



SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN FIRST
VOTER GUIDE

A MESSAGE FROM RON



Dear Southwest Michigan Community,

The year 2020 has been one of the most challenging many of us have faced collectively in our lifetime—from a global pandemic and record high unemployment to overdo calls to remedy centuries-old social and economic injustice. The shockwaves started in March and kept on coming.

While these challenges oftentimes left us feeling lost and heavily burdened, I challenge you: you are not powerless! You do have a choice that can make a difference. The November General Election is your opportunity to make 2020 end differently than it began. By voting for your candidates of choice in the upcoming election, you now have the ability to chart the course of our region's future.

I cannot guarantee that your candidate will win. In every election, it is inevitable someone must win; meaning someone will lose. Our political system says that the candidate with the most votes will win despite what conspiracy theorists say or supporters of the losing candidate tell themselves. If you choose to stay home and sit on your couch on Tuesday, November 3, 2020 and wake up on the morning of November 4 only to find out that the "other" candidate has won, you have no one to blame but yourself.

I hope you are as inspired to hit the polls as I am. Before you do, take some time to familiarize yourself with the candidates. The Southwest Michigan First team has asked candidates seeking the path of public service and who have courageously decided to run for important local, state, and national seats to respond to our questionnaire around their priorities. Our goal is to help you to get to know the candidates as leaders and individuals. For those who chose to respond, you will find their responses within the pages of this Voter Guide and posted on our [FIRST & 42](#) media resource.

Here at Southwest Michigan First, we believe the greatest force for change is a well-paying job. We can only achieve our goals of job creation and positive economic growth for our communities by working closely with government and bridging ties to the business community. Your decision at the polls will determine who we work with in the next two to four years. We need your voice to be heard.

The year 2020 will change on November 4. It is up to you to decide how that change will affect the future of our region. Make it happen.

Always forward.

Ron Kitchens
chief executive officer and senior partner
Southwest Michigan First

RUNNING FOR OFFICE IS...



U.S. Senate

Gary C. Peters (D)		4
John James (R)		5

U.S. Congress

Jon Hoadley (D)	6 th District	6
Fred Upton (R)	6 th District	7

State Representatives

Julie Rogers (D)	60 th District	8
Gary Mitchell PhD (R)	60 th District	9
Christine Morse (D)	61 st District	10
Bronwyn Haltom (R)	61 st District	11
Luke Howell (D)	63 rd District	12
Matt Hall (R)	63 rd District	13
Abigail Wheeler (D)	66 th District	14
Beth Griffin (R)	66 th District	*

Kalamazoo County Elected Officials

Richard C. Fuller III (D)	Sheriff	15
Shannon Bagley (R)	Sheriff	16
Meredith Place (D)	Clerk & Register of Deeds	17
Mona Lisa Watson (R)	Clerk & Register of Deeds	18
Thomas Whitener (D)	Treasurer	19
Mary Balkema (R)	Treasurer	20
Jason Wiersma (D)	Drain Commissioner	21
Joanna Croes (R)	Drain Commissioner	22
Gary Hahn (R)	Surveyor	*
Jeffrey S. Getting (D)	Prosecuting Attorney	*

Kalamazoo County Commission

Tami Rey (D)	District 1	23
Zac Bauer (D)	District 2	24
Tracy Hall (D)	District 3	*
Jen Strebs (D)	District 4	*
Andrew Smith (R)	District 4	25
Veronica McKissack (D)	District 5	26
Valarie Cunningham (R)	District 5	27
Jen Aniano (D)	District 6	28
Jeff Heppler (R)	District 6	29
Anthony Bates (D)	District 7	30
Roger Edward Tuinier (R)	District 7	*
John Gisler (R)	District 8	31
Keshia Dickason (D)	District 9	32
Dale Shugars (R)	District 9	33
Mike Quinn (D)	District 10	34
Charley Coss (R)	District 10	35
Dr. Fran Bruder Melgar (D)	District 11	36
Lisa Brayton (R)	District 11	37

Did not respond to Southwest Michigan First's request.*

GET TO KNOW

Gary C. Peters

info@petersformichigan.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

U.S. Senate

District Position Represents

State of Michigan

GARY'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"One of These Nights" by The Eagles;
Steely Dan.

Movie

"Top Gun."

Book

"Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance" by Robert M. Pirsig.

Food

Steak and Peanut M&Ms.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am running for office because I believe Michiganders need a strong, independent voice fighting for the needs of our middle class and small businesses. While I am proud of the results I have delivered, I am seeking re-election because I know there is much more work to do.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

I am focused on continuing to address our public health and economic crises and getting Michiganders the resources they need—that has to be our priority. Broadly, I'm focused on lowering drug costs and expanding health care; supporting small businesses and expanding opportunities in the skilled trades; and protecting our Great Lakes.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I'll work with anyone to deliver results for Michigan. That's why I am ranked as one of the most effective and bipartisan Senators. I recently passed my ninth bill through the Senate with bipartisan support this Congress, passing more standalone bills than any other Senator in the last two years.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Improving our economy starts with recovering from the economic crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic has created. That's why I fought to secure aid for small businesses, expanded unemployment assistance and eligibility, and proposed creating the National Institute of Manufacturing to boost manufacturing in Michigan and safeguard our supply chains.

GET TO KNOW

John James

john@johnjamesforsenate.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
U.S. Senate

District Position Represents
State of Michigan

JOHN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse"
movie soundtrack.

Movie
Any movie on Disney+ these days.

Book
"Hillbilly Elegy" by J.D. Vance.

Food
Chicken and rice.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

From the battlefield to the shop floor, I have worked my entire life placing service before self. I'm a husband, father, combat veteran, and businessman. I believe that, now more than ever, it's time for fresh, proven leadership in Washington to produce tangible results for Michigan.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Health care: Focusing on access to affordable, quality health care that is patient-centered, market-based, and protects people with preexisting conditions.
- Job Creation: Reducing (or eliminating) barriers to entry for entrepreneurs who want to create jobs in their community.
- National Security: Champion national security policies that secure our positioning as the leaders and best in the global marketplace.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I'm a combat veteran. As a Ranger-qualified Apache helicopter pilot, I led two Apache platoons in Operation Iraqi Freedom. I've also run a successful auto logistics company and created jobs and economic opportunity. I have experience leading people from all backgrounds in the toughest of environments and will use this experience when elected to the U.S. Senate.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

By reducing (or eliminating) problematic barriers to entry for entrepreneurs who want to create jobs in their community. We need to jump-start our economy safely especially due to the setbacks COVID-19 has caused. We also need to ensure we have fair and free trade that opens access to markets across the globe.

GET TO KNOW

Jon Hoadley

jon@jonhoadley.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

U.S. House of Representatives

District Position Represents

Michigan's 6th Congressional District

JON'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Something from Sugarland or Frankie Ballard, or anything by Jason Robert Brown or "Dear Evan Hansen."

Movie

"Bridesmaids."

Book

"The Fault in Our Stars."

Food

A good slice of pizza with black and green olives.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I'm running for Congress because I believe in putting people and community at the center of our decisions. Whether it's skyrocketing prescription drug costs, global threats to manufacturing and agriculture, or deteriorating air and water quality, our country is facing massive threats to our economic security and the future of our families. The politics and partisanship of Washington D.C. are making matters worse instead of better. It's time we face the future and our country's challenges head-on with fresh ideas.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Ensuring everyone has access to high quality, affordable health care and lowering prescription drug costs.
- Protecting our environment and taking urgent action to address climate change.
- Reforming our politics to fight corruption, end dark money, and protect the vote.
- Creating jobs and rebuilding the middle class.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

For far too long, partisanship in Washington D.C. has stood in the way of progress and relief for the people here at home, and if we want to change our politics, we need to change the politicians who are supposed to be fighting for us. As a member of the Michigan Legislature, I know what it's like to have to work with both sides of the aisle to find compromise, achieve progress, and get results for the people and communities I represent here in Southwest Michigan. I'll take this same bipartisan approach to Congress in order to deliver real results for communities here.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

As our economy becomes more unpredictable, financial security and stability is out of reach for Michiganders from all walks of life. The middle class of yesterday feels like it has been replaced with side hustles, benefit cuts, and outsourcing. In order to truly reinvigorate middle class jobs, we must work to find new solutions to the questions of the twenty-first century. We must create an American economy that invests in American workers through a living wage and new training programs and reinvigorates unions. We do best when we invest in people through training and education, and our programs are targeted to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and quality manufacturing.

GET TO KNOW

Fred Upton

info@uptonforallofus.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

U.S. House of Representatives

District Position Represents

Michigan's 6th Congressional District

FRED'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

I have always been a Springsteen fan and have listened to Sirius XM's "E Street Radio" channel back and forth to D.C. the last couple of weeks.

Movie

Drama—any Tom Hanks movie.

Book

"The Splendid and the Vile" by Erik Larson.

Food

Pizza—Specifically, that found at Silver Beach.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

The people of Southwest Michigan are salt of the earth, and they want leaders focused on helping Southwest Michigan. I have committed to working with everyone to deliver results, protect our communities, and solve problems. There are good people in both parties doing good work. We just need more of them.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

Addressing the unprecedented challenges facing our state: record high unemployment, a generational public health crisis, and a demand to improve racial disparities—those are my top priorities. We will rise to meet these challenges, just as we have always done. But we must do so by talking with folks—not at them.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

With a divided government, we need to work. That's why I am a leader of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, a group made up of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, that can help pass legislation to strengthen our economy, create jobs, and help our families and communities.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Earlier this year, we had one of the strongest economies in American history because we enacted pro-growth tax cuts and protected small businesses from job-killing regulations. We can get there again by working together on solutions that once again help put us toward strong economic growth.

GET TO KNOW

Julie Rogers

julie@juliemrogers.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

60th House District

JULIE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Anything by The Beatles, Bruce Springsteen, and Lady Gaga.

Movie

I love all genres and movies are a great escape. A favorite is "Love Actually."

Book

"For the Love of Cities" by Peter Kageyama.

Food

Breakfast tacos!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I first ran for office while advocating for low-cost/high-quality health care for my patients. As the only health care provider in my race, I'm uniquely positioned to represent the needs of our community. Michiganders deserve leaders who will work to unify our state rather than divide it.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

Improve health care, protect our environment, reform our criminal justice system, and expand human rights protections. As County Board Chair and Michigan Association of Counties Board member, I'm ready to hit the ground running in Lansing and work with colleagues from across the state to help move Kalamazoo and Michigan forward.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I will fight for improved mental health care coverage, public health resources, and investment in preparedness; clean up blighted land and champion renewable energy; support equitable policies that keep non-violent offenders out of the prison system, and expand the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for all LGBTQ+ Michiganders.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

As we reopen our economy, it's not enough to create jobs—we need to protect our workforce too. Michigan needs to expand Work Share eligibility which brings in federal dollars and helps avoid a larger unemployment insurance debt so that our businesses can maintain as much of their payroll as possible.

GET TO KNOW

Gary Mitchell PhD

Gary@GaryMitchell2020.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
State Representative

District Position Represents
60th House District

GARY'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"The Moon Represents My Heart."

Movie
Action and martial arts.

Book
Plutarch, Herodotus, Xenophon, and Thucydides, and Louis Lamour.

Food
I am a pretty big fan of Chinese food such as hand-pulled noodles, Biang Biang Mian and La Mian, and Dim Sum and dumplings.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

Opponent was the Chair of the Kalamazoo County Commission when they put the 911 tax on last week's ballot. Everyone wants 911 to work, so they voted to pass this extra tax, but since 911 has been funded for several years now in Kalamazoo, this money will be used for whatever pet project the County Commission could not get voters to vote for. I call this governing by trickery. This is similar to the scam our Governor has tried with the gas tax. I do not want to be governed by tricksters. I think our leaders should be honest and truthful and look out for the people's needs not their own.

This year, we will have the most important elections of my lifetime. Because of the pandemic and other events, we will have a chance to shrink our state government or grow it another big step. It will depend on which party gets control of our state legislature. I want to assure that enough conservatives get in office to guard our freedom. Every new government law is that much less freedom for the individual.

I am alarmed when I see videos of college students that have no knowledge of the history or even the government of our country. A republic form of government requires an educated populace willing to take part. We need to fix our schools.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My priorities, when elected in 2021, will be:

- Fix the budget without raising taxes. We may need to cut some projects that are not performing up to par. Why do we need a full-time legislature? Most states (40 of the 50) have less than full-time legislatures. What makes governing Michigan so much harder?
- Fix the roads without raising taxes. The legislature has had plans that could do this for many years.
- Fix the schools. We need to require that high school students learn about our nation, the good points as well as the bad. It seems now as if they are only taught about the bad parts. There is also a problem with students not testing competently in core subjects such as math and reading.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

It is the responsibility of the legislature to budget money for state government. I expect the allocation process to be a team effort and involve compromise and ingenuity. It will require building a working relationship with my fellow legislators for one thing. As for the schools, one start on this project would be to require students to be able to pass the test given to immigrants to obtain their citizenship.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The economy will generally support itself if the government keeps out of the way and does not overburden with taxes and regulations. This should not be done at the expense of the environment, our beautiful lakes and streams, woods, and parks. I am definitely in favor of a clean environment and sometimes the ways that have been used to force that are too burdensome and ill-designed.

GET TO KNOW

Christine Morse

info@vote4morse.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

61st House District

CHRISTINE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Instant Karma" by John Lennon.

Movie

"The Wizard of Oz."

Book

"All the Light We Cannot See" by Anthony Doerr.

Food

Tacos.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am a former attorney and current Kalamazoo County Commissioner running for State House to bring responsive, transparent leadership to the 61st district; to make progress on increasing access to affordable, quality health care and public education; and to protect our water resources.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Public education—Equitable funding and improved standards.
- Health care—Guaranteeing health care for Michiganders with preexisting conditions.
- Water—Addressing the long-term flooding in our community and preventing PFAS contamination.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

- Public education—As a state representative, I would vote to increase public education funding for both K-12 and higher education budgets.
- Healthcare—Pass a bill to require all Michigan health care plans to cover people with preexisting conditions.
- Water—Continue to work with the Texas Township Flooding Taskforce to usher through flooding relief for residents and work with other legislators to reinstate Polluter Pay.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I support retraining programs like Michigan Reconnect and Going PRO, and believe we need to implement New Deal-like programs similar to the Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration to sustainably bring people back to work modernizing our infrastructure and energy grid. I also want to make sure we are boosting state programs for small business loans in the COVID-19 recovery as well.

GET TO KNOW

Bronwyn Haltom

bronwyn@bronwynhaltom.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

61st House District

BRONWYN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Turning on any Frank Sinatra song makes my day better.

Movie

Some recent favorites are "Little Women" and "Get Out."

Book

"Little Fires Everywhere" by Celeste Ng, but my favorite will always be "To Kill a Mockingbird"

Food

Any type of pasta or dumpling.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I grew up in Southwest Michigan, I was educated here, and my husband and I own a small business here. Like many, I am worried about Michigan's future. Our elected leaders must continue focusing on the things that matter to Michiganders—preparing students for the jobs of tomorrow, building better roads, and growing our economy with good-paying jobs. Michigan is at a crossroads, and we must decide whether we will move forward with the pro-growth policies that revived our state or go backwards into another lost decade. I believe in Michigan and am willing to fight for an even brighter future, which is why I hope to serve our community and be a voice for our Southwest Michigan in Lansing.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Expand economic opportunity and foster an environment that encourages growth and investment in our state.
- Invest in education, skilled trades, and programs that prepare Michigan students for 21st-century jobs.
- Find real, long-term solutions to address Michigan's crumbling roads and infrastructure.
- Create an environment of more transparency, accountability, and cooperation in Lansing.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I believe that meaningful bipartisan reforms are possible when legislators put politics aside and do good on behalf of their constituents—and I will work with colleagues to craft policies that will move Michigan's economy forward and advance a pro-jobs agenda. Understanding the limitations on legislative authority and the challenges of divided government, I am motivated to seek commonsense solutions that bridge partisan divides and make a real difference in our communities.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I will lead on legislation that removes government barriers and regulatory hurdles from business owners and encourages companies to invest in Southwest Michigan. As our economy recovers from the effects of COVID-19, our state must be truly open for business, and I will work to repeal overly burdensome regulations, advance programs that connect talent to meaningful career pathways, and reform occupational licensing laws.

GET TO KNOW

Luke Howell

Howellfamily2005@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

63rd District

LUKE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Good Day" by Nappy Roots; "Just Breathe" by Pearl Jam.

Movie

Sci-fi, "Star Wars," Marvel movies, and "Forrest Gump."

Book

Just one? "The Bible," "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance," "Lord of the Flies," "Lord of the Rings," "Billy Budd," "Harry Potter," and Mark Twain.

Food

Pizza or fajitas.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I'm concerned about SB431 and gravel and mining operations circumventing the local control that zoning boards have to develop a plan for their community. I'm tired of divided politics and politicians that make decisions without community input or that only benefit special interests.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Mental health 911.
- Suicide by firearm prevention.
- Fix the roads and a comprehensive infrastructure plan.
- Police reform, including better mental health training and mental health support services.
- Small class sizes and better pay and benefits for all educators, including support staff.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

In everything I've ever done, I've tried my best to be an effective communicator, cooperative co-worker, and good listener. I want to tone down the divisive rhetoric and work with all of my colleagues, both red and blue, to make the 63rd a better place.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

- Fair pay.
- Raise the minimum wage.
- If COVID-19 has taught me anything, it is that far more of us are essential than we realized, and we need better pay, increased wages, and benefits that allow the shrinking middle class to invest again.

GET TO KNOW

Matt Hall

matt@electmatthall.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

63rd House District

MATT'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Sailing" by Christopher Cross.

"Sweet Freedom" by Michael McDonald.

"Taking it to the Streets" by Doobie Brothers.

"This is It" by Kenny Loggins.

"Still the One" by Orleans.

Movie

"Casino."

Book

"Art of the Deal" by Donald J. Trump.

Food

Schuler's Classic Roast Prime Rib of Beef

Schuler Cut Medium Rare.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

In my first term, I was appointed Chairman of the House Oversight Committee. My responsibility is to hold the Whitmer Administration accountable to the people of Michigan and to ensure that departments of government operate effectively, efficiently, and lawfully. I also serve on the House Education, Regulatory Reform, and Tax Policy Committees. My primary areas of expertise are in regulatory policy and administrative rules. I want to have a bigger impact on the regulatory policy and in the development of administrative rules for the departments. In May, I was appointed Chairman of the Joint Select Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a bipartisan committee of House & Senate Members that reviews the decisions made by the Whitmer Administration during the COVID-19 pandemic and makes recommendations on how Michigan can better prepare for a future pandemic and improve on decisions in the future. I want to see through these recommendations and make sure they are implemented through legislation.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Regulatory reform.
- Executive branch oversight.
- Tax policy that fosters job creation and economic activity.
- Workforce development.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I have laid the groundwork to do so during my first term. I will build on my work this first term. The first steps are committee assignments. I intend to return to the regulatory reform committee, oversight committee, and continue to stay engaged on any committees formed next term related to the COVID-19 pandemic. I also am looking to serve on the health policy committee next term because so much of our economy is health care-related. I also want to serve on the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules so I can better influence Administrative Rules that are developed from new legislation. I have been working on guidelines for the House Republicans on how to limit the administration's ability to create new administrative rules in the new legislation. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed a lot of the policy agenda that we were hoping to accomplish this term. If we are unable to accomplish occupational licensing reform, fund workforce development programs, and regulatory reform, then I will take these issues up and champion them next term.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

- Remove barriers to gaining occupational licenses.
- Repeal overly burdensome regulations.
- Make sure that new regulations are fair, science-based, and not overly burdensome.
- Oppose tax increases.
- Support policies like Going Pro and Reconnect that help workers develop skills that employers are looking for.

GET TO KNOW

Abigail Wheeler

abigail@wheelerforthe66th.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

State Representative

District Position Represents

66th District

ABIGAIL'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Work That" by Mary J. Blige.

Movie

Loves horror movies; "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark."

Book

"Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban."

Food

Tacos.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

As a firefighter/EMT who puts my community first, I also serve on the non-partisan Mattawan Village Council. As a first responder and local representative, I have seen the troubles that plague my community and want to work to improve the quality of life in the 66th district.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Bringing transparency and accountability to state government.
- Lowering prescription drug prices.
- Funding public education.
- Expanding broadband access.
- Protecting Michigan's greatest resource: our water.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I have a proven track record of finding common ground and improving my community as a member of the non-partisan Mattawan Village Council. I put people over politics. As a first responder, I help everyone in need. I will bring that same approach to Lansing and work toward commonsense solutions.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I believe we need a real strategy to address the pandemic in order to rebuild the economy. Let's grow the public health sector and lay the foundation for growth. I will fight for an economy that works for everyone where a person can work a 40-hour week and support a family.

GET TO KNOW

Richard C. Fuller III

kzoosheriff@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Sheriff

District Position Represents

Kalamazoo County

RICHARD'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"More Than a Feeling" by Boston and "Roll Me Away" by Bob Seger.

Movie

Comedy.

Book

Anything written by Malcom Gladwell.

Food

Spaghetti.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

My motivation comes from a desire to lead and teach all law enforcement to show dignity, respect, kindness, and compassion in all of our work.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Continue community connection and education.
- To further develop our community policing model.
- Expand the police contracting agreements with townships, cities, villages, and schools.
- Enhance our community and law enforcement connection through recruiting from the Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) police academy.
- Implement a crisis intervention team utilizing mental health and law enforcement staff.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

- Sheriff's office personnel are in the schools working with children. Deputies are tasked to visit all out-county schools.
- Educate the local municipalities of the benefits and cost savings of partnering to deliver services.
- Partnering with KVCC to teach and guide the next generation allows a better opportunity to recruit.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

As your Sheriff, my job is to maintain a highly educated, well trained, and equipped staff to enforce the laws in a fair and equitable way allowing for commerce to flow without interruptions, and without fear of loss or damage.

GET TO KNOW

Shannon Bagley

bagley4kzoosheriff@gmail.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Sheriff

District Position Represents

Kalamazoo County

SHANNON'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

This is a toss-up. I listen to Jazz, R&B, Rock and Country.

Movie

I love comedies, but "Remember the Titans" is #1.

Book

"Beowulf." I've enjoyed it since junior year English literature.

Food

I'm a pasta guy...lasagna.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am running for the office of Sheriff because I care about our community and the women and men who serve at the Sheriff's Department. I believe change is needed. The citizens of Kalamazoo County deserve leadership focused on service, not politics.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Build strong partnerships/relationships with communities.
- Data-driven approaches to problem-solving.
- Reducing recidivism.
- School safety and youth initiatives.
- Fiscal responsibility and transparency.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The success of an organization in achieving its goals and objectives is determined through relationships. Relationships are successful (both internal and external) when communication is the priority. Meaningful and consistent engagement throughout the organization builds trust and creates an atmosphere of legitimacy. This approach empowers people and makes them part of the process.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Safe communities create opportunities for growth. Partnering with residents to find solutions to the issues we face in our neighborhoods is critical. Fostering deeper collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, social services, non-profits, and faith-based organizations to engage in community outreach, youth initiatives, and reducing recidivism is a priority.

GET TO KNOW

Meredith Place

vote4meredith@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Clerk & Register of Deeds

District Position Represents

Kalamazoo County

MEREDITH'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Won't Back Down" by Tom Petty.

Movie

A Christmas classic: "It's a Wonderful Life."

Book

I love a good novel, anything by Liane Moriarty.

Food

Ritter's Ice Cream!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I was born and raised in a small town in Eastern Iowa. Growing up, I learned that hard work and determination were recipes for success and caring for your neighbors was a moral responsibility. I was raised by a public school teacher and disabled Vietnam veteran who through their experiences, taught me that politics is personal.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Improve access to and participation in our democracy.
- Expand voter outreach and engagement.
- Modernize the Clerk/Register's office.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

As Clerk & Register of Deeds, I will implement Proposition 3 and work to establish satellite offices in densely populated areas where we see voter suppression giving new registrants another place to register in person and make voting more convenient. I will work with already established groups, neighborhood associations, and local clerks to coordinate voter education efforts and innovative ways to make voting easier. I will prioritize the security and integrity of our elections while utilizing technology to improve other services.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The Clerk & Register of Deeds office is integral to the functionality of our county and our local economy. As Clerk & Register of Deeds, I'll partner with citizens and outside agencies to improve processes and make information more readily available to the public. I will prioritize modernizing and upgrading our real estate record-keeping and search technology to include a mobile experience for those using tablets and smartphones, enabling anyone at a real estate closing to quickly confirm whether additional relevant documents have been recorded. This work will help our realtors and local banks to be more efficient.

GET TO KNOW

Mona Lisa Watson

watson4kcalcounty@gmail.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Clerk & Register of Deeds

District Position Represents

Kalamazoo County

MONA LISA'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Made for This" by Carrollton.

Movie

Action. My favorite movie is "Doctor Strange."

Book

The Bible.

Food

Vegan nachos with Daiya deluxe cheese sauce and pecan "ground beef"—so yummy.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

As the granddaughter of a Civil Rights activist and war veteran, I was raised with the values of integrity at the ballot box, efficient delivery of clerk services, and accessibility to vital records. I am running to ensure these values are upheld by the next County Clerk & Register of Deeds.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My priorities are integrity, efficiency, and accessibility. I am qualified, ready, and prepared to enforce policies and procedures, leverage innovation and technology, and maintain the integrity of voting and vital records to ensure that state statutes are followed, and laws are adhered to.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

- Partnering with clerks throughout the County and County elections and vital records staff to ensure that every vote is counted.
- Identify reliable election auditing procedures.
- End partisan gerrymandering.
- Create a council of community "Idea Champions" to offer a more visible and engaged County Clerk & Register of Deeds office.
- Expand Medicaid and Medicare Coverage, offering a public option.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I will work closely with the County Treasurer, Administration, County Board of Commissioners, and others to establish an equilibrium between clerk services and the budget. Priority-based budgeting will be the norm going forward which includes ensuring that our employment pay practices, the cost of services, and other efforts support the goal of creating a more economically viable community. For example, I will partner with the County Treasurer in order to address property tax issues for residents who have been economically impacted by COVID-19.

GET TO KNOW

Thomas Whitener

Thomas@Thomas4KzooTreasurer.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Treasurer

District Position Represents

Kalamazoo County

THOMAS'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Bishop Briggs, AC/DC, and Foo Fighters when I'm working. I have a 15-month old, so lots of "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Wheels on the Bus" as well!

Movie

Comedy; real life is drama enough these days.

Book

"The Deficit Myth" by Stephanie Kelton, though I'm also working back through "Dune" by Frank Herbert.

Food

Ice Cream—can't get enough of it.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I'm running to help address the affordable housing crisis in Kalamazoo County, to bring transparency and accountability back to the treasurer's office, and to support homeownership in the diverse communities across our county.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Working with homeowners to ensure everyone has a fair chance to stay in their home.
- Changing the processes and criteria for tax foreclosures to remove racial disparities from the system.
- Ensuring that the government of Kalamazoo County reinvests in the diverse communities that live here.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The Treasurer's office has wide latitude to work with homeowners to establish payment plans, target enforcement, and set the application criteria for buying Land Bank properties. I intend to review the current practices here and change them to more equitably support the diverse communities in Kalamazoo County.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Homeownership is the single best way for people to build wealth. By supporting homeownership and affordable housing, the tax base will grow, the citizens of Kalamazoo County will better be able to lift their own fortunes, and a durable economic stimulus will be created. It won't be instantaneous, but this kind of growth is more permanent and better for everyone.

GET TO KNOW

Mary Balkema

marybalkema@sbcglobal.net



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Treasurer

District Position Represents
Kalamazoo County

MARY'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"God Bless the U.S.A.," featuring Lee Greenwood.

Movie
"Life is Beautiful."

Book
"To Kill a Mockingbird."

Food
Layla's Cool Pops and Pho on the Block.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am a bean counter with a deep passion for service. The position of County Treasurer is to be the manager of the county's funds but also allows me to have meaningful interactions with community members and help them develop plans that have a real impact on their life—from getting finances in order and catching up on taxes to evaluating if people have the right paperwork in order to have a homestead exemption to estate planning.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Sound fiscal management.
- Foreclosure prevention.
- Revitalizing Kalamazoo/strengthening the tax base.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I've laid the groundwork for success in my 20+ years of public service in our community both as a City Commissioner and as County Treasurer since 2007. Shortly after I took office, the country experienced the 2008 recession which took a decade of hard work to fully recover from. Despite the challenges that faced us, I was able to develop a plan to strengthen the tax base, return blighted properties to productive use, and stabilize property values. I became a statewide leader in foreclosure prevention and championed legislation to keep families in their home, but also achieved the unprecedented goal of zero owner-occupied tax foreclosures in our urban cities. My number one goal is preventing foreclosure and keeping families in their homes.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our community is facing hurdles that are expected to be worse than the 2008 recession. I immediately took swift action to reassure taxpayers that no homeowners would lose their homes to tax foreclosure because of it. I've worked with a bipartisan group on legislation to make sure all Michiganders are in the best position to financially recover.

GET TO KNOW

Jason Wiersma

jasonwiersma2020@gmail.com



Affiliation
Democrat

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner

District Position Represents
Kalamazoo County

JASON'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

U2's "Beautiful Day" and George Benson's "Give Me the Night" .

Movie

Sci-Fi! "Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope."

Book

"The Urban Treasure Hunter" by Michael Chaplan.

Food

Anything my wife makes. She is an amazing cook!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am running for Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner because it is vital to have a candidate with knowledge, experience, integrity, and empathy. I provide these key qualities for this elected position. I have worked for over three years directly under Pat Crowley, Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner, as the county's Soil Erosion and Sediment Control (SESC) Agent. I work with homeowners, builders, local municipalities, other agencies such as the Road Commission, and EGLE (Environmental and Great Lakes Energy) in efforts to protect the waters of the state and adjacent properties during construction activities. I provide public education, assist flood mitigation, federal permit inspections, and county drain inspections. I am looking forward to doing even more to serve the residents of Kalamazoo County and meeting the needs of our community.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

I will provide responsible stewardship for all of Kalamazoo County drainage districts and will position the office towards proactive management instead of a more reactive approach to drain issues. I will encourage the implementation of modern stormwater techniques. I will partner with local and state agencies to combat flooding for the health and safety of all Kalamazoo County residents.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I will be working with state and local officials and Kalamazoo County residents, providing guidance and addressing public concerns. I will manage this department with integrity and resourcefulness. I will work to develop a program that provides systematic preventative maintenance and rapid response to drain issues. In my current role as the SESC Agent for Kalamazoo County working for the Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner, I have improved inspection and safety protocols, implemented updated technology to promote efficiency, and fostered open dialogue to develop long-term relationships with these governmental departments, officials, and the residents of Kalamazoo County, and look forward to expanding on this.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

A successful Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner works with many governmental departments and officials impacting growth in the economy. This office encourages more partnerships, especially in seeking grants. In conjunction with the Kalamazoo County Road Commission on projects and permitting, the office provides vital infrastructure for Kalamazoo County residents. This office works in tandem with the Michigan Department of Environment and Great Lakes Energy (EGLE) at the state level on construction projects and in efforts to protect our state's natural resources. This office also works directly with homeowners, builders, developers, and local units on construction projects that directly impact economic growth and value-added improvements for the residents of Kalamazoo County.

GET TO KNOW

Joanna Croes

JoannaLCroes@gmail.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Drain Commissioner

District Position Represents
Kalamazoo County

JOANNA'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"You Say" by Lauren Daigle.

Movie
"Phantom of the Opera."

Book
"The Goal" by Eliahu M. Goldrall and Jeff Cox.

Food
Strawberry Rhubarb Pie.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am passionate about seeing qualified and honest leaders with the best interest of the public at heart taking office. I decided to run for office to be the change I want to see. I have had a love for math, science, and nature since long before graduating with my engineering degree. This position seemed like the perfect opportunity to combine my love for helping people, natural science, and technical problem-solving.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My top priorities are to fight flooding in our communities to support farmers and protect low-income families and lake houses. Also, to clean our water by managing industrial runs offs to keep PFOS and bacteria out of our water. Last but not least, I will strive to be proactive to prevent disasters before they occur.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The Drain Commissioner office operates within the boundary of the Drain Code of 1956. One of the largest constraints is a maintenance budget cap of \$5,000 per linear mile per year for a drain. This makes it incredibly important to be smart with our money to maximize output and community benefit. It is also imperative when considering new projects to assess if proper maintenance is realistic within the pre-allotted budget.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The Drain Commissioner's office routinely hires contractors for the maintenance of the drains and civil engineering consultants. I am a strong advocate for utilizing Kalamazoo County talent and business resources whenever possible. Not only does this provide employment opportunities in Kalamazoo county, but it also puts people to work on our land that is most familiar with its history.

GET TO KNOW

Tami Rey

friendsoftamirey@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 1

TAMI'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

If I had to choose, I would say "God Favored Me," "Brown Skin Girl," anything neo soul, WIN and Savage remix!

Movie

Favorite movie of all time for me is "What's Love Got to Do With It."

Book

My most recent favorite is "Just Mercy" by Bryan Stevenson!

Food

Pizza (Bimbo's), pepperoni, double cheese!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I have worked with my neighbors on the ground organizing around the most pressing issues. I spend my days working to empower my community to advocate for themselves and using the power of a collective voice. I understand that our issues will only be resolved through effective, transparent, and inclusive policy.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My campaign is about inclusive, transparent, and equitable actions. It is my goal to restore the trust between the County Commission and its residents. If elected, my top priorities will be the expansion of affordable housing, addressing the flooding, and working to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce for county employees.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I plan to accomplish these goals by working together with my colleagues as well as with other governmental departments and officials. Interagency collaboration is not only vital to our success, it also demonstrates our commitment to the people we serve. This can also be accomplished through the budget.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Investing in and supporting our local economy is a critical component to any great community. If elected, I plan to take a real look at our budget and re-appropriate funds. We, as a community, need to also seriously develop a strategic plan that includes an economic recovery plan.

GET TO KNOW

Zac Bauer

zac.d.bauer@gmail.com



Affiliation
Democrat

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 2

ZAC'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"Under Pressure" by Queen.

Movie
"All the President's Men."

Book
"A Farewell to Arms."

Food
Anything off the grill.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

Kalamazoo County is a great place to live; I love it here. However, our local government needs to focus on issues that impact our residents' quality of life. We need leaders committed to the role and not the next opportunity.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- COVID-19 economic recovery.
- Increase access to affordable housing.
- Develop a long-term solution to the flooding.
- Address the flooding issues in downtown Kalamazoo.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

A growing tax base is required for our community to thrive. We need to keep families in their homes and increase new homeownership. By leveraging federal and state funds, with local philanthropy, Kalamazoo County can help support small business development. Additionally, we need a county-wide workforce training plan for workers who lost their jobs due to COVID-19. To increase access to affordable housing, we need more affordable single-family housing and multiple family rentals. We must reauthorize and increase the homelessness millage to help support LIHTC (Low-Income Housing Tax Credits) development and explore low equity co-ops, collective housing models, and mixed-use development.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

- Support workforce training programs, affordable single-family housing construction in the City of Kalamazoo's core neighborhoods, and affordable multi-family rental construction with gap funding to support LIHTC projects.
- Seek and support construction and infrastructure projects.

GET TO KNOW

Andrew Smith

andrew.128.smith@outlook.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 4

ANDREW'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Vote for Me" by Chicago because you need to have some levity in this line of work.

Movie

"Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back."

Book

"What's So Great About America" by Dinesh D'Souza.

Food

Right now one of them is La Pinata's Burrito Arizona.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

This county has been my home for ten years. I see it as capable of achieving so much more in fostering and protecting its physical, social, and human capital. To assist in this, the County government should focus on what it is constitutionally mandated to do, and beyond that, stay out of the way.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My top priorities are public safety, creating a budget prioritizing essential services while eliminating wasteful spending, and not raising taxes and lowering them if possible to help promote economic recovery and growth.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

It is the County Commission's job to give direction to policy and carefully oversee how the administration is carrying it out. With my colleagues on the Commission, I will work with the administrator on a new budget and will review how it has worked out as soon as the data is available.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Getting the budget in better order will eliminate the "need" for new taxes and fees. It's even possible that we could roll them back somewhat. That will mean people of every station in life will have more money and will utilize it better than the government can.

GET TO KNOW

Veronica McKissack

mckissack4commissioner@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 5

VERONICA'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Smile" by Kirk Franklin and "I Can't Breathe" by H.E.R.

Movie

Drama and Comedy. My favorite movie is "Life" starring Eddie Murphy and Martin Lawrence.

Book

One of my favorite books is "Mom & Me & Mom" by Maya Angelou.

Food

My favorite food is seafood—crab legs to be specific.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

My motivation for running for the District 5 seat on the Kalamazoo County Commission is to diversify decision-making and promote equity through policy.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

A County Commissioner promotes decisions that benefit public interest including budget and local policy. My top priorities will be to work with other elected Commissioners bringing collaborative strategies to maximize County resources and accessibility to all County residents.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

By promoting transparency to reduce the culture of distrust within the County and bringing forth equitable policies that put County welfare over political agendas, I will promote accountability by demanding compliance with laws and regulations and impartially applying them to all departments.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I will support initiatives that will bring opportunities to utilize land and bring new jobs to our community.

GET TO KNOW

Valarie Cunningham

valarie4commissioner@gmail.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 5

VALARIE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Worship and inspirational songs.

Movie

Love and drama romance—"The Bodyguard" with Whitney Houston.

Book

"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Steven Covey.

Food

Fried chicken, pizza, and French fries.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am running to represent you in Kalamazoo for County Commissioner because I am passionate about our community and want to do my part to ensure it has a healthy future!

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My top three priorities are families, fiscal responsibility, and the future state of unity for Kalamazoo County residents. Vibrant communities have healthy families who have support and stability which are key to their overall well-being. This includes educational equity, access to needed mental health services, and healing community trauma. Having 17 years of experience managing limited budgets, fundraising, and prioritizing necessities will position me to support the integrity of the current fiscal structure. Lastly, but equally important, is the future of our county, where I see people taking ownership of the dream of a unified community.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

I believe serving as a liaison between residents and the government is the most effective way to ensure the needs of both are met. For over 20 years, I have been a bridge builder, and I am a bridge between cultures, businesses, and religious institutions. So in my role as a liaison, I know how to bring clarity to residents surrounding existing and arising policies, expectations, and solutions. It is important to foster an environment of unity and peace which is a role I am comfortable with. I anticipate providing support where needed by helping to decrease tensions between the residents and the government department and official.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Having 17 years of experience managing limited budgets, fundraising, and prioritizing necessities will position me to support the integrity of the current fiscal structure and support the economy within our community.

GET TO KNOW

Jen Aniano

missaniano@gmail.com



Affiliation
Democrat

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 6

JEN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
I love all music!

Movie
"Hook."

Book
"Harry Potter."

Food
Pizza.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am currently serving as the Commissioner. I want to continue to bridge gaps between community services and public schools. I also want to continue to propel the county forward with a progressive policy that helps everyone.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My goal for 2021, if given the opportunity, will be to put forth a millage to support veterans, continue to push policy to reform policing and criminal justice in the county, continue to bridge gaps between County community services and schools so that our partnerships may better serve our students in Kalamazoo County, and to continue my commitment to making the County government a place of employment committed to equity and diversity.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

All of my goals fit within the purview of my position.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I work hard to advocate for union labor on our big building projects like the upcoming justice complex. I believe when workers have access to unions that they are paid a fair wage. Those fair wages are then used to buy food, goods, and services. This is one way a County Commission board deeply impacts the economy.

GET TO KNOW

Jeff Heppler

augustapd@tds.net



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 6

JEFF'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Proud To Be an American" by Lee Greenwood.

Movie

"McLintock!" with John Wayne.

Book

No favorite.

Food

Prime rib.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

To make Kalamazoo County a great place for people to come work and play.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

To keep taxes low and provide good services to the people, businesses, and companies that come to Kalamazoo County—as we provide a safe place for all people and business that come to Kalamazoo.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The County Commission is the funder of County operations and has the responsibility to make sure that the County is being run responsibly.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

- By making Kalamazoo County a place where people, business, and companies want to come and grow.
- As we make a safe and efficient well-run community were people want to be.

GET TO KNOW

Anthony Bates

anthony@batesforkzoocounty.com



Affiliation
Democrat

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 7

ANTHONY'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Let's go with favorite artists: "Skrillex, Deadmau5, and Avicii—to name a few.

Movie

"Blade Runner" (1982 release).

Book

Anything by James Patterson. I love mystery novels.

Food

Lobster!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I want to be the voice for change that, so far, my community has not had. We, the people, deserve to be heard, and our concerns noted. As the next Commissioner, I will not only listen to these issues but act upon them, because issues concerning livelihood, infrastructure, farming, community values, business growth, and the environment are not just important to me—they are important to the district. As a Commissioner, I will find solutions to our most troubling problems. Everyone deserves a chance at a better life, one where you do not have to worry about the necessities and public works. These issues affect everyone. I will make sure the community's voice is heard, and I plan to work hard to bring change to the 7th district.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

The top three out of the six priorities that I have listed would be livelihood, infrastructure, and environment. Working to improve each of these three categories will help to improve the lives of thousands of residents in Kalamazoo County. These three policies are connected because one will not survive without the other. Our livelihood, how we live, and what opportunities that are given to us to reach higher goals, is affected by our health. Our health is affected by the environment and having access to clean drinking water and fresh air to breath which is supplied by our infrastructure. I look to help improve how we live.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

Hard work and communication. Communication is the most important thing when it comes to building Kalamazoo County up. Staying in contact with local municipality leaders monthly to work on ideas that can impact their communities in a positive way is the first step. There needs to be a strong working relationship between leadership at all County levels.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The current situation has put a financial strain on County services. Any time an event occurs that can repeat the current financial situation puts the County government in a tough spot. Cutting jobs should never be an option; cutting the budget should be a last resort. As a Commissioner, I would look to create a way that we can increase the County reserves so our government could last a minimum of six months without any incoming revenue. We need to look into future planning and projects and find ways that we can continue to improve our County while also setting money aside for an emergency. We need to be able to draw in new business to help the County grow. The airport project is one of the things that will help that.

GET TO KNOW

John Gisler

jgisler5@comcast.net



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 8

JOHN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
Anything by Chuck Berry.

Movie
"You've Got Mail."

Book
"Basic Economics" by Thomas Sowell.

Food
Ice Cream.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I want to pay back to the Kalamazoo community for the environment it provided for my family to flourish. We moved here in 1971. Our kids received first-class educations and grew to become solid citizens with families of their own. I want to pass that environment forward.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

The government should prioritize spending. It can no longer provide everything to everyone all the time. This may mean lower-priority services are scaled back and some even eliminated.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The current Kalamazoo County budget is \$110 million. Any new spending should come out of this existing budget. Taxes should support only "essential" services. We must prioritize spending!

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The government should not pick winners and losers—just contribute to an environment where businesses can start, grow, and prosper.

GET TO KNOW

Keshia Dickason

Keshia.Dickason@gmail.com



Affiliation
Democrat

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 9

KESHIA'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"Hope" by Emeli Sané.

Movie
Romance. Comedy. My favorite movie is "Meet the Parents."

Book
"To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee.

Food
My favorite food is chicken noodle soup and a turkey sandwich.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

My motivation for running for office comes from a deep longing for me to make a change in the community for the greater good of the people. I know that we are stronger together and making sure that we as a community work effectively together will be the most important thing that we can do as leaders.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My top three priorities for seeking the office of county commissioner for District 9 Texas Township and Oshtemo are:

- Maintaining a healthy community.
- Protecting our environment.
- Ensuring responsible redevelopment.

If I am selected as County Commissioner, I hope to accomplish unity and positive communication between all County Board members as well as the community.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

In my role as District Manager for the Michigan Senate in the office of Senator McCann, I have learned how to work and assist other offices to make sure that our constituents are well represented and given the correct information they need to be successful. I will continue to utilize these goals that I use in my current role as District Manager for Senator McCann's 20th Senate District Office. Our Senate and government offices work together daily to help constituents, and these are the same skills and talents that I will bring as County Commissioner. I am a leader in the community who stands for the people and will continue to be the voice of the people to make our community safe, healthy, and prosperous while in this office.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

The growth of the economy comes from the leaders and community members. Leaders and stakeholders have to use strategic plans and well-thought-out budgets to make sure that the growth of the economy is successful. I will encourage others in the community to buy locally and support local and small business owners. Encouraging community-wide small business fairs will also bring awareness to our community and help others to support those businesses that may go unnoticed.

GET TO KNOW

Dale Shugars

daleshugars@gmail.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 9

DALE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"Nobody" by Casting Crowns.

Movie
"Coach Carter" starring Samuel L. Jackson, directed by Thomas Carter.

Book
"Borrowing Brilliance" by David Kord Murray.

Food
Salads.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

As a CPA with 23 years of experience in public service, I have a servant heart with an understanding of the importance of fiscal responsibility at all levels of government. I am running to bring service and accountability to the Commission rather than politics and political pandering!

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Restore fiscal responsibility by eliminating paying volunteers, health insurance for part-time employees (including Commissioners), and excessive out-of-state travel for Commissioners!
- Support efforts in managing and preventing floods throughout the County.
- Emphasize "best practices" in governance! The board should be responsible for policy, and staff for daily operations. Together they should establish the budget.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

Develop an environment [that encourages] listening and respecting each other when addressing every issue. We cannot have what an independent consultant hired by this Commission stated in their report: "Decisions appear to be made as well as avoided for political reasons as opposed to overall County welfare or effective Board leadership practice."

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

Have the County government operate as efficiently and effectively as possible without discourse on national issues which divide the Commission and community. Developing a positive image through focusing on local issues the Commission has responsibilities for, along with keeping taxes at a low or competitive rate, will help economic development!

GET TO KNOW

Mike Quinn

mikedquinn@sbcglobal.net



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 10

MIKE'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

Irish music: "Óró Sé do Bheatha Bhaile" energizes me!

Movie

"The Guard" (2011), starring Brendan Gleeson.

Book

"Quality, Productivity, and Competitive Position" by Dr. W.E. Deming.

Food

Steak, mores, and Two Hearted Ale!

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I joined the Marines in 1966. To my surprise, I made it back in one piece after a tour in Vietnam, and in gratitude, chose productivity and service as lifetime goals. I served in the Peace Corps, Nicaragua 1975-77. I am greatly honored to be serving on the County Commission.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

My priorities are:

- To help the people here who need help the most.
- To take care of our County's financial stability and infrastructure.
- To build resilience in our community.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

Each year, Commissioners as a board work with the administration to set a budget, roughly \$100 million. How we allocate the resources available is actually the expression of our goals. We set policies and appoint or hire the best people we can get to do the work.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I'm a small business owner and a member of the Workforce Development Committee. We must focus on facilitating recovery from COVID-19 as well as economic growth. Different problems require different approaches. Here, we're blessed with lots of innovators, and we'll thrive if we stay alert for the best ideas and opportunities.

GET TO KNOW

Charley Coss

charley@votecoss.com



Affiliation

Republican

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 10

CHARLEY'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong.

Movie

"The Producers" directed by Mel Brooks.

Book

"Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy" by John le Carré.

Food

Fish & Chips.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

Our County Commission is dysfunctional and mismanaged. Our County is growing and we need a partner for the business community, not an adversary. As a small business person, I will include all stakeholders, including businesses large and small. We need a new team to lead the commission.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Support our law enforcement and first responders.
- Prioritize and protect seniors and our vulnerable populations.
- Partner with our business community—pro-jobs.
- Support our veterans.
- Better budgeting, including following through on audit recommendations.

Times are unique and need unique thinking.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

We need to get back to basics and follow the core responsibilities of the County government. Reviewing the current audits and recommendations will be a good start. We will need a team approach to move many of the necessary changes forward, this will require working across the aisle with all commissioners. We can do this if we have the will.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

We know one of the most important single items in a business's decision to expand or relocate is the potential regulatory burden. I would suggest reviewing and removing or reducing unnecessary regulations providing opportunities for job growth and capital reinvestment. These are the basics of leadership. We can do better.

GET TO KNOW

Dr. Fran Bruder Melgar

vote4fran@gmail.com



Affiliation

Democrat

Position Seeking

Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents

District 11

FRAN'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song

"Time Of Our Lives" by Chawki.

Movie

"The Princess Bride;" "Swimming With Men,"
"National Treasure," and "The Incredibles."

Book

The "Harry Potter" series; "Lord Willing?
Wrestling with God's Role in My Child's
Death" by Jessica Kelley; "Reaching Out"
by Henri Nouwen.

Food

Massaman curry, chocolate, and ice cream.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I am motivated to address the medical needs of our County. As a physician working in a low income clinic, I see how clean air and water and access to affordable housing and to medical and mental health services affect the quality of life of my patients on a daily basis.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

- Assuring safe drinking water and clean air.
- Addressing issues of public safety and Black Lives Matter.
- Bringing community leaders together to address systemic racism and supporting our public safety officers with mental health workers who can deescalate situations with people in crisis.
- Preserving/expanding our green space and bike paths.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

The County budget is reviewed and approved by the Commission. Each Commissioner is involved in committees within County government. I will focus my attention on the health impact of the budget proposals and how they affect all county residents.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

In the wake of coronavirus, people are rethinking priorities, lifestyle choices, and what matters to them. Resilience and teamwork will be key to our recovery from this economic downturn. I would support vocational education programs to train workers for a new wave of renewable energy jobs.

GET TO KNOW

Lisa Brayton

friendsoflisabrayton@gmail.com



Affiliation
Republican

Position Seeking
Kalamazoo County Commissioner

District Position Represents
District 11

LISA'S FAVORITE THINGS

Campaign Song
"Proud To Be An American" by Lee Greenwood.

Movie
"Pulp Fiction" by Quentin Tarantino.

Book
"The Secret" by Robin Byrne.

Food
Mexican.

WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING FOR OFFICE?

I have always been an advocate for folks. I started a charity in 2002, which fed, sheltered, and gifted Kalamazoo Country Day and Portage Public Schools for approximately 16 years. I have sat on several PTO boards, raising thousands of dollars for both schools as well. I was a team mom for both of my boys' sports teams for eight years. I have run our dental practice for well over 20 years. The Commission Board is lacking fiscal responsibility and people who truly care for folks. Thus, with my experience and determination, I am hoping to make a huge difference for our wonderful people in our community.

WHAT ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITIES WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THIS ELECTED OFFICE?

One of my top priorities is to lower the taxes of our elderly population. I find it so horrible that these folks are on a limited income, and yet their taxes increase so much that they find themselves having to leave their beloved home. I will be determined to hold people accountable, to be fiscally responsible.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH THESE GOALS WITHIN THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

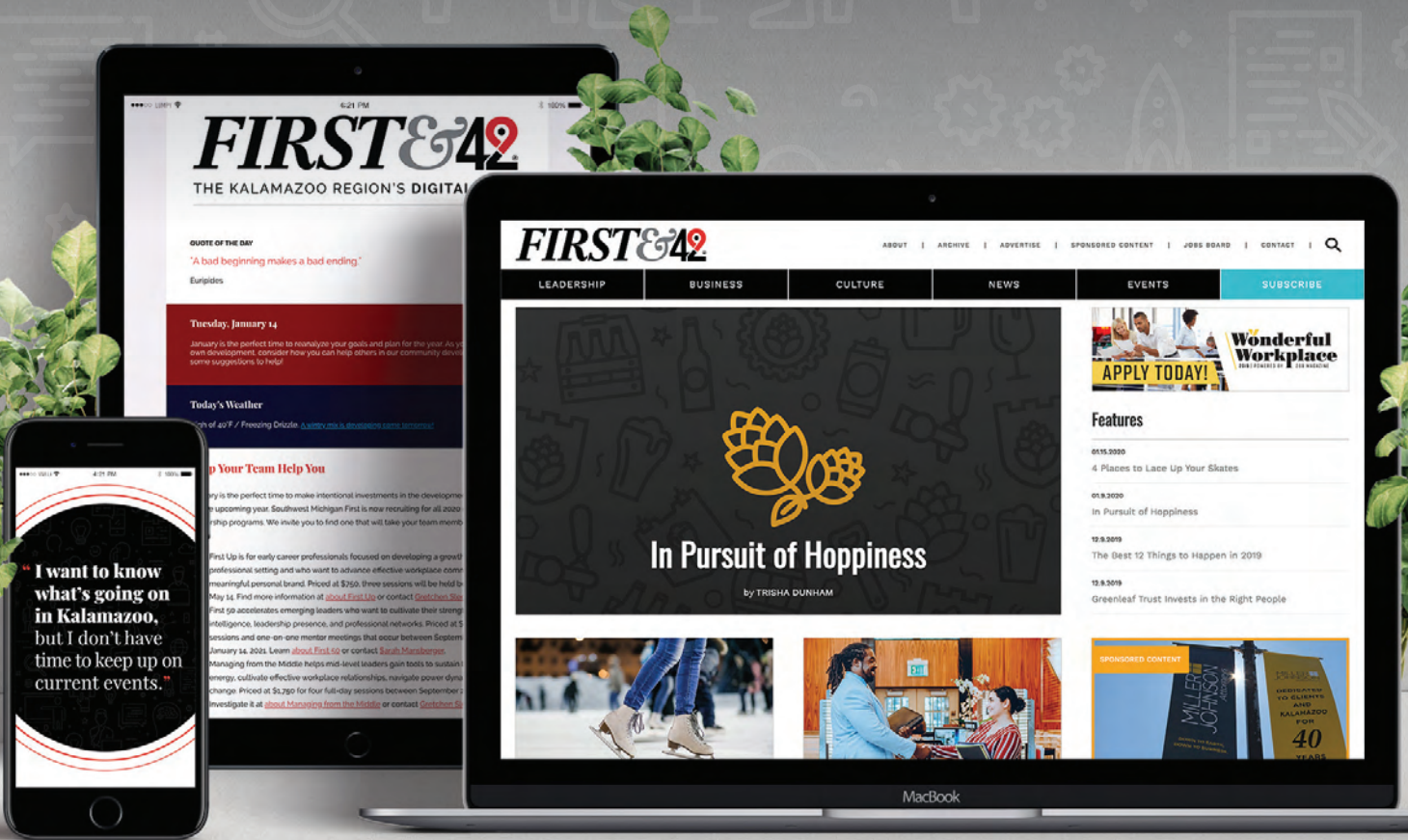
I plan on working with all Commissioners to achieve these goals. I plan on working hard for all of our people in our community.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE ECONOMY IF ELECTED?

I plan to:

- Encourage small business growth and positive work environments.
- Bring my knowledge as a health care professional to continue to educate people on what to do per the COVID-19 crisis.
- Work and bridge the gap between the two parties.

“I want to know what’s going on, but I don’t have time to keep up on current events.”



SUBSCRIBE FOR FREE AND GET
THE KALAMAZOO REGION'S FASTEST & MOST FUN READ
ACROSS ALL OF YOUR FAVORITE DEVICES!

FIRST&42
THE KALAMAZOO REGION'S DIGITAL DAILY

READ AND SUBSCRIBE AT FIRSTAND42.MEDIA