

## Michigan SEP candidate responds to gubernatorial debate

# Granholm, De Vos trade right-wing nostrums: No choice for working people in Michigan governors' race

**Statement by Jerome White, Socialist Equality Party candidate for US Congress in Michigan's 12th District**  
**5 October 2006**

Monday night's debate between Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm and her Republican opponent, billionaire businessman Richard DeVos, was a vulgar and degrading spectacle. What emerged from the mutual mudslinging and recriminations was the fact that working people in Michigan are confronted with two right-wing gubernatorial candidates who have no interest in addressing, let alone resolving, the devastating social crisis that has engulfed the state.

Michigan's 7.1 percent unemployment rate is already the highest in the nation. With the auto industry slashing nearly 100,000 jobs in North America, many more blue-collar and white-collar workers in Michigan will be added to the jobless rolls.

Over the last five years, median income in the state has fallen by 12 percent, the sharpest drop in the US. Northwest Airlines, Delphi and other companies are demanding unprecedented wage and benefit cuts from their workers.

More than a million residents of the state have no medical insurance, pensions for retired workers and their dependents are being slashed, and the state is leading the nation in home foreclosures.

This catastrophe is not limited to Detroit, Flint and other hard-hit industrial cities, but has spread to surrounding suburbs, like my district in Oakland and Macomb counties, which has seen a staggering increase in the number people seeking emergency housing and food aid.

In the course of the one-hour televised debate, the two candidates made little attempt to conceal their disinterest in the plight of working people. Nor did they even raise such vital issues as the war in Iraq—which has already claimed the lives of nearly 100 soldiers from Michigan—or the trampling of democratic rights by the Bush administration, which has already resulted in police state measures against hundreds of the tens of thousands of Arab-Americans who reside in the Detroit metropolitan area.

The event hardly merited the term "debate." The candidates were not trying to persuade potential voters on the basis of ideas or policies. Instead, the two right-wing

candidates slugged it out, trying to convince the corporate and financial elite that they could do a better job defending their profits than their opponent.

By prior agreement, the Democrats and Republicans and the news media excluded the gubernatorial candidates of the Michigan Greens, the Libertarians and the US Taxpayers parties, although thousands of Michigan voters had signed petitions to place their names on the ballot.

Richard DeVos, who inherited hundreds of millions from his father—the co-founder of Amway Corporation—is the richest man ever to run for statewide office in Michigan. He is a big contributor to the Republican National Committee, which in return promoted legislation that granted his company millions in tax breaks and other incentives.

DeVos speaks for that section of big business that wants to do away with virtually all taxation and regulation and gut whatever remains of social spending for schools and other social services. During the debate, DeVos repeated the Bush administration's identification of "job creation" with tax cuts for the rich and poverty wages for workers. He outlined plans to eliminate Michigan's Single Business Tax—saving corporations \$2 billion—and slash at least \$1 billion from the state's budget, referring to social spending as "fat" that needed to be cut.

For her part, the Democratic governor insisted she was no "tax and spend" liberal. Granholm boasted that she had cut more money from the state budget than "any governor in Michigan history." She added that she had been a strong supporter of President Clinton's "welfare reform"—which ended the federally guaranteed income program for tens of millions of the country's poorest citizens.

The governor was indignant over her Republican opponent's charge that she had failed to create a business-friendly atmosphere, noting that she had handed over \$600 million in tax cuts and other incentives to corporations and had made similar offers to Honda, Whirlpool and Electrolux to encourage them to invest in the state.

To prove how much she was willing to pander to the interests of big business, Granholm recalled her efforts to keep Swedish appliance giant Electrolux from shutting its refrigerator factory in the western Michigan town of Greenville. "I told them they could pay zero taxes," she said, and "the workers were willing to take big wage and

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benefit cuts.” Nevertheless, the company shut down the 2,700-employee facility last March and moved its operations to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

In fact, the governor’s handouts to big business have not stopped the hemorrhaging of jobs in Michigan, which has lost 200,000 manufacturing positions over the last five years. In the face of this undeniable reality, the Democratic governor launched into an anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese tirade, confirming the old adage that “patriotism is last refuge of a scoundrel.”

The problem in Michigan, Granholm declared, was “unfair competition” from China, the free trade policy with Mexico, and trade barriers that were supposedly keeping US companies from penetrating world markets.

Granholm repeated the charge made in her attack ads against DeVos that he had slashed thousands of jobs at his Michigan-based Amway company while opening up manufacturing facilities in China. Her protectionist ranting was only interrupted when DeVos noted that her political ally, former Democratic President Bill Clinton, had championed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico, which she now denounces.

National chauvinism has long been the stock-in-trade of the Democratic Party and its allies in the trade union bureaucracy. From their racist attacks on Asian workers and the smashing of Japanese cars, to their tirades against Mexican workers for “stealing American jobs,” the United Auto Workers union and the Democratic Party establishment have promoted nationalism to conceal the fact that it is the capitalist profit system, not “foreign” workers, which is responsible for the devastating job loss. The flag-waving and “American-first” campaigns have coincided with never-ending demands that workers sacrifice wages and benefits to “save” the US auto industry.

What has this produced? 600,000 workers have lost their jobs over the last three decades, wages have stagnated, and brutal conditions have returned to the factory floor. At the same time, compensation for the top corporate executives, including those responsible for driving the US auto industry into the ground, has skyrocketed, with CEOs making tens of millions each year.

The truth is that the global capitalist system is victimizing workers on every continent. Just days after Ford announced plans to eliminate 44,000 jobs in North America, Europe’s

second largest automaker Peugeot-Citroen announced that it would wipe out 10,000 jobs—or 7 percent of its workforce.

It is critical that workers reject the chauvinist demagogues who want to weaken and divide the international working class, and instead launch a common fight to defend the jobs and living standards of all workers, regardless of where they live.

Whether a Democrat or Republican politician has occupied the governor’s seat in Lansing, the impoverishment of the working class in Michigan has continued unabated. That is because the representatives of both these parties, including my opponent in the 12th Congressional District, Sander Levin, defend the capitalist profit system and speak for the corporate and financial elite that has enriched itself at the expense of working people.

That is why I am running for US Congress in Michigan and why the Socialist Equality Party is working to build a powerful political movement of the working class against the two parties of war and social inequality. I call for an emergency program to provide economic security to Michigan’s working people.

\* I demand a moratorium on all foreclosures and evictions. No one should be made homeless because of the loss of a job.

\* I demand the launching of a massive public works program—paid for by sharply raising taxes on the wealthy—to hire the unemployed and rebuild the cities and rural areas. This must include a crash program to construct schools, medical clinics, mass transportation and cultural and recreation centers, and hire tens of thousands of new teachers, doctors and other health care providers.

\* The auto industry, upon which so many lives depend, can no longer be the personal asset of big Wall Street investors and corporate CEOs, who have proven incapable of protecting the interests of the masses of working people who produce the wealth, let alone the needs of consumers for safe, fuel efficient and affordable transportation. The auto industry must be transformed into a public enterprise, democratically controlled by committees of workers, technicians, and other experts dedicated to the interests of working people.

I urge Michigan voters to study the program of the Socialist Equality Party and to vote for me in the November 7 election.

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