?

Taxes and Revenue Sharing: Michigan's taxes are not appropriately distributed. Oakland County has been a "donor county" for far too long – by sending more local tax dollars to Lansing than are received in return through revenue sharing of services. Since Southeast Michigan was especially hard hit with the decline in the auto industry, it is time for Lansing to have resources redirected to serving the region with the largest population and the greater need from the state.

Stabilizing revenue sharing for our local communities is of critical importance. The ability of local cities and townships to provide needed services, especially police and fire protection, depends on this revenue stream from the state. I will work with our local leaders and the legislature to prevent raids on revenue sharing dollars.

What changes would you support to resolve Michigan's structural budgetary deficit? Be specific, and list any pledges you have made or signed with respect to reducing expenditures or raising taxes.

Adopt a 2-3 year balanced budget.

I support a change to our tax structure, either graduated tax and/or additional tax on services. In addition, I would propose a 3-5 year budget projection.

Audit government contracts and close ineffective tax loopholes. Specifically, I would also eliminate tax incentives and loopholes for companies failing to create and retain jobs.

Require yearly performance reviews for all remaining tax credits and incentives and audit government contracts to eliminate waste.

Establish a budget based on the priorities of our local communities:

Education, health care, public safety and services for children and seniors.

- Offer incentives for college graduates and young families to locate in Michigan and buy homes
- Close corporate loopholes
- Implement a graduated income tax
- Require performance audits of state departments
- Find ways to collaborate with nonprofit organizations to provide services
- recognize the important economic contributions of small businesses and entrepreneurs – offer incentives and ease burdensome regulations
- Make community colleges and state college tuition affordable for all families

I have not taken any pledges, written nor orally, with respect to reducing expenditures or raising taxes.

Describe any changes you would support in the compensation, health or retirement benefits of teachers and other public employees.

I have none at this time.

Detail any steps you believe state government should take to attract new jobs to Michigan or discourage employers from reducing or moving jobs out of the state.

- Putting an equitable business tax structure in place
- Tax incentives for small businesses and entrepreneurs
- Expand successful economic development strategies established in Oakland County, such as Automation Alley, Emerging Sectors and the new Medical Main Street, to attract new businesses

Identify a significant initiative undertaken by members of the opposing party that you support, or an instance in which you have effectively worked with members of the opposing party to realize such an initiative.

During my 14 years as an Oakland County Commissioner, I have held a minority position as a Democrat, yet I have been successful in building bridges and collaborating with members of the opposite party in order to establish many of my initiatives/laws.

Do you support reductions in the services provided to Medicaid patients? Do you support legal or legislative efforts to "opt out" of national health care reform?

No to question one and No to question two

What specific steps should the Legislature take to promote the consolidation of school districts and local governments and/or the sharing of local services and capital expenses?

I have no suggestion at this time.

Should Michigan increase its financial commitment to higher education, and if so, how would you propose to finance that increased investment?

Yes, but first we have to resolve the states' budgetary problems. We need to look into departments with run away expenditures, such as the Department of Corrections. The number of Correction employees has tripled since 1980. The Department now comprises over 30 percent of all state Civil Service employees and 20 percent of the Michigan General Fund. It does not make sense for our State to spend more on incarceration than on education. By investing more money and providing better educational opportunities, it is my hope we'll have less people being incarcerated thus reducing such large expenditures to the Department of Correction budget.

What steps should the Legislature take to provide for the maintenance and/or expansion of its transportation infrastructure?

- Work to maximize federal funding, grants and credits

How often should tax exemptions, credits or deductions be reviewed? What should the criteria for extending such tax breaks be?

Tax exemptions, credits or reductions should be reviewed on an annual basis.

Criteria for extending tax breaks should include:

- Hiring a minimum number or percentage of employees from the local community
- Providing employees with a living wage and health care benefits within one year of employment
- Work project uses qualified contractors and provides job training
- The extent to which the tax base/valuation is increasing in value
- The commitment and demonstration of long-term capital investments (buildings, infrastructure), as well as, real and personal property investments
- The extent to which the tax-abated project is contributing to the growth, diversity and long-term prosperity of the community/region

- Meets local building codes and zoning ordinances

Should Michigan consider taxing retirement income or reducing other tax breaks it offers to senior citizens? Why or why not?

Michigan is a “tax-friendly” state for retirees, according to a recent study by Kiplinger’s. Michigan exempts \$81,840 a year in private retirement income per couple, in addition to Social Security, from its 3.9% state income tax. The Oakland County Commissioners are preparing for the “Silver Tsunami,” where officials have predicted “that Oakland County will experience an unprecedented older adult population growth and that by 2030 the number of seniors in the county will have doubled. Officials also predict that by 2020, almost half of Oakland County's 61 communities will have more seniors over age 65 than school-age children.”

We need to keep Michigan a state that is “tax-friendly”, especially in light of the forthcoming population boom within the older and retired citizen population. It would be counter-productive to increase taxes on retiree income when we should instead be working strategically to compete with other States to make Oakland County and the State of Michigan a preferred place for retirees and their families to live and relocate.

What role should the state play in the redevelopment of Detroit and other major cities?

The State of Michigan should be a partner in the redevelopment of Detroit, the metropolitan region and other major cities throughout Michigan. It is essential that we reverse the trend of being divisive. We must recognize that we have one major metropolitan region and the fate of Detroit – or core city – impacts us all. This entails the State of Michigan engaging in smart growth strategies to redirect public investments towards the redevelopment of Detroit and the metropolitan regions infrastructure. The State must also play a critical role in attracting private investment and public/private partnerships to foster a thriving metropolitan region with excellent education, job opportunities, housing and public transportation.

Have term limits for state legislators and executive branch officers improved governance in Michigan? What changes do you support?

The current term limits aren’t working. This year, 29 of 38 Senators and 34 of 110 State Representatives are term-limited. Frequent turnover doesn’t allow inexperienced lawmakers time to understand complex issues, so they become dependent on lobbyists. Experience with complex budgetary issues and legislative processes are essential from day one. In a recent twelve-year study by Wayne State faculty shows term limits for Michigan legislators have negatively impacted the state. “Frequent turnover in the Michigan Legislature is a major obstacle in understanding complex issues facing state government. Inexperienced legislators need time to adjust, learn the ropes and acquaint themselves with fellow legislators and lobbyists.

The ability to master complex issues and learn the nuances of the legislative process is expected from the first day of session. Major issues, such as the budget or education, are forced into their laps immediately. In the first few months of a new term, the newness engenders heightened confusion and a lack of direction in policy, especially among the inexperienced members”.

Should Michigan change the process by which it draws congressional and legislative boundaries after each census?

Yes. The current process for redistricting in Michigan only requires that the plans pass by a majority of the legislature, subject to veto by the Governor. However, almost always, the process is bogged down by the political partisanship and an effort to gain political advantage. As a result, we find the real decisions for redistricting are determined by the decisions of the Michigan Supreme Court. The more pertinent question is, "What redistricting process would provide for more transparency, inclusion of the public in the process and that protects voting rights and provides for diversity and communities of common interests?" If the redistricting process is to become one utilizing an independent commission, then those appointments should be independent of the incumbents; the composition should be large enough to reflect the diversity of the state; the process and procedures should be transparent, open and accessible to the public; and minority votes and representation should not be diluted.

If elected, what would you do to move Michigan toward full disclosure of campaign spending and the activities of independent issues organizations that have allowed anonymous spending to influence the outcome of elections?

Voters have the right to know what individuals and/or organizations are supporting a candidate or issue. We need stronger legislation to govern campaign spending and just as important, punitive measures must be implemented when the rules are intentionally ignored. All election related communications – broadcast, printed and telephone, email – within 60 days of a primary or general election should be considered campaign expenditures and they subject to Campaign Finance Act regulations and reporting requirements. All contributions and expenditures to independent issues organizations should be limited and reported. Robo-calls that name a candidate for public office should be required to include a disclaimer naming the sponsor of the call.

As a candidate, will you commit to release your real estate holdings and income tax records for the last two years at least 30 days before the election and, if elected, during your time in office?

If it becomes a state requirement to hold a state position, elected or otherwise.