

2016: The Year in Review and A Look Ahead

Congressman Fred Upton

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A note from Congressman Fred Upton on the priorities for 2017

As we look ahead to 2017, we must look to advancing a bold agenda to fix the problems that face all American families. We will have our work cut out for us, but by working together, I believe we can accomplish great things.

Jobs and our local economy will continue to be priority number one for me. From agriculture to manufacturing to technology, Southwest Michigan is home to innovative companies and businesses big and small. I remain ever-committed to working with our local stakeholders to promote common-sense legislative solutions that boost jobs and help our economy.

Infrastructure improvement will also be a key part of this strategy. Folks here in Michigan understand better than most that our roads, bridges, and other critical infrastructure are in need of attention. Investing resources in our infrastructure needs will not only help create jobs but will also create an environment where businesses and families will want to come to Michigan.

Under Obamacare, folks have experienced losing their trusted doctors and have seen higher bills that undermine the very reason this program was put in place. And so repealing and replacing Obamacare will be a top priority in 2017. Our efforts must take careful consideration, planning, and my hope is that these needed reforms will be bipartisan. My focus will remain on ensuring Michiganders can benefit from better choices at lower costs. I am also committed to ensuring health care insurance markets provide more affordable options for families and small businesses, while protecting Americans with pre-existing conditions.

Tax reform is another issue I believe we should vigorously pursue. American families and businesses are simply taxed too much and I have long been in favor of reducing tax rates for both individuals and businesses as a way to spur real economic growth. We need to clean up our tax code and lower the rates so that American businesses can compete on a more even playing field with the rest of the world.

The New Year will certainly provide new challenges, which we will face together. As always, please know that staff in my constituent offices in Kalamazoo (269-385-0039) and Benton Harbor/St. Joseph (269-982-1986) as well as my office in Washington, D.C., (202-225-3761) are happy to help assist with any issues or concerns as we move forward through the year.

My hope is that the rest of this report will provide insight into some of our major accomplishments from 2016 and provide a foundation for what we hope to accomplish in the coming year.

Serving Our Southwest Michigan Community

As a member of Congress, I strive to always be open, transparent, and accountable to all of my constituents across Southwest Michigan. This year was a busy one, with great focus on important legislative issues as well as serving the community I love. All told, I was able to respond to 31,255 constituent letters and emails this year, and took part in 463 meetings with constituents. We were also able to help 1,196 constituents through casework and gave 172 U.S. Capitol tours. If you or someone you know is in need of assistance with a federal agency please do not hesitate to contact one of my district offices to see if we can help. In 2017, this same focus on building, supporting, and leading our Southwest Michigan community will continue.

In 2016, tragedies in [Kalamazoo](#) and [Berrien County](#) rocked our region to its core. In both instances, our office was intimately involved in the recovery. I led a [moment of silence](#) on the floor of the House of Representatives for those lost in the Kalamazoo tragedy, and gave a [statement on the House Floor](#) about those brave public servants we lost in Berrien County.

We will never forget those lives lost in Kalamazoo or Berrien counties.

In 2016, we were able to [open up a new constituent service office](#) in the heart of downtown Kalamazoo. We also continued our fight for the freedom of Harbert, Michigan, resident [Ibrahim Parlak](#). We held our annual [high school art competition](#) as well as the first ever Sixth Congressional District [Facebook cover photo](#) contest.

Finally, our community said sad goodbyes to Southwest Michigan icons [Anna Whitten](#), [Juke Van Oss](#), and [Muhammad Ali](#).

21st Century Cures: The Game-Changer Patients Need

21st Century Cures grew out of more than three years of Congress listening to experts within the healthcare ecosystem. Patients, doctors, innovators, job creators, educators, and researchers were all consulted. Dozens of bipartisan roundtable were held across the country, including one in Kalamazoo at the Western Michigan University Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine. At its core, 21st Century Cures will safely speed up the approvals for life-saving medical cures and devices. Coupled with billions of dollars allocated to agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ensure the next generation of research and innovations happens right here in the United States and not overseas. In 2017, I will be focused on the implementation of 21st Century Cures to ensure our work to find #CuresNow continues.

In 2016 we joined forces with the folks at the Van Andel Institute in [Grand Rapids](#), the University of Michigan in [Dearborn](#), business leaders in [Holland](#), The Who lead singer [Roger Daltrey](#), and more to promote the policies included in 21st Century Cures directly to the American people.

It worked.

Following on the heels of an overwhelmingly bipartisan 392 to 26 vote in the House of Representatives and a 94 to 5 vote in the Senate, [President Obama, on December 13, signed the 21st Century Cures Act into law.](#)

Working together, we were able to get the job done. Patients needed a game-changer – and it is our hope that history will look back at the Cures effort as the moment in time when the tide finally turned against disease.

Jobs and our Local Economy

More local jobs and a stronger economy continue to be my number one priority. And while our economy is clearly improving, more can and should be done to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to find – and hold – a meaningful job. In 2017, our region will face more innovation and change, and I will continue to work with local, state, and federal stakeholders to ensure Southwest Michigan remains at the forefront of the global economy.

In 2016, I was part of the [bipartisan, bicameral](#) group of legislators that finally achieved landmark chemical safety reforms as part of the [Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act](#). The landmark legislation advanced in the House by a 403 to 12 vote, was unanimously passed in the Senate, and then signed into law. This law modernizes the decades-old *Toxic Substances Control Act* (TSCA) to improve chemical safety while encouraging innovation, economic growth, and better interstate and global commerce.

Self-driving cars are part of the new wave of innovation that will fundamentally change our economic future – especially here at home in Michigan. In order to promote Michigan as a leader in this cutting-edge industry, we held [bipartisan congressional hearings](#) to promote the exchange of ideas around self-driving cars and what they mean for our economy and jobs.

We urged the Federal Communications Commission to improve high-band [spectrum](#) to spur innovation and job creation and I was proud to be named as part of an [encryption](#) working group to tackle an issue that will be of critical importance in the coming years.

I was also part of the efforts aimed at modernizing the Federal Trade Commission and our joint efforts were critical to advancing legislation to modernize [rural call completion](#).

Finally, the House of Representatives passed critical legislation to improve the [outdoor recreation industry](#), which has become a significant driver of job and economic growth here in Southwest Michigan.

Healthcare Innovations

There is a real need to reform our health care system to reduce costs and expand access to quality care for all Americans. As debates surrounding the future of healthcare continue, we must pursue a reasonable, bipartisan approach that promotes patient-centered reforms and the highest care quality possible. I am committed to ensuring health care insurance markets provide more

affordable options for families and small business, while protecting Americans with pre-existing conditions. In 2017, my focus will continue to be on ensuring Michiganders can benefit from better choices at lower costs.

Our oversight of federal healthcare programs came to a head as problems with Obamacare persisted, and [double-digit rate hikes](#) came as an unwelcome surprise to millions of Americans in October. And when the rising cost for life-saving [EpiPen Auto-Injectors](#) became an issue in August, we immediately took a hard look at the specifics and pressed Mylan, the manufacturer of EpiPens, for concrete answers.

As part of the historic 21st Century Cures Act, breakthrough [mental health reform](#) legislation was signed into law. President Obama also signed into law legislation to combat the Zika virus. This came after we had spent months [spearheading efforts](#) in the House for a prompt and thorough public health response to this potentially life-changing illness.

We also began a broad review of the health effects of [concussions](#) and promoted collaboration and modernization at the [Food and Drug Administration](#). We championed bipartisan legislation protecting kids from [liquid nicotine](#) and critical legislation to [protect](#) sexual assault survivors.

I was also proud to support the passage of the Childhood Cancer [STAR Act](#) after a touching vigil in Bronson Park in Kalamazoo spurred action.

Finally, we continued our track record of strengthening critical programs like Medicaid by [empowering](#) Medicaid beneficiaries to empower individuals with more control and by working to enact 21st century [reforms](#) to get rid of bad actors and increase access to those that rely on these critical programs the most.

National Security and Keeping our Promise to Veterans

America's top foreign policy goal must be to defend our citizens and our homeland from foreign threats. We must also work together to ensure the brave men and women in our Armed Forces, and their families, have the resources and training necessary to succeed on and off the battlefield. And as cyberattacks take center stage, we must closely monitor each situation and explore strategies and develop protections to mitigate the impact these types of attacks have on our networks. In 2017, I will continue to play a constructive role in promoting our national security, and keeping our promise to our veterans.

This year, the House and Senate again passed the critical [National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017](#), which included the largest pay raise for our troops in six years and exceeded President Obama's original budget request to help close the readiness gap our military currently faces. This bipartisan legislation also blocked any attempts to close or transfer detainees to the United States from Guantanamo Bay.

President Obama signed into law bipartisan legislation championed by myself and U.S. Sen. Gary Peters, D-Michigan, to modernize the Michigan National Guard [leasing program](#). Congress also voted to allow families of the 9/11 attacks to [seek justice](#).

Of continued great importance, the Michigan Congressional Delegation worked together to support the proposed [Fort Custer](#) missile defense site, as one of the three remaining locations under consideration for this vital national security mission.

Finally, the House and Senate passed legislation that would honor South Haven veteran James C. McCloughan with the [Medal of Honor](#) for his heroic acts performed as an Army medic while serving in Vietnam in 1969.

Advancing Education Reforms and Opportunities

A proper education is truly the bedrock of our democracy and one of my greatest pleasures as a Representative is hearing from, and speaking to, students from around Southwest Michigan. In 2017, we must continue to put students and families first by offering them choices and equal prospects to the most cutting-edge educational opportunities available.

I enjoyed teaming up with Rep. Debbie Dingell, D-Michigan, on [bipartisan legislation to champion For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology \(FIRST\) Robotics](#). Our work would honor Christa McAuliffe, the science teacher who tragically perished on the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, with a commemorative coin, the proceeds of which would go to help support FIRST's efforts to mentor and foster Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) education. We also convened a [legislative hearing](#) focused on advanced robotics, and specifically, the role FIRST plays in fostering this unique educational experience for children across the country.

The House of Representatives also acted to reauthorize the [Carl D. Perkins Act](#), which is bipartisan legislation that provides much-needed federal support to state and local career and technical education programs.

My office continued our [Congressional Art Competition](#), which helps foster creativity and hard work among Southwest Michigan students. And finally, my office also announced the appointment of several students to U.S. military academies, including the [Air Force Academy](#) and the [Naval Academy](#).

Protecting our Great Lakes and Environment

Growing up on the shores of Lake Michigan instilled in me a deep appreciation for our Great Lakes and its natural beauty. I personally know the need to preserve our Great Lakes for future generations and have an extensive bipartisan record of working across the aisle to do just that. In 2017, I plan on continuing common-sense stewardship of our Great Lakes and environment.

I was proud to be a key leader in getting bipartisan legislation, the *Protecting our Infrastructure of Pipelines and Enhancing Safety (PIPES) Act*, to enhance pipeline safety efforts [signed into law by President Obama](#). The PIPES Act also included a specific provision that I championed requiring increased inspections for some underwater pipelines in high consequence areas, including the Line

5 pipeline under the Straights of Mackinac. This bipartisan legislation was a big win not only for Southwest Michigan, but the entire Great Lakes region.

We worked to support the Great Lakes by advancing H.R. 223, the [Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Act](#). This bipartisan legislation would improve the environmental quality of our Great Lakes by increasing funding to combat invasive species like Asian Carp and helping cleanup of toxic substances.

Also, as part of the [Water Resources Development Act of 2016](#) (WRDA), we were able to ensure funding was made available from the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund for operations and maintenance of critical navigation projects in the Great Lakes.

We also continued our bipartisan oversight of Great Lakes drinking water related to harmful [algal blooms](#).

21st Century Energy Policies

Now more than ever we need to pursue a common-sense, “all of the above” energy strategy that utilizes our abundant energy resources. With advances in technology and innovation, we are experiencing a new era of energy abundance. Building the infrastructure to safely move these supplies to consumers so that prices remain low will again be a high priority in 2017.

This year, House and Senate officially kicked off a “Conference Committee” on a bipartisan [energy bill](#). This comprehensive energy bill, aimed at modernizing our energy laws for the 21st century, was the first such effort since 2005. And while, in the end, we did not quite finish the job, we laid the foundation for how bipartisan energy policy should be conducted in the coming months and years.

While we technically enacted bipartisan policy to lift the 40-year-old ban on oil exports in 2015, the benefits of reversing this outdated ban were seen in 2016. Through the creation of jobs, improvement in our balance of trade, and competition with Russia and Iran and others who used to dominate oil markets.

We held a [thoughtful review](#) of car and truck efficiency standards as set by the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFÉ) program. Being from Michigan, I worry about the impact these standards could have on the long-term health of the auto sector. Motor vehicles are getting more efficient and will continue to do so, but we need to make certain that it happens in a way that maximizes benefits for consumers and preserves the health of the automotive industry.

We also launched a long-term review of the future of [electricity](#), to ensure the nation’s electrical system is prepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century.

Combatting the Prescription Opioid and Heroin Epidemic

As the awful opioid and heroin epidemic continues to tear through Southwest Michigan and communities across the country, Congress came together and passed legislation to address the problem. According to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Service, in 2014 drug poisoning deaths rose 14 percent and became the No. 1 cause of injury-related death in Michigan. We addressed this crisis head on, and in 2017, our focus must continue pursuing legislative solutions that help folks in our communities facing real crisis as a result of this epidemic.

In July, the House and Senate passed, and the President signed into law, [a sweeping package of laws aimed at attacking the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic from all sides](#). This critical legislation includes more than a dozen bills advanced by the House Energy and Commerce Committee. I was also proud to have chaired the House and Senate Conference Committee that finalized the comprehensive package.

And then in December, as part of the *21st Century Cures Act*, an additional \$1 billion dollars was allocated to states to address the opioid and heroin epidemic.

I also helped championed the [DXM Prevention Act of 2015](#), which would prohibit the sale of a drug containing dextromethorphan (DXM) to an individual under the age of 18.

Investing in Michigan Infrastructure

Infrastructure is literally the foundation of our Southwest Michigan community. This year, we focused on repairing fractured infrastructure and provided support for key local projects. In 2017, our emphasis on rebuilding our infrastructure at the local, state, and federal level will be a significant component and something our entire Michigan delegation will be focused on.

In September, the House passed the Water Resources Development Act of 2016, critical [water infrastructure legislation](#) that included a specific provision, and millions in funding, to help Flint.

From the beginning, I was an outspoken proponent of aid for Flint. The federal government had a role to play in the water crisis, and so the federal government bore responsibility to help make the situation in Flint right. As a result of our work, the House of Representatives passed the [Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation \(WIIN\) Act](#), a comprehensive water resources infrastructure bill. This act also included authorizing funds to address the situation in Flint. It authorized \$100 million in Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Capitalization Grants, \$20 million for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, \$17.5 million for lead registry, \$2.5 million for the Lead Advisory Council, \$15 million for the childhood lead prevention program at the CDC, and \$15 million for the healthy start initiative.

The WIIN Act also contained public notification requirements similar to provisions in H.R. 4470, which I sponsored alongside Rep. Dan Kildee, D-Flint.

I also [threw my support](#) behind the Michigan Department of Transportation's I-94 project to help finalize critical infrastructure improvements in Kalamazoo.

Good Government and Oversight

The American people are entitled to a government that is responsive and transparent. Part of being an effective member of Congress is being able to hold powerful interests accountable to consumers. In 2016 we saw a number of scandals break out that demanded Congressional oversight. As we look ahead to 2017, our focus on being effective consumer advocates must continue.

As the [Volkswagen scandal](#) erupted, we took a close look at what a settlement would mean for consumers. I am one who believes that gaming the system and breaking the law cannot, and will not, be tolerated. Volkswagen clearly betrayed the trust of American drivers and the U.S. government. It's important that any final agreement on a settlement is fully understood down to the granular details.

The [Takata airbag scandal](#) dates back to 2014, and our continued oversight of the matter will continue as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration revealed in June that 300,000 additional vehicles were at higher risk of exploding.

Our oversight of U.S. government agencies still lacking the most basic safety measures in [bioresearch labs](#) has been ongoing, and the April news from a nonpartisan watchdog confirming that policies were not comprehensive or up to date means that our oversight will continue.

Conclusion

As this report highlights, 2016 was a year of productivity. We were able to advance meaningful policies in a host of issues. Working together, 2017 should shape up to be even more productive year as we tackle new issues.

As always, you can learn more about my work on my [website](#), or on my social media accounts: [Facebook](#), [Medium](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#). And you can sign up for my weekly email updates [here](#).