



Life In Brief

Current Title: Governor

Political Party: Democratic Party

Born: August 23, 1971

Birthplace: Lansing, MI

Religion: Christian Church

Ethnicity: White/Caucasian

Marital Status: Married

Education:

- Michigan State University, BA, 1993
- Michigan State University Detroit College of Law, JD, 1998

Family:

2 children; 3 stepchildren

Work History:

- Former Intern, AFL-CIO
- Former Policy Analyst, MI State House
- Former Intern, Office of Chief Judge Anna Diggs Taylor, U.S. District Court, Eastern MI District
- Of Counsel, Dickinson Wright Law Firm, PLLC, 2015-2016
- Prosecutor, Office of Ingham County Prosecutor, 2016
- Towsley Policy Maker in Residence, University of Michigan Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy

Quick Summary

Michigander who rose to national prominence in state government, where she was the first woman to be the Senate Democratic leader and led a ticket that elected a record number of women in Michigan

- Made national headlines in 2013 as a state senator by detailing her sexual assault story in a floor speech opposing pro-life legislation, making her a prominent voice on pro-choice issues
- As minority senate leader, fought against right to work legislation and led the opposition to bills considered to be anti-union
- Obama-era Democrat whose gubernatorial campaign focused on improving infrastructure and raising the minimum wage
- Rising voice in the Democratic party who gave the State of the Union response in 2020 and floated as a potential VP pick for Joe Biden
- Credited with unifying the Michigan Democratic party after Hillary Clinton's defeat in 2016

Approach and Motivations

Believes politics are personal and having women in office is the best way to protect women and families. Exudes folksy charm that underpins a reasoned and effective leadership style

- Credits her parents, who both worked in state government, for instilling her with a desire for service and helping others
- Whitmer's mother died of brain cancer while she was nursing her first child amidst her first election in 2000; ascribes the experience as showing her the importance of family leave and affordable health care



- Claims her personal experiences are what compel her to fix problems, expressing impatience with politicization of issues instead of getting to work

- Worked with Republican Governor Rick Snyder to help pass a Medicaid expansion plan as a state senator in 2013
- Announced “Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies” plan to address infant mortality rates, especially for African American women

Policy Position and Areas of Focus

Emphasizes kitchen table issues

Infrastructure: 2018 Campaign slogan was “Fix the Damn Roads”

- Views Michigan’s lead water crisis a result of failure to keep up maintenance on pipes and vowed to increase spending to fix waterways
- Budget proposal included a 45 cent gas tax to pay for fixing the roads and for clean drinking water
- Views expanding access to broadband as a critical infrastructure problem, has worked to close broadband gap in public schools

Education: Focus on early education to help improve state literacy rates

- Introduced a plan that increases funding for schools in low income districts, improving the literacy rate, and investing more in early childhood education
- Major education plan focuses on the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, wants to introduce universal Pre-K
- Critical of charter school and school choice reform put in place by the DeVos family, has worked to walk back emphasis on standardized tests

Health Care: Focus on affordability and accessibility

- Family leave and affordable health care are intensely personal issues for Whitmer

Core Communities

Balances growing national attention with life-long Michigan roots

Health Insurance Companies: Close personal ties

- Whitmer’s father is former CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, which holds 70% of Michigan market share for health insurance
- Current CEO of BCBS of Michigan Dan Loepp served as an honorary co-chair of her transition committee; Whitmer credits him with being the first person to suggest she run for office as a state representative
- BCBS of Michigan donated \$70,000 to her campaign

National Women’s Movement: Frequently endorses and campaigns with other women running for office

- Campaigned with Debbie Stabenow and Dana Nessel in the 2018 elections and helped a record number of women win in Michigan
- Partnered with Elizabeth Warren on an initiative to increase volunteer participation
- Gave keynote address at the Michigan Women’s March in January 2017

Michigan Business and Community Leaders: Campaign backed by prominent business groups

- Anthony Earley (former CEO of DTE Energy), Wright Lassister (CEO of Ford Health System),



Florine Mark (CEO of Weight Watchers Group), and Cindy Pasky (CEO of Strategic Staffing Solutions), all cofounded fundraising group "Business Leaders for Whitmer"

- Michigan Municipal League, the largest association of state municipal leaders, frequently releases statements in support of Whitmer's legislative proposals

Political History

- Former Vice Chair, MI State House Democratic Women's Leadership Caucus
- Former Policy Analyst, MI State House
- Member, MI State House, 2000-2006
- Member (MI023 D), MI State Senate, 2006-2015
- Minority Leader, MI State Senate, 2010-2015
- Member, Ingham County Democratic Party

Relevant Financial Information

Strong support from unions and trade associations

Biggest Industry Donors (career)

- Lawyers and Lobbyists: \$1.3 million
- Public Subsidy: \$900,000
- General Trade Unions: \$500,000
- Education: \$300,000
- Insurance: \$300,000

Biggest Group Donors (career)

- United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers (UAW): \$92,000
- Michigan Education Association: \$90,000
- Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association: \$87,000

- Michigan Association for Justice: \$76,000
- Michigan Laborers District Council: \$73,000

Biggest Individual Donors (career)

- Joseph Melad (Eastpointe, MI): \$33,000
- Ardele Shaltz, Philanthropist (Flint, MI): \$29,000
- Haifa Fakhouri, CEO, Arab American and Chaldean Council (Detroit, MI): \$27,000
- Lissy Bank Twine Capital (New York, NY): \$27,000
- Sujo Offield, Philanthropist (Palm Desert, CA): \$27,000

Publications, Media and Speaking

Recent national media engagement has focused on COVID-19 response

Publications: *Written bipartisan op-eds*

- Washington Post: Calls for more federal action to respond to COVID-19 with Gov. Hogan (R-MD) (March, 2020)
- Michigan Live: Wrote in support of clean energy policy with former US Representative Joe Schwarz (R-MI07)

Media: *Frequent contributor on national outlets to discuss COVID-19, appears on local station WOOD TV8 in Michigan*

- Preferred Outlets: Meet the Press, PBS News Hour, State of the Union
- Favorite Subjects: Michigan health care, electing Democrats, COVID-19
- Social Media Habits: Avid Twitter user, frequently posts videos addressing voting initiatives and COVID-19 updates



Speaking: Given commencement addresses, keynotes for women's issues

- Favorite Subjects: Helping women run, importance of education
- Preferred Audience: Keynote speaker at the Michigan Women's March in 2017

Professional Affiliations

- Member, Ingham County Bar Association
- Member, National Caucus of Environmental Legislators
- Member, Women's Economic Club

Family and Personal Background

Early exposure to state government helped fuel interest in politics

- Father served as the head of the state's Department of Commerce under Gov. Milliken
- Her mother, a Democrat, was a senior lawyer in the state attorney general's office
- Early career goal was to become a television sports correspondent before she took a political internship and switched her focus to law
- Taught public policy at the Ford School at University of Michigan

Criticisms and Controversies

Received criticism about ties to health insurance industry and term as county prosecutor

Attacked from the left for insurance ties

- Received criticism in 2018 election cycle for having a fundraiser hosted by BCBS executives

that raised \$144,000 for the company's political action committee

Criticized for handling of Michigan State gymnastics doctor case as county prosecutor

- Whitmer faced opposition for not aggressively investigating Lawrence Nassar while serving as interim county prosecutor, a position she held for 6 months
- Nassar was later convicted of sexual molestation and child pornography
- Whitmer has stated that she pursued the necessary charges based on the information that was available at the time and that the Nassar case was eventually taken out of her jurisdiction