

State Legislative Candidates – House District 104 – Cathy Albro

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

I recognize the tremendous potential for all people, families, and businesses to thrive in northern Michigan, District 104. To reach our fullest potential, we must start by working together. I believe most of us have common values and goals. Let's start there to compromise and collaborate on solutions.

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

As the Representative for District 104, there are unlimited ways to preserve and increase the economic vitality of our region. Often, the solutions are not easily determined and must be examined with a lens toward root causes and return of investment (both short and long term). When determining the cost of a project or solution, we also must look at the cost of doing nothing or something else. For example, a lack of investment in affordable housing or quality childcare, will diminish the opportunity for people to remain in or move to an area. When we make critical investments in those areas, we increase the likelihood of sustained economic growth for new jobs and employees to fill those job vacancies. As a former 30-year small business owner, I understand the value of investing in small business start ups and support for growth. Small businesses are important contributors to community culture and create the foundation for further growth. I would use my role to coordinate and work with other elected officials (locally and federally) as well as work with area experts, including all stakeholders to improve our economic vitality. |

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

Yes, local governments know best and should have this right. I believe it is fair to have a type of "grandfathering" process to give owners time to make changes.

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

We must work on creating communities that would attract skilled workers to want to move to or stay in an area. With the Infrastructure Bill investment in rural Internet, I believe this problem will be solved within the next few years (a shame we couldn't solve it sooner). Affordable quality childcare, housing within their means, great public schools, welcoming communities (let's get rid of the divisiveness in some places), great healthcare, and local educational opportunities to learn the skilled trades during and after high school. Northwest MI Works seems to be doing well with an expansive list of careers and successful regional partnerships with employers. I would like to see the unions get more involved in Northern Michigan to offer Internships and training.

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

I would leave it up to communities to decide what is best for them. It is important to allow everyone who wants to participate to have a voice and a fair way to judge the allocations. One community may decide that clean water is a priority and invest in updating septic systems. Another community may decide to invest in a more reliable EMS system. Some funding should be reserved for larger state investments, where our constituents still participate in decision-making. Education (from birth-death) is a priority that benefits everyone. I do believe some of the surplus funding should be spent on attracting and retaining teachers and support staff.

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?

There are many ways to increase affordable housing choices. Locally, we should reconsider zoning and allow small homes to be built in a planned community or more homes to be built on a single lot. When I'm canvassing, I see many mobile homes in use and parked next to homes. This may be a seasonal solution for non-winter months. The free market hasn't been the solution, so we must work around it. There are grants available and community organizations who rehab existing homes and turn vacant buildings into livable spaces. Improved public transportation (Benzie County is a rural model) for people to live in a more affordable area and commute to work. Local communities may want to consider adding a fee to short-term rentals to help subsidize home ownership or rental for year-round residents who need support. As a Representative, I would appropriate funds to local communities to work on their own solutions. I would also consider supporting more protections for renters. For example, many locally owned mobile home parks are being purchased by large corporations who substantially raise the rental rates without much notice. The mobile homeowners are stuck because they are unable to move their home due to cost or structure age. When the free market doesn't work, I am in favor of reasonable regulation or alternative solutions.

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?

Affordable quality childcare for all children is a huge concern that I have been working on for decades. I have a BS in child development and founded an accredited childcare center in Grand Rapids and helped businesses open their own on-site centers. I know firsthand how expensive it is to do it right. Children need consistent nurturing and knowledgeable teachers/caregivers, small group sizes, clean, enriching, and safe environments, healthy fresh food, and more. Most parents cannot afford the true cost of this care. I believe it is the responsibility of our society to provide the best care for all young children when their parents must work or go to school. Through the American Rescue Plan, Michigan received \$1.4B to be invested in the next 3 years for high quality and expanded childcare services. We must continue to make sure childcare providers have what they need to do the job. They are small businesses in their communities that

also happen to be integral to the success of other businesses.

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

Inflation and increased supply chain costs have many different causes. I believe that some of the costs were increased because the manufacturer, middleman and/or someone else in the supply chain saw an opportunity for their investors and themselves to make more money and took it. Elected officials need to require more transparency and restrict price gauging when they suspect this is happening. The price of gas is one example that had a domino effect on costs of other products. The fossil fuel industry made their highest profits ever in the last few quarters. I am in favor of anti-trust regulation (enforcing current and possible additional). Some legislation could be handled at the state level, or we could work with our federal counterparts. I will work to increase American made products (made in Michigan even better) to avoid some of the supply chain challenges that we encountered recently. The CHIP Bill should provide more stability in some markets that may, in turn, affect other markets. We must plan for our future and be prepared. Another solution for small businesses may be to form co-ops or other large buying groups to bring individual costs down. Better to form those alliances in advance rather than in the middle of a price hike.