

# **Report to the Michigan Women's Commission**

by M'Lynn Hartwell - "Traverse for Women"

## **INTRO**

Last fall a group of women met to discuss the idea of how we may build a women's community by and for women in NW Michigan. Our first social gathering was at the Park Place Hotel on a Wednesday night in November of 2003. In May of 2004 we decided to create an online presence as well where women could gather, talk, and plan events and gatherings. Our group became known as "Traverse for Women." We have gathered for dinner, socializing, hiking, camping, and kayaking ... sometimes with our children, sometimes without.

After receiving my invitation to testify here today I sent out an e-mail to about 250 women, as well as placed a number of telephone calls to women in our area. Today I will share some of the more common concerns and issues affecting the lives of these women.

## **INVISIBILITY**

The most common theme that I heard was that of Invisibility. The women who live outside of metro areas are many -- yet geographically disbursed -- creating a political and social invisibility that exacerbates every concern and challenge presented to them.

## **HEALTH CARE**

At the top of concerns list is a declining level of access to adequate health care, both physical and emotional. Women's insurance coverage is either diminishing or disappearing altogether.

This year my insurance coverage as a single employee business owner was scheduled to rise to nearly \$850.00 a month. I could no longer justify the cost of insurance, and for several months I too joined the growing ranks of the uninsured in Michigan. Ultimately I found a plan that at least covers my catastrophic medical needs. I'm fortunate. Sadly, most uninsured women and children receive little or no health care at all -- until it becomes life threatening.

Adding insult to injury, Michigan's poor women are trapped in a Catch 22. On one hand they are denied the right to reproductive freedom through state laws that prohibit medicaid coverage for abortions, while on the other hand they are punished for bearing children under new welfare reform laws.

It is cruel that the people who have the lowest ability to pay, are charged the highest rates, while those who have the funds to afford health insurance coverage enjoy the benefits of lower costs? Investing in keeping people healthy and productive in Michigan makes good financial and business sense.

## **EDUCATION**

While sports superstars earn exorbitant salaries, our schools remain understaffed and our educators - the people who inarguably and ultimately will create the Michigan of tomorrow -- are

undervalued and underpaid. How can anything be more wrongheaded than to shortchange Michigan's future by depriving our children of a good education and the opportunity to successfully compete in their chosen field of interest within the global market! Michigan has historically enjoyed the benefits of being a technological leader ... the auto manufacturer for our nation and beyond. Michigan must endeavor to lead the United States in the field of education if we hope to create the brain trust that will keep us at the leading edge of the critical technologies of tomorrow.

### WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Women represent over half of the population in the United States. Women ARE the new economy. Female entrepreneurs are opening their own businesses at twice the rate of men. Women now own over 9 million businesses. Women owned businesses account for over 38 percent of all U.S. firms, \$3.6 trillion in annual sales and more than 27.5 million employees. Yet a new ceiling has descended. There is a gender gap in the amount of venture funding flowing to women-owned businesses. Female entrepreneurs received only four percent of the \$48 billion dollars of venture capital invested last year! Women owned business is one of the best things going for Michigan. Please invest in them!

### DAY CARE

One of the most complimentary investments Michigan could make in working women and women pursuing a higher education would be Day Care. Every mother has a fundamental need to know that her children are safe and well cared for. Without affordable, available, qualified day care, productivity suffers – Michigan's economy suffers.

### ENVIRONMENT & SAFE FOOD

Environmental concerns including safe food was another issue that frequently came up. The women of northern Michigan are well aware that the Great Lakes and fresh air are the basis of our tourist driven economy. Fishing and related sales alone in Michigan generate \$1.1 billion dollars per year, stated a recent report by the State Environmental Leadership Program in Madison, Wisconsin.

Many of us are working to create and support legislation and other systems that will protect waters in the Great Lakes basin from diversion and pollution. At first glance it may appear that there is plenty of water. After all most of the earth is covered by the oceans. Yet, fresh water -- the water we have available to drink -- makes up less than 3% of water on earth. You may be surprised to learn that 20% of all the fresh water on earth lies right here in the Great Lakes. Think about this for a moment -- Michigan has more fresh water surrounding us than any place else on earth!

Water is life! We must have the right to use it -- and the resolve to protect it. As with any resource shared in common -- such as air or sunshine -- its use requires that the consumer be responsible. The most fundamental responsibility should be to ensure/mandate that our public resources are not diminished or destroyed.

Nestlé Waters of North America and their Ice Mountain brand of bottled water is in the position of establishing a damaging legal precedent that could endanger the future of the Great Lakes. On September 1, the Grand Rapids Press stated “If there was ever a time to push for protection of the Great Lakes in Washington, it's now.”

If Nestlé Waters Corporation wins the right to pump Michigan water -- at will -- without limit or restriction -- other corporations must by International law be granted the same privilege and rights.

We must establish policies that keep Great Lakes water within the great lakes watershed IMMEDIATELY. Each gallon of Great Lakes water that is bottled and/or diverted elsewhere -- is a gallon of water we will never see again in the Great Lakes!

According to a UN report, mankind's most serious challenge in the 21st century might not be war, or hunger, or disease, or even the collapse of civic order; it may be the lack of fresh water. Future wars may be fought over water.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Because both the Annex and Michigan's proposed Water Legacy Act, which would help implement the pact in Michigan, don't address the privatization of water in bottling, the status of water as a public trust resource -- held in trust by the government for all the people -- is threatened. Trade agreements and other features of international law make it unlikely, once Great Lakes Basin water is legally allowed to be bottled and exported, that regional or state control over water can be regained. This means federal governments in Washington and Ottawa, or even international trade organizations, can take control of decisions affecting 20% of the world's fresh water.

### What Can Citizens Do?

The only way to fix what's wrong with Annex 2001 and the Water Legacy Act is for the public to insist on changes. (my letter reads):

Dear [insert the name of Governor Granholm and David Naftzger here],

I feel that it is urgent to repair the language in the [insert here in the letter to Governor Granholm:**Water Legacy Act -- and insert here in the letter to David Naftzger Annex 2001**] to include the following changes.

The changes should include:

- A moratorium on new bottled water operations in the Great Lakes Basin, and
- Impose strict conditions on any bottled water operations that draw from the Great Lakes Watershed Basin, and
- Expressly assure all citizens that water will remain now and forever more a public trust resource.

Thank you in advance for your kindness and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,  
(signed)  
[Your Name Printed Here]

### Write the following officials to express your views before October 18:

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm  
P.O. Box 30013  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
PHONE (517) 373-3400  
FAX (517) 335-6863

David Naftzger  
Executive Director  
Council of Great Lakes Governors  
35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1850  
Chicago, IL 60601  
E-mail: [Annex2001@cglg.org](mailto:Annex2001@cglg.org)

## WASTE MANAGEMENT

The water bottling industry represents yet another threat to Michigan, and that threat is from plastic ... in fact last year alone, more than 93 billion non-biodegradable plastic water containers wound up in U.S. landfills. Laid end-to-end, that's enough bottles to:

- Reach the moon and back 38 times;
- Circle the equator 371 times;
- Stretch the length of the world's longest river, the Nile, 2,222 times;
- Line Interstate 80 from New York to San Francisco 3,196 times;

### PUBLIC WATER SUPPLIES

When I was growing up we enjoyed safe and dependable municipal water supplies. Drinking fountains were everywhere ... in every school and in every community. We must act now to reduce plastic waste in Michigan. Let's reclaim the traditional water drinking fountain, and rebuild and repair our drinking water distribution systems. Let's take the lead in Michigan by educating the public about the risks to our fragile eco-system from non-biodegradable plastic waste.

### MERCURY IN THE LAKES

An immediate threat to Michigan water is Mercury and other man generated pollutants. All life depends on safe water. There are health advisories warning consumers of the risk of eating certain types of fish caught anywhere along the state's 3,250 miles of shoreline. There is NO excuse that is acceptable for the current situation we find ourselves in.

### AIR QUALITY

Auto manufacturing and exhaust, combined with coal burning energy plants and factories are responsible for nearly all of the mercury pollution in our water. But before it reaches our water these sources pollute the air we breathe -- causing respiratory illnesses, cancer, liver and brain damage. Children who breathe polluted air may suffer long-term lung damage, according to preliminary data from a 10-year study of 5,000 children published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine.

Scientific studies show that air pollution causes:

- Premature death
- Increased hospitalizations and emergency room visits to treat severe symptoms of asthma and other respiratory problems
- More frequent absences from work and school
- Susceptibility to respiratory infections, such as flu and pneumonia
- Elevated risk of heart attack in people who have heart disease

It is important for the Governors of the Great Lakes region to work to reduce life threatening air and water pollution.

### NO TO GMO'S

Many of the women and students I spoke with have expressed concern about the difficulty in finding "real food" any more. It is worrisome that the agro-corporations are force-feeding us inadequately tested Genetically Modified Organisms. The mothers and children of Michigan

should not be corporate America's guinea pigs.

On September 1 of this year the Institute for Responsible Technology published the following story which I will excerpt.

"Before the Appleton Wisconsin high school replaced their cafeteria's processed foods with wholesome, nutritious food, the school was described as out-of-control. There were weapons violations, student disruptions, and a cop on duty full-time. After the change in school meals, the students were calm, focused, and orderly. There were no more weapons violations, and no suicides, expulsions, dropouts, or drug violations. Now other schools are changing their meal programs with similar results.

We are just beginning to understand the influence of food on behavior. A study in Science in December 2002 concluded that "food molecules act like hormones, regulating body functioning and triggering cell division. The molecules can cause mental imbalances ranging from attention-deficit and hyperactivity disorder to serious mental illness." The problem is we do not know which food molecules have what effect.

Genetically modified foods have genes inserted into their DNA. Genetically Modified food will likely have a large impact on children. Children are three to four times more susceptible to allergies. Altered nutrients or added toxins can result in developmental problems.

We are being fed Genetically Modified foods daily, without knowing the impact of these foods on our health, our behavior, or that of our children. Thousands of schools around the world, have decided not to let their kids be used as guinea pigs. They have banned Genetically Modified foods."

It should be a high priority for Michigan to ban all Genetically Modified foods from our public school systems and grocery store shelves. As an interim step, we should require labeling on all food packaging that indicates the presence of Genetically Modified ingredients.

#### THE HIGH COST OF FACTORY FARMS

Agro-Corporations or so called Factory farms rely on mass transportation from coast to coast. Food distribution is becoming increasingly unreliable and too expensive for many Michigan families. With increasing threats to fuel prices and availability it is time to work to once again find a way to support the traditional home and family farm, if Michigan hopes to enjoy a secure and safe food future.

#### LIVABLE WAGES

The people of Michigan deserve to earn livable wages. A job should keep you out of poverty, not keep you in it. Hardworking Americans paid minimum wages earn up to \$10,712 a year. That's at least a third less than their counterparts earned a third of a century ago (adjusting for inflation). A couple with two children would have to work a combined 3.3 full-time minimum wage jobs to

make ends meet. That's 132 hours a week.

- Right now in Michigan there are health care aides who can't afford health insurance.
- There are teachers aides who don't make enough to save for their own children's education. It just doesn't add up.

The real value of the minimum wage peaked in 1968. Since then, worker productivity went up, but wages went down. Productivity grew 74.2 percent between 1968 and 2000. Real wages for minimum wage workers -- two-thirds of whom are adults -- fell 35 percent.

Successful businesses -- large and small -- have demonstrated that good wages are good business. Higher wages reduce turnover, improve productivity and increase purchasing power. Certainly, employers today can pay a minimum wage equivalent to what their counterparts paid more than three decades ago.

Women in Michigan continue to earn far less than men for the same work. The "glass ceiling" remains a barrier to women's advancement in the workplace. Today's wages are not working for many working Americans.

#### PROPOSAL 04-2 ON THE NOVEMBER 2 BALLOT

This religious based proposal would amend the Michigan Constitution to provide that "the union of one man and one woman in marriage shall be the only agreement recognized as a marriage or similar union for any purpose."

If passed the amendment is likely to:

- End same- and opposite-sex partnership benefits in cities, townships, and school districts throughout the state.
- Eliminate current partnership benefits at the University of Michigan, Michigan State, and other public universities.
- Jeopardize the collective bargaining rights of Michigan workers (many labor agreements require public certification of same- and opposite-sex partnership benefits)
- Strip our cities and townships of the authority to determine the best benefits policies for our communities.
- Throw private-sector employment law into legal limbo, chilling the hiring climate and deterring new business investment in Michigan.
- Reduce the level of incoming tourist dollars. Michigan will appear unwelcoming as a destination.

Amendment 2 does NOTHING to create healthier heterosexual marriages.

Amendment 2 is blatant and cruel discrimination against people who do not want to pursue heterosexual marriage, and desire self defined unions and commitments.

In Michigan gay and lesbian people (or people who are perceived to be gay) can be denied the right to stay in a hotel, to be served in a restaurant or store, to rent an apartment, to be hired for a job, or in many cases raise their own children. Amendment 2 will worsen this problem for thousands of Michigan residents.

A man and a woman who have been married for only one minute have an estimated 1,047 more rights and protections than a gay couple who have lovingly shared their entire adult lifetime together. This is unfair and cruel. Love is love, and ought to be respected for what it is.

If we want to live in a free country, we have to accept that people are different. You are not free if you are only free to be like everyone else.

Please “keep your laws off our bodies” Michigan. We do not want faith based legislation that defines and mandates our choices in Michigan. We are adults. We are capable of making the best choices for ourselves.

When we lose the right to be different ... When we lose the right to choose ... We lose the privilege to be free.