1996 Legislative Activities

Expanding Opportunities for Good Paying Jobs

Education Helped lead the fight to stop extreme cuts in education funds, restoring $2.7 billion in early 1996 in the wake of a battle over budget priorities that contributed to two partial government shutdowns. He was also a leader in shaping the education debate for the final 1997 fiscal year budget, which restored $4.2 billion for programs including Head Start, Pell Grants, the Title I math and reading program, Safe and Drug Free Schools and an initiative to improve computer literacy. The Direct Student Loan Program was also protected by this agreement. In September, Senate Democratic Leader Thomas Daschle praised Levin's leadership as "extraordinary".

Minimum Wage Successfully fought to hike the minimum wage by 90 cents to $5.15 an hour over two years. The Economic Policy Institute estimated 10.5 percent of workers in Michigan, 420,000 workers, will benefit from this wage increase.

Taxpayer Bill of Rights II Supported legislation which was signed into law to get the IRS to embrace higher standards of fair play and build in safeguards to make the agency more accountable when they make mistakes. Levin played a key role in enacting the first Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

Detroit Metro Airport Helped Detroit Metro Airport win a $150 million airport improvement grant to create a new midfield terminal for Northwest Airlines' domestic and international flights, a train to move passengers inside the new terminal, a new concourse for commuter airlines, parking decks and a fourth runway. These funds were critical to a $1.6 billion project that will nearly double the size of Detroit Metro, capping a nine year effort, and is expected to create 20,000 airport jobs and more than 50,000 related jobs in the metro area. Levin teamed up with Wayne County Executive McNamara to make a direct appeal to President Clinton to support the project during a March visit to Detroit. The project will help Detroit become a world class airport and the construction-related spending is expected to stimulate more than $1.6 billion for the local economy and generate economic benefits for the entire region. Groundbreaking is expected sometime next year.

New Non-Stop Flights Between China and the U.S. Michigan cemented its position as a major commercial link to China's huge opening market when the inaugural flight of the first ever 6,600 mile Detroit-Beijing air route took off this spring. Levin helped make these flights possible when he led the Michigan delegation in asking Secretary of Transportation Frederic Pena to allow Northwest Airlines to add three nonstop flights a week between Detroit and Beijing in the final stages of the U.S.-China Aviation Agreement negotiations. By becoming a gateway to Asia, Michigan is expected to reap big economic benefits with new growth for export trade.

Auto Trade As co-chair of the Auto Parts Task Force and the Auto

Caucus, led a successful bi-partisan effort in Senate to pass a resolution seeking full compliance with the "letter and spirit" of the U.S.-Japan framework agreement. This 1995 agreement is an enforceable set of commitments to open the Japanese market to foreign competition in autos and auto parts.

CAFE Helped lead bipartisan effort to ensure a competitive American auto industry by preventing radical increases in corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. The one-year freeze enacted into law means CAFE standards stay at 27.5 miles per gallon for passenger cars and 20.7 miles per gallon for light trucks. Levin argued raising the standards would not have resulted in more fuel efficiency but would have resulted in a loss of American jobs, because U.S. motorist's choice of cars would be skewed toward Japanese and foreign manufacturers' products who would not have had the same restraints. Recent studies also suggest there is a strong relationship between cutting the weight of cars and light trucks to increase fuel economy and more serious and frequent injuries in auto accidents.

New Federal Jobs Helped win funding for a new, state-of-the-art, $270 million, 432-bed Veterans Medical Center, which opened their doors in 1996, creating hundreds of new jobs.

Spousal Individual Retirement Accounts As part of the Small Business Tax Package passed along with the minimum wage increase, Levin was a strong supporter of this provision to allow spouses -- including homemakers who do not work outside the home -- to participate in a retirement program.

Fighting for High-Tech Research to Strengthen the Economy

Saved Manufacturing Technology Centers Fought for and won continued funding for Michigan's six Manufacturing Technology Centers. The centers, whose funding is now guaranteed for at least another year, help provide high wage jobs for Michigan families by assisting thousands of firms in the state modernize their operations using the most cost-efficient technologies available. Last year, 3,000 Michigan firms participated in MTC modernization efforts. The main center is in Ann Arbor, with supporting field offices in Flint, Grand Rapids, Traverse City, Saginaw and Marquette.

Focus:HOPE Won $10 million in the Defense Appropriations to support the Center for Advanced Technologies at Focus:HOPE in Detroit, which provides job training for inner city residents for high-tech manufacturing jobs.

Supporting Path-Breaking Research Helped steer $13 million to fund collaborative research and development at the National Automotive Center in Warren, Michigan. Advancing automotive technology will benefit both the military and the auto industry. The center, which Levin helped create in 1992, is the lead agency for the Pentagon in the President's Partnership for a New Generation of Vehicles Initiative to

produce cleaner, more fuel-efficient cars. Also helped win continued funding of the Advanced Technology Program which funds state-of-the-art technology development critical to U.S. competitiveness and jobs, and has been a key source of research dollars for manufacturers, providing over $70 million to Michigan since 1990.

Increasing Write-offs for New Equipment Purchased for Small Business Passed as part of the Small Business Tax package, along with the minimum wage hike, this provision will allow small businesses to boost their first year tax write-off when they buy new equipment. This new deduction, which Sen. Levin supported, stood at $10,000 when President Clinton took office and will be at $25,000 by the year 2003.

Putting the Federal Government to Work for Michigan

Supporting Cherry Farmers With Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, got USDA to issue a federal red tart cherry marketing order to help growers create a more stable and profitable price for their product. Red tart cherry producers and processors in seven states, including Michigan, overwhelmingly approved the order and it's being implemented. Also, Levin helped convince USDA to buy about 10 million pounds of surplus cherries.

Promoting Competition Succeeded in winning USDA approval for brand name cereals to compete for contracts in USDA commodity distribution programs, giving taxpayers the full benefit of competition and Michigan companies a fair shot at USDA contracts. Although cereals like Kellogg's Corn Flakes and Bran Flakes have lower costs per pound than many generic cereals and meet all other requirements under this program, they have not been allowed to compete. They had been blocked because of the government's insistence that all foodstuffs for the program be only in generic packaging. This is a five-year pilot project.

Traverse City Land Transfer Working alongside Rep. Stupak, won approval of a popular local plan to transfer unused land currently owned by the U.S. Coast Guard to the Traverse City public school system for a soccer field complex. Under the proposal put forward by "Between the Fences" and the Traverse City school system, a total of seven fields will be constructed on the land that Levin and Stupak successfully transferred to the school district.

Military Airport Program Opened a new door at the Federal Aviation Administration to apply for funding options to convert the former K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base into the new Marquette County Airport. Prior to Levin's action, K.I. Sawyer was ineligible to apply for these funds, which were limited to airports that could alleviate congestion.

Preserving Historic Lighthouses Together with Rep. Stupak, Levin helped preserve three well known historic lighthouses by transferring the properties to several non-profit groups and public agencies. Over 40 acres at the Whitefish Point Light Station, marking the entrance to Whitefish Bay and the final approach to the Soo Locks, has been

transferred to the Shipwreck Historical Society, the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Nearly 100 acres at the Presque Isle Light Station, on Lake Huron, are being transferred to the Presque Isle township for the purpose of historical preservation. Two-and-a-half acres at the Saint Helena Island Light Station are being transferred to the Great lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association, which has completely overhauled and restored the Mackinac County property and structure on Lake Michigan just west of the Mackinac Bridge.

Safe Neighborhoods and Making Criminal Justice Work Better

100,000 Cops Opposed Republican effort to de-fund the COPS program, which has already produced $73 million for 1100 new police officers in Michigan.

Church Arson Prevention Act Supported enactment of a statute which makes it easier to prosecute people who burn churches and authorizes more money to pay for additional investigations. Worked to keep civic and religious leaders in Michigan informed about the progress on the bill and the related federal investigations.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Working to make permanent a law Levin wrote which encourages agency use of alternative dispute resolution methods, like arbitration and mediation, which cost less and work faster than courtroom litigation to resolve contract and other disputes with federal government. The law expired last October.

National Security: The Right Priorities to Keep Us Strong

Emergency Terrorism Fund Won Senate approval for a new $14 million emergency anti-terrorism fund for the Pentagon. Action followed issuance of the Pentagon's final Report of the Anti-terrorism Task Force, which asked for a separate program to be managed by the Office of the Secretary for Defense to fund high priority emergency needs to combat terrorism.

Arms Control Helped win 1996 Senate ratification of the START II Treaty to reduce Russian nuclear arsenal to one-third its size during the cold War. Treaty requires thousands of Russian nuclear weapons to be dismantled.

Blocked Effort to Revive Star Wars Joining with Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., Levin led a successful fight in the U.S. Senate to stop legislation opposed by the Joint Chiefs which would have required the U.S. to build a national missile defense system by 2003, whatever the costs or status of technology.

Protecting the Great Lakes and Michigan's Environment

Controlling "Invasive Species" Helped win enactment of legislation strengthening programs to control aquatic invasive species, such as

strengthening programs to control aquatic invasive species, such as zebra mussels which have invaded the Great Lakes, and helped win increased funding of control efforts. Helped lead Great Lakes lawmakers in the bipartisan fight to win adequate funding for sea lamprey control and eradication and prevent efforts to add new layers of bureaucracy to this mission.

Protecting the Great Lakes Helped win funding for and introduced legislation to support ongoing studies on the human health effects of eating contaminated Great Lakes fish. Helped maintain funding for EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office, charged with overseeing federal Great Lakes programs, at about $14 million a year. Helped preserve and win funding for Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, a 60-person, $5 million per year, state-of-the-art facility in Ann Arbor. Also helped win funding for the Interior Department's Great Lakes Science Center in Ann Arbor.

Safe Drinking Water. Helped win enactment of a Safe Drinking Water Act reauthorization bill that provides greater flexibility to local governments and relieves the cost burden of regulations without decreasing public health protection.

Interstate Waste. Spearheaded effort to secure Senate passage, twice, of legislation preserving local government control over out-of-state solid waste, including Levin's amendment to cover solid waste from foreign countries. Unfortunately, the House leadership opposed passing a similar comprehensive bill.

Providing for Health Care Security and Pension Reform

Kennedy-Kassebaum Helped win enactment of Kennedy-Kassebaum bill to provide greater health care security, by limiting exclusion for pre-existing conditions, ending "job-lock" by making health coverage portable, helping individuals who lose jobs maintain their insurance coverage, and improving coverage for newborns and disabled family members. This legislation increased the health insurance tax deduction for the self-employed from 30 to 80 percent.

Research to Block the Craving for Illicit Addictive Substantives Won over $31 million in new funding in next year's budget for the National Institute on Drug Abuse to speed up research aimed at shattering the cycle of drug addiction. Scientists have made substantial progress toward suppressing drug craving behavior in their drive to find anti-cocaine medications by activating receptors in the brain which trigger the addition. With the link between drug use or craving for illicit drugs and a life of crime, this momentum toward a scientific breakthrough in the war on drugs is a welcome chance to stem the destructive tide of drug addition.

Preserving and Protecting Medicare Joined the fight against GOP efforts this year to cut Medicare $168 billion, more than what the actuaries say is necessary to keep Medicare solvent over the next decade.

48-Hour Hospital Stays for Moms Supported lengthening maternity hospital stays to 48 hours from 24 hours for mothers with normal deliveries of newborns to allow health care professionals to monitor babies for medical problems that often do not appear in the first 24 hours. The law goes into effect in January 1998.

Organ Donor Drive Championed "Organ Donor Awareness Week", including a first-ever drive among U.S. Senators to call attention to the vital need for organ transplants. Over 41,000 Americans currently await organ transplants. 58 Senators are currently signed up as organ donors. In Michigan, over 150 patients died last year while waiting for a donated organ.

Pension Reform Helped win enactment of legislation to simplify pension requirements and encourage small businesses to offer pensions.

Making Government Work Better

Work for Welfare Won enactment of strong work requirements for welfare recipients, requiring able-bodied welfare recipients to perform community service within two months of receipt of benefits if not in job training, school, or working in private sector jobs.

Administrative Relief Won administrative relief for West Michigan from unnecessary vehicle inspection requirements. Levin got EPA to conduct an accelerated review of monitoring data, that resulted in redesignation of Kent and Ottawa into "attainment" status. He also forced EPA to modify its policies to incorporate "overwhelming transport" as a consideration.

Health and Safety Helped develop bipartisan substitute establishing right of Congress to review and exercise "legislative veto" of major regulations before they go into effect, which passed the Senate unanimously; similar legislative review legislation later enacted into law on March 29, 1996.

Negotiated Rulemaking Act Working to win reenactment of a law which encourages negotiations among interested groups to produce sensible regulations that everyone can support, avoiding costly courtroom battles.

False Statements Won enactment of legislation strengthening laws prohibiting knowing, material false statements to Congress, reinstating a 40-year old ban on false statements to Congress following the Hubbard decision.