

State Legislative Candidates – House District 103 - Betsy Coffia

1. Why are you interested in serving the people, families, and businesses in northern Michigan?

Former Gov. Bill Milliken is a personal political hero. His long career serving Michigan demonstrated the type of true, bipartisan public service that I want more of at all levels. I aspire to his example. I want to serve because I love and am proud of my community and my state, believe in our potential and I believe in public service to help us reach that potential. I am also driven to serve by my own experience with pressing challenges families in our region face, such as adequate access to healthcare. Growing up, my blue collar family worked hard but could not afford health insurance. This meant my parents and 3 siblings and I sometimes went without needed care. Dental, mental health and other needed forms of care were simply unaffordable. I understand our elected leaders must do so much more to ensure all Michiganders enjoy life with dignity and opportunity, and address pressing needs like childcare, mental health, rural broadband, housing access and more. Finally I want to do all I can to steward the beautiful Great Lakes state we know and love for future generations, so our families and businesses and communities can thrive. I bring next generation leadership and perspective at a time when it is badly needed. We need less partisan fighting. I have demonstrated on my county commission, an ability to show up with practical, pragmatic bipartisan leadership and public service. My record demonstrates my ability to work with anyone of any party, for our families, businesses and community.

2. How will you use your role to support the economic vitality of our region?

As a two term Grand Traverse County Commissioner, I have used my role to advocate that we address the needs of working class families and local business owners - listen and respond to what our community is telling us about what issues are most significantly impacting their lives and businesses. Over and over I hear childcare, housing, mental health as key concerns impacting our workforce and small businesses. I have been a vocal proponent pushing my county commission to engage with these pressing needs, whether mental health, housing or childcare. I am proud to have pushed for us to finally create a current strategic plan and that each of the above community needs were named as areas our county will prioritize. One issue that's consistent amongst everyone I talk to is housing access. Our business owners are struggling to attract and retain talent because affordability is such a serious issue. As a representative for the 103, I will take a balanced approach to housing that ensures that we can continue to grow the workforce in our region and support our region's unique economic engines.

3. Do you believe local government should have broad authority to regulate short-term rentals?

Yes. This ties into the housing crisis I mentioned above. It is imperative local communities in the 103rd be able to regulate short-term rentals; removing that local control would pour gasoline on an already blazing fire. Leelanau County is entirely in my district and they have been in the news for having absolutely zero available rentals. Our local municipalities need more agency and tools to be able to address this issues. Not fewer. In addressing the housing issue, I believe we need to change the ranking system for developers seeking public funds to build workforce housing - currently developers wishing to build in communities with a population of less than 50,000, get a lower ranking than those wishing to build in larger population areas. We should change MSHDA's scoring criteria so that it doesn't inadvertently penalize northern Michigan and other areas with under 50,000 population as we also badly need housing options here.

4. How would you address the shortage of skilled labor in northern Michigan?

Again, I would prioritize addressing the housing shortage as we cannot bring talent to Michigan if they have no place to live. I am proud to have been a yes vote on the county commission in ensuring the trades having an increased presence in our public schools so that our students know there is a path to a strong, long-term career that exists outside of the traditional college path. I voted as a commissioner to allocate county budget dollars toward this type of programming in partnership with Traverse Connect. In taking that vote, I advocated successfully that such programs also seek out women in the trades to model for our young people that girls can go into the trades and have successful, well paying careers.

5. How would you prioritize leftover funds from federal aid packages and surplus dollars in the state's general fund?

Top priorities include closing the gap on uninsured Michiganders so that families like the one I grew up in, can go to the doctor when ill and get good preventative care. I would continue to increase funding to our public schools which have been drastically underfunded over the last several years. In addition, we should invest in bringing more mental health providers to our region and state as well as closing the cost gap for lower income Michiganders who need mental health care. We should look at funding pilot programs based on proven models to address the housing crisis as well.

6. The availability of housing is a barrier to business growth and talent attraction in our region. How do you intend to address the affordable housing shortage?

As stated above, giving local communities greater ability to balance the influx and pressure created by short-term rentals is a key component to addressing the housing shortage, particularly in my district. The Grand Traverse area has a very strong tourism industry which is an important component of our economic engine, but it has also led to accelerated levels of short-term rentals which have prevented prospective homeowners and long-term renters from finding a place to live and negatively impacted our small business' ability to find and keep staff.

7. Many families struggle to secure quality child care. This can be a barrier to attracting talent and keeping people in or bringing people back into the workforce. How will you work to increase access to affordable and quality child care?

I support expansion of the pilot TriShare childcare program that splits cost of childcare between the state of Michigan, providers and employers to ease families costs and increase workforce capacity. I believe this model should be made a permanent statewide offering as a way to support our families and small businesses. I will work with providers to reduce unnecessary regulation while maintaining safe facilities and adult to child ratios. I support the use of public funds to supplement wages so that small business child care facilities, whether home or center based, can afford to hire and keep qualified staff. In my remaining time on the county commission, I will continue to advocate that county government be a partner in addressing this need by utilizing unused/under-used county/city owned facilities for on site childcare much as Munson has done for their workforce. While it doesn't solve the entire problem we should be looking to do whatever we can and on site childcare would both free up slots at other daycares for other families and be another point of attraction to keep our county and city workforce.

8. What are your solutions for supporting businesses being affected directly by inflation and supply chain costs?

I believe state government is limited in what we can do about federal and international trade issues that result in supply chain costs. However, where there is unethical price gouging and profiteering by corporate entities that are posting record profits, I believe those in policy making and enforcement positions should hold them accountable for gouging consumers.