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PROFILE: MICHIGAN HOUSE MINORITY LEADER CHRISTINE GREIG

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Michigan Rep. Christine Greig

As minority leader in the Michigan House, Christine Greig leads a team of 52 Democrats. As a child growing up in neighboring Indiana, she was part of another large team — a close-knit family of 12 children.

“I’m number six, right in the middle,” she says. “My whole family and childhood upbringing were always very team-centered. Everyone shared in success, and everyone had a part in success.” Greig carries that same philosophy to her role as a legislative leader.

“My number one goal is to define the passions in each of my caucus’s members, and then help them get to a success point,” she says. “When they are successful as individual legislators, then we will be successful as a caucus.”

And they’ve enjoyed some additional political leverage since 2019, when a Democrat was elected governor (Gretchen Whitmer) to create divided government in a state where Republicans have long held majorities in both legislative chambers.

Greig ascended to her caucus’s top leadership position that same year, her fifth year in the House.

Her path to the Legislature was not a direct one. Though she had been involved in student government as a high school student, Greig had a long and successful career in the private sector as an expert in computer applications and information technology — working for Andersen Consulting, for example, and owning a consulting business with her husband, Bob.

“When my boys started getting into school, I started cutting back on my business,” Greig says.

She instead was spending more and more time as a leader in education, creating a foundation for her local schools and traveling to Washington, D.C., and Lansing to meet with policymakers.

“That’s what got that fire going that I had when I was in high school,” she says. “I thought I should run for office and see if I had the abilities to be that voice for parents who are worried about their kids and be a voice for teachers — to champion public education investment.”

Once elected, she began working on a range of K-12 education issues: improving policies on school safety and student discipline, addressing teacher shortages, and strengthening charter-school accountability.

Early on, Greig’s colleagues took notice of her legislative work. She has held a leadership title of some kind in each of her three terms in the House.

During a recent CSG Midwest interview, Rep. Greig reflected on her views on lawmaking and legislative leadership, and discussed policy priorities for her final year in the term-limited Michigan House.

Q: What do you view as some of the biggest challenges leading your 52-member, minority-party caucus?

A: The diversity of our caucus is breathtaking. Our members come from all walks of life and bring different perspectives — with half being women and 23 first-timers to the Legislature or first-time officeholders. And our members range in age, from their 20s through their 70s, and represent the Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu faiths, to name just a few, and a diversity of professionals including scientists, firefighters and teachers.

Unifying the caucus can be challenging on any issue, but our diversity enriches the conversation. At the end of the day, we are usually able to find common ground on the most important issues. I strive to be a resource and help new members navigate being a first-time legislator, as well as to help them find their passion in terms of policy development.

Q: What would you describe your leadership style?

A: I follow the servant leadership model, as it is more of a collaborative approach that focuses on helping members of your team optimize their accomplishments to achieve greater organizational success. I firmly believe it is my responsibility to bring our 52 members along that journey with me.

My goal is not convincing every single member to agree with my opinion, but to encourage each member to strategically evaluate the issues based on their unique district dynamics and conscience. And, at end of the day, everyone needs to live up to their values. I’m committed to always respecting that.

Q: You’ve also talked about the value of building personal relationships across the aisle. Why is this important to you?

A: It would be really easy for us to just completely go to partisan ends and have a bloody battle about everything. But our responsibility is to govern.

It’s infrastructure. The state that put the country on wheels is having a lot of challenges with our roads and our bridges. We have not invested at the appropriate level to maintain and modernize our infrastructure. And every year that we’re not catching up on that investment, our roads and bridges are getting worse. We must address the critical infrastructure needs of our state with a practical long-term funding solution.

Another key priority is the protection of our environment and, in particular, our water.

We have people across our state that do not feel comfortable or safe drinking the water that’s coming out of their tap. Most people in the country are aware of the Flint water crisis, but now we have thousands of PFAS contamination sites across the state. Under previous administrations, we’ve been working under a philosophy of containment, and not prevention and cleanup. Now, we face a significant challenge to improve and protect our water resources and make sure that we’re living up to our moniker of the Great Lakes State.