



Candidate Questionnaire for the 88th District Michigan House of Representatives

Name: **Christine Baker**

Email: **bakerc52@gmail.com**

**Please note that this is a fillable word document. Please save as a PDF and return to the Chamber.*

General:

1. Why are you running for office?

I want to have a positive influence on public policy impacting our state and local community. The 88th is a newly drawn district with new opportunities to shape cooperation with Muskegon County, and to reimagine representation at the state level from West Michigan. My experience in education, on the school board, and with the League of Women Voters gives me a unique perspective and deep public policy knowledge to serve constituents.

2. What qualifications/experience do you feel you possess that will enable you to fulfill the responsibilities of the elected office you are seeking?

EDUCATION

B.S. in Education, Central Michigan University (CMU) - 1975; MA in Educational Administration (CMU) - 1977; Education Specialist in Curriculum/Instruction, Michigan State University - 1992

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Retired Education Professional (35 years); Past-President of Grand Haven Area League of Women Voters; Current VP of Grand Haven Area Public School Board (10 Years)

3. Have you ever run for political office before? If yes, please explain.

Grand Haven Area Public Schools - Board of Education - 2012 to Present

4. With all the challenges currently facing our State and Nation, what skills would make you the best candidate to represent the new 88th District and Northwest Ottawa County?
I have lived, worked, invested in, and raised my family here for the past 40 years. I understand the community and its values. Further, I am an experienced professional, proven public servant, honest broker of ideas, and committed to transparency. My family business has operated for 150 years in the community. That gives me a lens into the needs of small businesses as well as the needs of employees navigating work and family balance. The intersection of business, public services, community resources, and public policy is important to understand for a leader and lawmaker. For all to thrive, policy must support all sectors of the community.

5. If elected, what would be your top priorities and why?

Democracy; Education; Economy

-Our Democracy is fragile. Voting rights and civil rights are in need of protection from restrictive measures based on misinformation and discrimination. Political power must be shared in order to maintain an inclusive system of governance. Further, campaign finance laws need reform to shine a light on dark money in politics.

-Public education is a cornerstone of our democracy. Adequate and equitable funding must be stabilized to secure quality outcomes for students. The school aid fund recently adopted will get us much closer to balancing the financial disparity between districts, improve infrastructure, invest in mental health services, and secure a stable workforce.

-Economic strength relies on a strong community foundation that includes stable school districts, strong local government and neighborhoods, healthy families, diverse talent, and 21st century job training. Investing in these elements of economic infrastructure is essential.

Economic Development and General Policy:

1. Please describe your general economic development philosophy for our State and Northwest Ottawa County?

An economy and public policy structure that doesn't invest in everyone is flawed and unsustainable. Economic strength stems from good governance around infrastructure, schools, fair wages and taxation, safe working conditions, equity in employment, adequate training, and benefits that improve the quality of life and the health of the community.

2. What is your tax policy in regard to supporting and enticing economic growth and development?

Taxes should be a shared commitment between business and community members to support the infrastructure necessary to grow and develop our economy. Incentives to expand or create additional jobs could be designed to benefit not just the business, but the community and employees as well.

3. How would you address the perception of over-regulation of business by government?
Please give specifics.

Regulation is necessary to protect the safety of citizens and the community. They are the rules that define the bounds of behavior. No one would want to eat in a restaurant that wasn't inspected by the health department. Safe working conditions and quality controls benefit everyone, including customers. Minimum wage and child labor laws are necessary to set standards for community well being. We all need to do our part to co-exist and balance profits against public risk. Through taxes, the public supports the infrastructure in communities that allow businesses to operate and thrive. Regulation is a fair trade off.

4. How would you address and resolve the challenges our small businesses and entrepreneurs are facing in securing and retaining financing of their businesses working capital and growth needs in the current economic climate?

Continue or expand efforts such as Growing MI Business Grant Program; explore state efforts to replicate loans like the Payroll Protection Program.

5. What ideas and policies would you support to help *rebuild our existing* workforce as well as *attract and retain* workers to assist businesses fill the many technical, skilled trades and entry level positions that are going unfilled today?

-Opportunities for 21st century job training (including green technology), fixing/expanding our infrastructure, and livable wages would rebuild and attract skilled talent to area businesses.

-Public policy that supports healthcare, childcare, and transportation would ease the burdens on low wage, entry level employees so they can afford to work and grow their potential. Housing options that are affordable is another critical piece of the puzzle.

6. With the emphasis of the last few years moving toward regionalization of Economic Development and Workforce Development, how do you plan to ensure the needs of the new 88th District, and more specifically Northwest Ottawa County, are met.

Intentionally collaborate with a wide range of partners including businesses, municipalities, colleges and universities, school districts, county governments, and state and federal agencies to plan for 21st century jobs, renewable energy sources, and quality of life issues to continue attracting population in the region.

7. Would you support changes to term limits? If so, what changes would you support?
I support the proposed ballot initiative slated for November which would allow more flexibility for lawmakers to stay longer in one chamber of the legislature. Institutional knowledge is important to good public policy. Further, this proposal would shorten lifetime service to 12 years from 14 and require more fiscal transparency on the part of candidates - which is necessary for good government. However, prior to instituting the Michigan Independent Redistricting Commission, I would have been opposed to changing term limits. Lengthening the time a legislator spends in the House or Senate when selected by partisan political means instead of voters, is not conducive to democracy.

Education:

1. What do you see as the most critical challenge facing Michigan's educational institutions in the next one to three years?
-Public schools must narrow the achievement gap and advocate for funding equity. Their focus needs to shift from K-12 to PreK-Early College in order to improve outcomes and meet the needs of future job demands. This may require modernizing the school calendar to expand options for students and families. Declining birth rates will be a long term challenge to navigate.
-Public universities and community colleges must reimagine their roles and responsibilities to integrate and articulate programs and degrees; attract a diverse student population; right size their institutions as fewer students live on campus; expand degree programs into neighborhoods, urban areas, and businesses for easier access; facilitate financing options through public policy advocacy and endowments.
2. How would you suggest the current public school system be improved or changed in order to better prepare a world-class workforce, particularly a workforce possessing necessary high-tech skills? **Prek-Early College instead of K-12**
Expand Early College programs and credit articulation with post-secondary institutions. Expansion of high quality early education and care will provide a strong foundation for future success.
3. School Calendars do not currently allow time for career exploration, job shadowing, internships, or industrial arts for high school students. How would you address this issue?
There should be options for year round schooling to accomodate students pursuing opportunities to grow their career potential locally. These options could be in local districts or at regional facilities such as Careerline Tech.

Environmental Policy:

1. What is your philosophy regarding additional regulations, fees, and taxes as they relate to environmental protection or enhancement?

Moving to renewable energy is important for the health, safety, and sustainability of our economy and populace. Tax incentives, subsidies, improving our infrastructure (electric vehicle charging stations), partnering with the federal government are ways to finance this transition. Improved regulations are indicated around water usage, run off, private company access to water, and managing development.

2. Do you support incentive programs that promote Brownfield redevelopment, and/or the revitalization of functionally obsolete or abandoned property? Why or why not?

Yes. Maximizing the potential of our community is essential for economic growth and community stability. Obsolete or abandoned property detracts from a community and is a waste of a valuable resource.

3. How would you contribute to protecting and preserving West Michigan's natural resources as an elected official?

Support continued investment and development of parks and recreation areas throughout the county, advance our progress toward renewable energy, back regional efforts to establish mass transit systems, and manage water usage to stabilize the watersheds.

4. What action/policy would you support to control invasive species of fish in the Great Lakes?

Efforts to prevent, detect, and control invasive species must be supported. The Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program is one way to achieve those objectives. Local, state, federal, and tribal units of government, non-profits, and universities are eligible for the grants. Further, EGLE shipping regulations around release of ballast water must be continually monitored and improved as technology advances.

5. What is your position on Government's role in providing safe, clean drinking water for the public?

Safety of citizens is a primary function of government. Safe, clean drinking water is an important part of that formula. Key priorities would include: securing new funding to update water infrastructure statewide, including replacement of all lead service pipes; establishing drinking water standards for PFAS; maintain state authority on environmental permits and clean up plans; support local governments address combined sewer overflow and stormwater management. Improved regulations are indicated around water usage, run off, private company access to water, and managing development. These measures will improve water quality and other natural resource preservation.

6. Specific to Grand Haven's Harbor Island, how would you provide support to the remediation, reuse and funding of the critical cleanup of that site?

To the extent possible, local, state, and federal resources should be leveraged to address the clean up and repurposing of Harbor Island. Unfortunately, this is another example of privatizing gain and socializing risk. It will take public action and public dollars to remedy this environmental problem. Limited recourse is available to share the cost with those who caused the contamination.

Housing Issues

1. West Michigan is facing challenges providing affordable housing options for young families and entry level workers to fill the many vacant positions in our businesses and industries. How would you proposed to support local communities as they work to address this issue?

ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) residents are the primary victims of lack of affordable housing. I would support public investment in healthcare, childcare, and transportation as a way to alleviate the financial burden on families. In addition, incentives, public/private partnerships, and adjustment to zoning could increase the availability of affordable housing stock, similar to the effort recently achieved at Grand Haven's Robinson Landing, and through the efforts of Housing Next. The new 88th district with lines now encompassing part of Muskegon County offers an opportunity to work collaboratively on housing and transportation for the economic benefit of both counties.

2. Northwest Ottawa County welcomes tourism and is supportive of short terms rentals that are controlled by local units of government through zoning. What is your position regarding short term rentals?

Local governments should continue to have oversight authority to create rules and conditions for use of housing for short term rentals. The needs of year round residents and businesses must be balanced against those in the tourism industry and property owners who benefit from summer and other short term rentals. There are safety, housing availability, quality of life, and neighborhood integrity issues to consider as communities navigate this issue.

Transportation

1. What is your philosophy regarding mass transit and what would you do, if elected, to incent regional collaboration regarding mass transit, specifically along the lakeshore?

Mass transit is an integral part of sustainable energy resources and improving our environment. The new 88th district, which now includes part of Muskegon County, presents an opportunity to work across county lines to achieve mutually beneficial mass transit options for our respective communities. I would facilitate those conversations. Federal, state, and local infrastructure resources could be leveraged to achieve a regional system of public transportation. This would enhance quality of life for everyone, alleviating traffic, lowering fuel cost, promoting cleaner air, and reducing wear and tear on roads.

Tax Policy

1. What is your position on expanded taxation (such as services) ?

At the moment, Michigan isn't in a position to worry about additional revenue. However, I support fair taxation that meets the needs of critical state budget priorities. Taxing services is less regressive than many other types of taxation such as sales, income, or gas taxes. So, as an alternative to raising those other types of taxes to meet future budget demands, I would support exploring taxation of services.

Energy Policy

1. What is your position/plan for reliable, cost-effective energy for the State of Michigan?

Transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable sources is the best way for our state to secure reliable, cost-effective energy. Moving to renewable energy is important for the health, safety, and sustainability of our economy and populace. Tax incentives, subsidies, improving our infrastructure (electric vehicle charging stations), partnering with the federal government are ways to finance this transition. Improved regulations are indicated around water usage, run off, private company access to water, and managing development. These measures will improve water quality and other natural resource preservation. Reduction in our carbon footprint will improve air quality.

2. Do you support the current state position on fracking? Why or why not?

I believe transitioning from fossil fuels is in the best interest of the health, safety, and sustainability of our economy and populace. Further, fracking has potential for impacting water quality and usage as well as air quality. State regulation is important to maintain in this industry as we move toward more renewable energy sources to supply the needs of our state.

Please attach additional information regarding any endorsements or community and business affiliations:

Endorsements:

- *West Michigan Building and Construction Trades Council*
- *Ottawa County Democratic Party*
- *Progressive Democratic Women's Caucus - Muskegon County*
- *Progressive Lakeshore - Ottawa County*
- *Ottawa Integrity*

Community Affiliations:

- *Grand Haven Area League of Women Voters*
- *Grand Haven Schools Foundation*
- *100 Women Who Care*

Business Affiliation:

- *D. Baker and Son Lumber Company*