

## MPLP Makes Huge Waves In Michigan's Political Landscape

'Michigan Matters' Exclusive

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*Carol Cain, CBS Detroit*



Detroit City Councilman Scott Benson, Anne Mervenne and Steve Tobocman — co-directors of the Michigan Political Leadership Program — join host Carol Cain on “Michigan Matters” to talk about the city of the Detroit, the divisive nature of politics and MPLP. (credit: Tony Chiudioni/CBS 62)

Scott Benson had been a small [business owner](#), served in the military and worked for a community organization in Detroit.

But knowing he had a goal of running for public office, the thing that truly propelled him in his bid was being part of the Michigan Political [Leadership](#) Program (MPLP).

“I had the chance to meet and network with people and [leaders](#) from across the state,” said Benson, who graduated from MPLP in 2011 and ran for Detroit City Council in November and won.

Benson made his comments during taping of “Michigan Matters” and appeared with Anne Mervenne and Steve Tobocman, co-directors of MPLP.

Benson, Mervenne and Tobocman also talked about other issues including Detroit, its [financial](#) plight and having Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr involved as the city fights it way out of bankruptcy.

The MPLP program, which started in 1992, is housed at Michigan State University's Institute for Public Policy and Social Research.

The nationally acclaimed program has nearly 600 alums with many working in politics.

Because of term limits and difficulty of running for public office these days, "the transition time from participating in MPLP to actually running for office is getting shorter and shorter," said Steve Tobocman, who is also managing partner at New Solutions Group LLC.

Which explains why three of the upcoming 24 graduating MPLP fellows on March 6 are now running for state rep. There are also 17 MPLP alums running for state house, six for senate seats and one for congress, Tobocman added.

Among MPLP alums – Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel, former Detroit city councilman Ken Cockrel, former state representative Maureen Stapleton, former speaker Craig DeRoche and Gov. Rick Snyder press secretary Sara Wurfel.

The MPLP program takes place one weekend each month (for 10 months) and covers topics like campaign [finance](#), grassroots campaigning and media relations. They hold sessions across Michigan so fellows can meet local leaders and network.

"The Michigan Political Leadership Program is one of the nation's premier training grounds for up-and-coming leaders," added Mervenne, who is [CEO](#) of Mervenne & Company, a governmental relations consulting firm. The program selects 24 fellows from a pool of applicants each year. The upcoming class is accepting applications with final selections made after Labor Day.

The 2013 class of 24 fellows will [graduate](#) on Thursday, March 6 at the MPLP's annual fundraising dinner at Laurel Manor where former Govs Tim Pawlenty and Bill Richardson will take to the stage to share insights and talk politics.

I will moderate the conversation between the two leaders. The public is invited but a ticket is needed.

The annual standing room event will attract nearly 800. It has featured speakers from both sides of the political aisle such as Geraldine Ferraro, Howard Dean, Bill Crystal, Donna Brazile and many others.

MPLP administrators and graduating class will then pack up and travel to Grand Rapids on Friday (March 7) where 400 will hear from the two former governors as a breakfast.

For more information on the MPLP dinner or breakfast, or applications to the program call: 517-353-0891 or visit [ippsr.msu.edu/mplp](http://ippsr.msu.edu/mplp)

**Watch "Michigan Matters" Sundays at 11:30 am on CBS 62.**

*Carol Cain is the Emmy winning Senior Producer/Host of "Michigan Matters." She also writes about politics and business in Sunday's Detroit Free Press. She can be reached at [ccain@cbs.com](mailto:ccain@cbs.com).*