

## WWJ Newsradio 950

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### **Mackinac Panel: Get Younger And Smarter Or Else**

Any thought that this week's Detroit Regional Chamber Mackinac Conference would sugarcoat the region's deep economic challenges was quickly dashed by the event's first two presentations late Wednesday afternoon.

First, auto heir Edsel Ford II gave the region the equivalent of three C's and two F's on a scorecard of five major goals of the One D drive announced at last year's Mackinac event.

Then, the people behind Michigan Future Inc., the Center for Michigan and last year's bipartisan state budget task force offered a bleak assessment of the state's economic performance this decade -- the worst since the Great Depression -- and said the old "Michigan deal," where a worker could make a good living with a high school education, is gone for good.

Yet not all the news was bad. Said Ford: "I'm pleased to report the needle is moving and the job is at hand to move it faster so we can be healthy and strong as a vibrant place to live." He gave several examples of progress in the One D's major goals of economic prosperity, educational preparedness, quality of life, race relations and regional transit.

Included was a study that found more than \$4 billion in economic investment in metro Detroit in 2007, an educational summit meeting, the adoption of the D brand by regional transit authorities, and bipartisan steps toward true regional transit.

Using a simplified scale of green light for "on target," yellow for "action required" and red for "missing target," Ford gave the region yellow lights for action toward economic prosperity, quality of life and regional transit, and red lights for educational preparedness and race relations.

One D is a collaborative effort of six founding organizations -- the Cultural Alliance of Southeast Michigan, the Detroit Regional Chamber, New Detroit Inc., the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau, Detroit Renaissance and the United Way for Southeastern Michigan.

Its five major initiatives are supported by 19 goals and 45 action steps, several successes in which Ford highlighted. Others, however, have yet to be begun.

Later, Lou Glazier, president of the non-partisan Ann Arbor think tank Michigan Future, took the standing-room-only crowd at the Grand Hotel's theater on a tour of the 10 most prosperous states, those with the highest per-capita income.

Forget your preconceptions, Glazier said. It's not the Sunbelt or low-tax states that rule. Instead it's Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Maryland, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Colorado, Virginia and California.

What they have in common is a high percentage of employment in knowledge-based industries, a big metropolitan area that has

higher income than the state, lots of college graduates in that city, and -- the single strongest predictor of prosperity -- a high percentage of college graduates.

And overall, he said, cities win. "All the futurists said that because work is digital and can be done anywhere, it will be, but the exact opposite is true," Glazier said. "Knowledge work is concentrated in big metros."

The bottom line of his presentation: We must get younger and better educated or we will get poorer.

And Glazier said: "We're optimists. Other people have done this and do can we."

Former House Speaker Paul Hillegonds also spoke on the state's budget crisis, which faces more huge deficits in the coming years. He said Michigan raised taxes last year, which it needed to do, but has failed to rein in spending, especially in prisons. He said Michigan has an incarceration rate 40 percent higher than its neighbors, and sentences 60 percent harsher -- yet does not enjoy a lower crime rate than its neighbors. And he said prison spending now exceeds that on higher education, a losing proposition.

Hillegonds also said overlapping and redundant local government units were also a major source of waste.

Finally, Phil Power, founder of the Ann Arbor think tank Center for Michigan, said his group has formulated an "emerging common ground agenda for Michigan's future" through a series of hundreds of meetings with thousands of Michiganders. It's hot off the presses at [www.thecenterformichigan.net](http://www.thecenterformichigan.net).

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