

Ep.3.32 - Hilary Doe

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SPEAKERS

Ed Clemente, Hilary Doe, Announcer

A Announcer 00:01

Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.

E Ed Clemente 00:29

Hello, I'm your host Ed Clemente. And today we're fortunate to have Hilary Doe, Chief Growth Officer for the State of Michigan. Welcome to the show, Hilary.

H Hilary Doe 00:37

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

E Ed Clemente 00:39

Oh, no, I've been excited. I know I've talked to you a couple of times already ahead of time, just because I was excited about doing this podcast because it is such a challenge of what you're doing. And it's so exciting and a lot of ways and challenging. Why don't you sort of give us like, I'm sure you're already running into a gazillion people, and they want to know what you do. And they don't want a long answer. What do you usually tell them?

H Hilary Doe 01:03

Yeah, well, I mean, as you know, from the announcement, I am Michigan's first Chief Growth

Officer, but also it's the first Chief Growth Officer position any state has named. So it's understandable that folks are asking that question, certainly. My mandate, in short, is to really grow Michigan's population. And to do that we have to grow the population, boost the economy, and also make sure we're telling our story to everybody here in Michigan and across the country, that Michigan is a great place to call home. So the tools that we've got to do that really include, you know, any policy reforms that we think we need to make or take on, the Growing Michigan Together Council is really helping us paint a strategic direction in that regard, any, you know, initiatives or programs or pilots that we want to try that we think we need to push forward in order to engage in effective talent, retention and attraction, as well as a marketing and branding mandate to tell our story, and again, paint Michigan in the center of, one of the top options for folks when they think about a place to call home. So we want to retain and attract folks back to our state.

E

Ed Clemente 02:07

Yeah. And I mean, like, in general, what do you think was the underlying sort of passion because I know that if it's the only one in the country, there must be something unique. And I think, you know, as a former legislator, and that was an issue, because we'd either lose congressional seats, or we might lose federal funding sometimes, based on per capita kind of things. But is that what kind of drove this? Or have there been other things, too, you think?

H

Hilary Doe 02:34

Yeah, you know, Michigan is one of 18 states, about 34% of states that have been seeing declines. And there are many more that have been saying population stagnation. It's a whole new world, how folks evaluate places, what they're looking for in the place that they choose to call home. You know, in the old world, you sort of make jobs, people come, I think we're seeing that that's changed a lot folks are looking for a really diverse offering, they want a welcoming place, they want a strong economic story, and they want a beautiful city or community. Michigan obviously has natural beauty in spades, we have a right to be at the vanguard of this green transformation of our economy. So we have a lot going for us. And it is a welcoming place, both in terms of welcoming diverse populations, but we've been seeing our star rise as well in our rankings, in terms of great places to do business. So I think we have a good offering here. But we have to, basically, by naming this position, and also naming the Growing Michigan Together Council, I think what the governor was doing is signaling to the rest of the country, that this is a problem a lot of states have, but we're going to be the one to take it on. So we do have a first mover advantage here, in terms of looking across the country, and good examples in different cities and different locations, dreaming about the kind of Michigan we want to build together. And then attempting to really tackle that comprehensively, not just sort of one bite at the apple at a time, but really build a comprehensive strategy here to do as you said, a hard thing, and reverse these population trends to the benefit of all Michiganders. So, I think that's the real value here in the approach, that pretty comprehensive, holistic picture.

E

Ed Clemente 04:09

And you said country, but I think you and I when we've talked before, but we're actually talking internationally because, [Right.] this is a problem. I mean, obviously Japan and South Korea are good examples of where they're having declining populations. So it is a like we're in

good examples of where they're having declining populations. So it is a, like we're in competition globally for this talent as well, right?

H

Hilary Doe 04:31

Sure. Yeah, that's totally fair. I mean, one way to put it, right, is that in order to grow our population, we have to win the net migration battle. And that includes international migration and the decisions that folks are making about where to locate internationally and also the domestic migration battle. Right now Michigan is seeing positive growth in international migration, but we're an outflow state so more folks right now are leaving Michigan than are coming here. And so when we look at sort of the levers of the scale, we can think about getting even better at international migration and reversing the trend on domestic.

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Ed Clemente 05:07

Let's get back to your path a little bit yet. You came here via New York, right? [I was in Brooklyn, yeah, for a long time.] And how long were you there?

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Hilary Doe 05:20

I moved back in 2018. I was gone for almost a decade out of the state, yeah, prior to moving back.

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Ed Clemente 05:25

And you're from Monroe, right?

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Hilary Doe 05:28

Yep, I grew up in Monroe County, went to school at Erie Mason High School. So shout out to the Eagles and went to undergrad and grad school at U of M, undergrad and got my master's degree at U of M as well. So yeah, that was sort of my path within the state. And you know, come from a long line of Michiganders. My parents were both public school teachers in Monroe County. But before them, they have these really Michigan stories. My grandfather on my dad's side was an engineer at Jeep, for example. And my grandparents, my mom's side actually migrated up here from Virginia. My grandpa worked in a paper mill and my grandma actually was a Rosie the Riveter at the Willow Run factory during World War Two. So just sort of, I grew up in a family that loves Michigan, and cared a lot about our natural beauty, really prioritized that as an important part of my upbringing as long as the cost of living, being the daughter of two public school teachers who built a great life and I had all the opportunities I could have wanted, that isn't a given, in every place across the country, especially today. So that's definitely part of our story too, this sort of equal opportunity. And Michigan has grown and thrived historically, when we're building shared prosperity.



E

Ed Clemente 06:44

And I'm a big fan of Monroe just because I live down river. And yeah, a lot of people from downriver do a lot of things we go to Calder's Farms and you know, we visit all those places. And if your dad was working at Jeep, that was probably down in Toledo at that point.

H

Hilary Doe 06:59

My dad's dad, yeah, and my dad actually did a stint, I think, hanging doors, if I remember correctly, at Jeep, before he had me, so it was definitely in the family.

E

Ed Clemente 07:10

Yeah, and you came here from the NationBuilder, why don't you tell us what NationBuilder was? Because I know that helped get you this position, I presume, too.

H

Hilary Doe 07:19

Yeah. So my sort of first act in my career was actually in public policy, I got my master's degree in public policy and was national director of a think tank, working on mostly economic issues. So closing the gap for economic inequality that was based in New York, and I was there for a long time. Honestly, the most inspirational part of it, I think, is worth saying, because it's so relevant to the population work, which is that we had about 100 chapters across the country of mostly young folks who were identifying challenges in their local communities, writing public policy solutions to solve them, and then getting them implemented. It was so compelling and inspiring to see folks do that in hundreds of communities across the country. And also to see sort of the growth of ideas like a great idea sprang up in New Haven that could be spread to other communities that were a lot like it. It's really relevant to the population work, because we're in this listening phase, where we're listening in communities across the state. What do folks love about the place that they are? What do they want for their future? What kind of Michigan should we be building together? And it feels really reminiscent of that time at Roosevelt when we were building policy agendas with community input. But after that, I made quite a pivot into tech, I didn't think I'd be a tech executive. And then ended up being there for almost 10 years, ended up being president at NationBuilder. And we existed really to lower barriers to access for advocacy for communities around the world. So we're a global company, whether you wanted to get a speedbump removed from your community, or build a movement around any issue in your state, we really wanted to ensure that folks had access to the tools that they needed in order to accomplish that. And again, that has felt really relevant in this population work that we're really thoughtful about how to ensure access and representation. And they were paying a lot of attention to not just the policy, but also the engagement, messaging, marketing, branding and movement building around Michigan, because it's really going to take both continuous improvement on the product that is Michigan to make it an even better place to call home, and really telling our story aloud and proud to folks in the state across the country and to your point around the world.

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Ed Clemente 07:25

And you know, not to overhype you, but you know, these are sort of like soft algorith...

And, you know, not to paraphrase you but you know, these are sort of like sort algorithms, you're sort of building right because it's not like hardcore analytics, but it still is somewhat anecdotal-based to the point where they become repetitive and that's probably in your previous job you would see repetitive things like that, that you said. Ah, so that's why we need to listen to this and yeah, does that help?

H

Hilary Doe 09:58

Yeah, I think you know, there's so much textured information in witnessing individual actions taking place, but then also being able to zoom out and say, Oh, I can see that pattern, I can see that intervention really having impact in all kinds of contexts. And yeah, I think that's definitely what we're up to here, in part, right, listening carefully to the differences between what rural communities are worried about what challenges they're facing, what they're hoping to become in the next decades. And also what our cities are saying, and then finding commonality as well. So we can think about the policy interventions that will sort of lift all boats across the state as we're driving towards this ambitious goal to grow Michigan's population.

E

Ed Clemente 10:37

Let's talk about that. Because obviously, it's a statewide initiative. So let's maybe blend in a little bit about your board, just the geographic size of it. And why don't we just start off by mentioning who your two co-chairs are?

H

Hilary Doe 10:55

Yep. So we have the Growing Michigan Together Council was announced the same day my position was announced, and I'm acting as executive director on that council. They have a big charge. They're meant to produce recommendations to provide to the governor by just the beginning of December, basically. So in order to get that done-

E

Ed Clemente 11:15

Of this year? so that's only a couple of months.

H

Hilary Doe 11:18

Yeah, we're in the sprint. So, the governor named the chairs who are meant to represent a really bipartisan commitment to this effort, because it's gonna take a while, right, it's gonna take our commitment in terms of our strategy, and we don't want it to be fickle. We want to really get this done for Michiganders. So Ambassador John Rakolta and Governor Shirley Stancato, a governor at Wayne State, are co-chairs. And then we took on the task of building as much as we could, a really broad-based group of experts and with a lot of regional representation and also youth representation, because obviously, attracting and retaining young folks is going to be important. So we ended up with a council of, you know, about 27 members, including some of the non voting members, and workgroups, about 18 people each

across for workgroups. So taken together, we have a nearly 100 folks who are working on that. And that's even before we include all the people we're engaging in our public engagement efforts, and between now and December, we're taking those on, head on. So it's looking like we'll do almost 70 events between now and the end of the year, with our true desire to get youth representation, regional representation, the stories of Michiganders across our state, as well as putting some polls in the field to hear with folks around the country about why they're choosing to live where they live, what's in the way and what we can do to make Michigan an even better place.

E

Ed Clemente 12:46

And so are you physically having to criss-cross the state, then?

H

Hilary Doe 12:51

I'm doing a lot of it. Yeah, I'm logging a lot of miles. But I'm really enjoying it actually. Because like I said, from data, zeros and ones, you can get one story, but actually having really rich conversations with folks in person paints so much texture into why folks want the outcomes that they want. And actually what they're dreaming about, what they're worried about when they see population declines in rural communities, for example. So it's been incredible so far, and we're only getting started.

A

Announcer 13:20

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E

Ed Clemente 13:37

How is the mechanism or like, you're saying that they have to coordinate like these different board members? And they coordinate in their little pockets and say, for example, DTE, we're going to be doing this and is that how it's working? Oh, you

H

Hilary Doe 13:50

You mean for the public engagement or the rest of the Council?

E

Ed Clemente 13:52

Is it just you? Are they doing work?

H

Hilary Doe 13:54

H Hilary Doe 13:54

Yeah, got it. Yeah. Well to zoom out for a second, just so folks can hear how the recommendations are gonna get assembled. So we're divided in four workgroups, infrastructure in place, jobs, talent, people, higher ed and pre-K-12. To really look hard at any structural reforms that would help aid us in ensuring that we can retain talent, attract talent, and making sure that you know, our places are ready for population growth, and we have like a strong foundation for that kind of growth. So our workgroups are pulling together recommendations in each of those four areas, rolling them up to the Council for their deliberation, and they'll produce the recs by December. But in addition to that, we're parallel processing this public engagement effort. And that's mostly my team stateside. And yeah, we're hosting those events with partner organizations across the state. So all our partners are really helping us carry a lot of weight. I keep saying to folks this is a group project so we need everybody and you know if I can plug one thing today, I would plug for you know, folks to go to growingmichigan.org You can submit a story you can submit an idea you can submit a policy question, get in touch with us, and we're taking all of those submissions really seriously. They're all going back to the workgroups to inform the recommendations. And they're going to help us get to a great outcome here in such a short amount of time.

E Ed Clemente 15:11

And can you mention those four groups, again, I think that's interesting, because if you want people to, I think those four groups kind of give you a good compass heading.

H Hilary Doe 15:21

Totally, yep. The four are infrastructure in place, which includes kind of traditional infrastructure, roads and bridges, and making sure that we have those foundations in place, but also placemaking. So thinking about our places, our communities, what we need to do to make sure that they can attract and retain talent, they're an asset for us. Pre-K-12, which, obviously, is pretty self explanatory. But when we think about the kind of Michigan we're trying to build here, one thing that you know, has become really apparent to me is across the state, the thing that I hear from folks is that they know who we are, our history of innovation, that we're makers that we make real things here in Michigan. And so when we think about our pre-K-12 system, we want to make sure it's always an asset to retention and attraction. And it's also helping us produce a population of folks who can participate fully in these 21st century opportunities, as you know, makers and creators and entrepreneurs. So that's really critical. Our higher ed group, which again, has a similar task, they're around both workforce and affordability, making sure that we have equity of opportunity here. And finally, jobs, talent and people. So thinking about workforce preparation, talent attraction programs, retention programs, and what we need to do to lower barriers to our folks participating, whether that might be, I've heard from our groups, so far, child care, thinking about housing, there are lots of sort of friction points that might be in the way, and we want to remove those to make it easy to move to Michigan, or stay here in Michigan and have a great job and a great quality of life.

E Ed Clemente 16:48

Yeah, thank you. I think that's really helpful. So you kind of touched on a few of these things. But what sort of trends do you see that are going to sort of either foster either more challenges

for you or things that might feed into what you're doing?

H

Hilary Doe 17:07

Yeah. Well, yeah, I think we have some opportunities and some challenges. So both sides of the coin here. What I'm seeing so far in the data, you can see that we are not currently winning this domestic net migration battle in particular. So we're losing more folks than we're gaining. And in particular, we're losing folks for job-related reasons. And a lot of those folks are young folks between 18 and 34, a lot of them with bachelor's degrees, who can help us on the plus side, really lean into some of the opportunities that we have, we need to keep those folks here in the state so that we can take advantage of some of the economic opportunities, we have to lead the green transformation to push forward on, you know, EVs, for example, to take our strong leading place and advanced manufacturing and future mobility and renewable energy. That's right there for us. Michigan has a right to it. But we need to make sure that we have you know, folks here in the state who can help us be the leaders in those areas. The other thing that we're seeing it trend is obviously with remote work, folks, sort of calculus, of why they might move somewhere, it's changing a little bit. So folks might prioritize natural beauty a little bit more than they did in the past. And we have obviously the world's longest freshwater coastline, that can't hurt. So us telling that story and making sure that it's part of a comprehensive story that also includes placemaking, and economic growth, all the other commitments we're making to drive more of those young folks, you know, back to Michigan and young families, young workers, recent graduates, we need to make sure we're making the case to bring them home.

E

Ed Clemente 18:36

Yeah, and I think you're, obviously consider yourself an example of a boomerang, kinda.

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Hilary Doe 18:42

Yeah, I guess so, yep.

E

Ed Clemente 18:43

You went away, came back. But I also think, and I've mentioned to you before about that author, Parag Khanna, who was on the podcast before wrote a book MOVE. And, you know, he's very bullish on Michigan, actually. But you know, you're right, you need to make sure there are filters and how we do it so that you don't have shortages of housing or you can't have some areas build up too fast or like, all those things happen.

H

Hilary Doe 19:14

That's what I'm so grateful for with this comprehensive approach, we do have the benefit of being able to bear witness to what has happened in other places, and again, by being the first mover here, saying out loud, we're going to take this on comprehensively, we get to look at those things and say, Hey, this community did a great job at growing population, and they ran

into this and that snag, they saw in affordable housing, they lost their grasp on cost of living, for example. So we can get ahead and make comprehensive recommendations that account for some of those challenges to ensure that we're protecting some of the things that we love about Michigan, like protecting our natural resources, protecting our cost of living and our relative affordability. We can be thoughtful about that while we're also pursuing growth strategies that can retain and attract folks, and we couldn't do that if we were taking a more kind of siloed approach. So another reason I'm really grateful for folks feedback. They're telling us not only, you know what they're hoping for, in population growth, but things that we should look out and be concerned about, that we need to address in our recommendations.

E

Ed Clemente 20:14

So you're sort of completing like a holistic audit first, before you start plunging in too fast.

H

Hilary Doe 20:21

That's right. However, as you know, the recommendations are coming out in December. [Oh, yeah.] So it's all happening at the same time, everything all at once. But, it's been such a great process. And it does mean so much to have the governor willing to say, hey, we're gonna do this, and we're going to be the first and I hope that that means an even brighter future for Michigan.

E

Ed Clemente 20:42

The last couple of questions are one, you've had an interesting career. But what would you go back and give your, you know, Erie Mason, high school Eagles? Yeah, what advice would you give to your 17-year-old self today?

H

Hilary Doe 21:00

Yeah, I mean, this is so trite. But, I think at that time, I grew up in a smaller community, I had a great upbringing, I'm so grateful to my parents for all the opportunities that they afforded me, but you know, as a small community, and I think I didn't realize all the opportunities that were out there, what all the possibilities were. And so as I've gotten older, the thing that I've always followed to each of these careers through these wild pivots, from sort of public policy into tech, and now back into a role like this, is that I'm committed to solving problems that matter. And everybody's sort of assessment of what matters and what compels them, and what drives them is, of course, different. But being really committed to following that, even if you can't totally see the full path in front of you has served me well. And I would certainly recommend that to others, we all have to spend a lot of our life hours working. So getting the opportunity to do something that matters that we care about, that we believe in, has been a gift to me. And last thing I'll say about that is, you know, one of the tasks here is to tell our story to a younger generation, and we're seeing a younger generation make those purpose-driven decisions about how they want to spend their life hours all the time. So I think we're already seeing folks begin to sort that way. And we need to tell Michigan story in that context, as well about the kind of future we're going to build together and Michigan's role in it.

E

Ed Clemente 22:24

Yeah, you know, I asked that question, actually, before your organization even existed, because I always thought that was pretty relevant to not just, I don't know if a high school kids gonna listen to this podcast, but you know, their parents might, or someone else might, that might influence somebody else. And everyone's advice is always a little different on that question, but it's always valuable, because it's all the things you kind of what if? And you wonder where what if would have taken you?

H

Hilary Doe 22:56

Yeah, and I mean, I recognize that it's sort of from a place of relative privilege, being able to follow your passion and get to pick but because I think that's important, it's why I think some of this pre-K work, for example, we're doing and some of this higher ed affordability work is so critical right? So that everybody gets a shot to be able to follow those passions and dreams I think that does better for Michigan and also for our role in the whole world right because we'll be making more things, we'll be innovating, we'll be creating future like Michigan has had a role in for for so many generations.

E

Ed Clemente 23:27

And that sort of dovetails in your last question is what do you like? Do you have like a favorite thing you like doing in Michigan, a festival or maybe it's down in Monroe, still? I don't know.

H

Hilary Doe 23:38

I do like the apple orchards in Monroe County, so I do like to still go down there and visit. We're going to make a swing down there, I hope, a high school swing to get some feedback from folks here soon. What do I love? I've always loved Detroit. I worked for the DGC briefly when I was in grad school and really fell in love with Detroit's architecture. We have Piston season tickets. I love basketball so I love going to Pistons games. I am so happy to be a Detroit resident, we're in Indian village. I love being able to get on the bike with my kids and be downtown in eight minutes. I couldn't do that in Brooklyn. I had to ride a subway for 45 minutes, so the quality of life can't be beat, and I love spending the summers like all good Michiganders who get the chance on a lake. So we've been lucky enough to go up to Elk Lake and Elk Rapids since I've been back here in the state and that's such a gift that you don't get everywhere.

E

Ed Clemente 24:34

Yeah, and that's a long drive. [Yeah, its four hours, but it's worth it.] Yeah, no, no, no. Yeah, I don't blame you. Yeah, but I just wanted to again, say thanks for taking time to talk to us today. Again, our guest was Hilary Doe. She's the Chief Growth Officer for the State of Michigan and she's working, I believe, are you technically under the MEDC?

H Hilary Doe 24:57

Yep, I'm at MEDC, the Growing Together Council is housed at LEO. So again, it's a group project.

E Ed Clemente 25:04

Okay. Well again, thanks again for doing the show. You've been a pleasure and I look forward to working with you in the future.

H Hilary Doe 25:09

All right, thank you so much.

A Announcer 25:12

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