2026 Michigan Defense Economy Candidate Questionnaire

State Offices: Michigan House, Michigan Senate, and Governor

• *November 2026 General Election* • *theDRDC.org*

Return no later than September 14, 5pm Return to: info@thedrdc.org

Candidate	Jamie Sonneberger	**Office sought**	Michigan State House
District	63	**Party (if applicable)**	Democrat

Why this matters

Michigan's defense and aerospace ecosystem is both a national-security asset and an economic engine. It connects military installations and commands, federal civilian expertise, prime contractors, thousands of suppliers, universities, skilled trades, engineers, and dual-use innovators. Decisions made in Washington and Lansing directly affect readiness, industrial capacity, high-wage employment, and Michigan's ability to compete for future missions and investment.

DRDC independently prepared this questionnaire using its defense-focused economic-development expertise and review of publicly available state, federal, regional, and industry data. Source citations document the underlying figures; they do not indicate participation in, sponsorship of, or endorsement of this questionnaire by any cited organization.

DRDC's Michigan defense economy snapshot

$30 billion	Approximate annual statewide defense-and-aerospace economic activity.[1]
166,000+ jobs	Michigan jobs supported across defense and aerospace.[1]
75% regional share	Southeast Michigan—the region represented by DRDC—accounts for approximately 75% of Michigan's defense economy.[8]
4,000+ + 900	More than 4,000 defense suppliers and 900 aerospace suppliers.[1]
$7.2 billion	Direct federal defense spending in Michigan in FY2024: $5.0B in contracts, $1.5B in payroll, plus other spending.[2]

23,700 personnel	FY2024 DoD footprint: about 854 active-duty, 10,000 civilian, and 12,900 Reserve and Guard personnel in Michigan.[2]
6,000+ people	Detroit Arsenal's Michigan-based workforce, supporting Army ground-systems acquisition, research, contracting, logistics, and sustainment.[3]
17 assets	Military commands, organizations, and installations statewide, including Detroit Arsenal, Selfridge ANGB, Camp Grayling/NADWC, Alpena CRTC, Fort Custer, and Battle Creek ANGB.[1]

DRDC analysis: how the ripple effect works. Federal contracts and payroll first support direct jobs and purchases. Contractors then buy from Michigan subcontractors and service providers (indirect effects), while workers spend wages in local communities (induced effects). The widely cited $30 billion figure is a broad economic-impact estimate; it should not be treated as a formal multiplier applied to the $7.2 billion FY2024 spending figure because the source years and definitions differ.

Michigan primes and the supplier network

Publicly available information reviewed by DRDC identifies major defense and aerospace employers with operations in the state, including General Dynamics Land Systems, BAE Systems, American Rheinmetall, GM Defense, GE Aerospace, SAPA Transmission, AM General, RTX/Raytheon, Oshkosh Defense, RENK America, Saab, and many others. Published project examples include:

- American Rheinmetall: 450 new Michigan jobs announced with a $31.7 million expansion in 2025; the company reports more than 1,500 employees across its multistate U.S. footprint.[6]
- Saab: 70 new high-paying jobs announced with a $75 million Grayling Township manufacturing facility.[7]
- Macomb County alone received more than 4,800 defense contract actions worth $3.2 billion in 2024.[4]

Michigan does not publish a current, standardized Michigan-only employee count for every named prime. Accordingly, this questionnaire uses the state's 166,000+ supported-jobs total and clearly labeled state-announced project commitments rather than mixing incompatible or stale company headcounts. These examples are not additive employment totals.

Instructions to candidates

Please answer every question. Check the applicable response and provide the requested concise explanation, action, funding level, and timeline. "Support" without a specific action or timetable may be interpreted as a general statement rather than a measurable commitment. Unless otherwise noted, please limit each narrative response to 150 words.

All questionnaires received by the stated deadline will be published verbatim and simultaneously on the DRDC website and shared through DRDC's social media channels, industry forums, and relevant news outlets. Candidate responses will be published without editing, analysis, or evaluative commentary by DRDC.

This is each candidate's opportunity to speak directly to Michigan's defense and aerospace community—in their own words.

Returned by: Jamie Sonneberger date: 8-28-2026 Questions: 10

State candidate questions

1. Will protecting and expanding Michigan's defense and aerospace economy be a stated priority in your first term?

☐ Yes—top-tier priority ☑ Yes—important priority ☐ No ☐ Undecided

Identify the priority level and one statewide outcome you will pursue.

Michigan has a strong aerospace and defense sector. My house district sits just north of Selfridge Air National Guard Base, which is vital to the surrounding communities. I support increasing the amount of federal dollars coming into Michigan's defense sector while protecting the military installations and employers we already have.

2. Will you support dedicated state leadership and reliable funding to protect and grow Michigan's defense and aerospace economy?

☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Conditional—explain

Describe the state functions you believe are most important—such as business attraction, company assistance, workforce development, policy advocacy, or coordination—and the funding or accountability you would support.

Michigan already has a dedicated Office of Defense and Aerospace Innovation. I would keep that office funded, but I also want to know what we are getting for that money. I would require regular reporting on federal defense dollars coming into Michigan, contracts won by Michigan companies, and jobs created or retained. If we are spending state money to grow this industry, we should be able to show that it is working.

3. What will you do to protect Detroit Arsenal, its workforce, its Army mission, and the Michigan businesses that depend on it?

Identify the state actions you would take—such as advocacy, workforce support, infrastructure, research partnerships, or coordination with federal officials—and provide a timeframe.

Detroit Arsenal is a major employer and an important part of Michigan•s economy. I would make protecting those jobs and that mission a priority. One thing I would do is support state budget money for infrastructure and workforce programs tied directly to the Arsenal and the Michigan companies that rely on it. I would also push to make sure Michigan is fighting for new missions and new investment instead of just assuming the work we have now will always be here.

4. Will you support state investment and policies that protect and expand Michigan's military bases, training centers, and testing facilities?

☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Conditional—explain

Identify the actions you would support for assets such as Selfridge, Camp Grayling, Alpena, Fort Custer, or Battle Creek and how you would judge whether the investment is successful.

When a military installation has a real opportunity to gain or expand a mission, I would be willing to use state dollars for the infrastructure needed to make that happen. Michigan just did that at Selfridge. I would judge those investments by whether they actually secure missions, federal investment and jobs for Michigan.

5. How will you help Michigan manufacturers enter the defense market or win more defense work?

Describe the practical assistance you would support—such as help with federal requirements, cybersecurity, quality standards, workforce needs, or introductions to larger contractors—and identify one measurable goal.

Michigan already has programs that help companies compete for government contracts. I would push those programs to actively recruit Michigan manufacturers that have the ability to do defense work but are not doing it today. I would also make sure there is enough money available to help smaller companies with the cybersecurity and certification costs that can keep them from competing. I would measure success by the number of Michigan companies winning their first defense

6. What state tools will you support to attract new defense companies and help existing Michigan defense employers expand?

Address the types of incentives, available sites, infrastructure, permitting assistance, research partnerships, or other support you favor, along with safeguards for public funds.

I would support using state economic-development dollars to get sites ready for companies that want to build or expand here. That can mean roads, utilities, or other infrastructure that makes a site usable. I would also support faster coordination between state agencies so a project does not sit for months waiting on paperwork. If a company gets a tax break or direct state help, there should be a written job and investment commitment, and the state should be able to take the money back if the

7. What will you do to develop and retain the workers Michigan's defense industry needs?

Address skilled trades, engineers, veterans, National Guard families, colleges, universities, apprenticeships, or other workforce approaches, and state at least one measurable goal.

I would put more emphasis on training people for jobs that actually exist. That means expanding apprenticeships and career programs tied directly to defense manufacturers, so students and adults can move from training into a real job without wasting time or money. I would also push colleges and employers to work together on programs for hard-to-fill technical positions. My goal would be to increase the number of people completing defense-related apprenticeship and training programs and going directly into Michigan jobs during my first term.

8. Will you support the Michigan National Guard through competitive member benefits, updated facilities, employer support, and policies that improve recruitment and retention?

☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Conditional—explain

Identify the benefit, policy, or investment you would champion and when you would act.

Michigan just expanded benefits for National Guard members, and I want to make sure we actually fund what we promised. The new childcare benefit can stop when the money runs out. I would make stable funding for that program a priority in my first budget so a Guard member isn't deciding whether to continue serving because they can't afford childcare while they are

9. If you currently or previously held public office, what specific actions have you taken to support Michigan defense missions, employees, installations, or companies?

List legislation, appropriations, budget actions, advocacy, convenings, or development projects and the result. If none, state "None."

None. My current public service has been on a local school board, and I have not had a role in defense appropriations, military installations, or defense economic-development policy.

10. What will you accomplish within your first 100 days and first 12 months to advance Michigan's defense economy?

Provide one action and deadline for each period. Gubernatorial candidates should also identify the lead agency or senior official; legislative candidates should identify the committee, bill, budget item, or caucus action they will pursue.

In my first 100 days, I would put a specific request into the House budget process to help Michigan companies and universities compete for more federal defense research dollars, including DARPA funding. We already have an Office of Defense and Aerospace Innovation. I don•t think we need another office. I want to give the one we have a clear job and hold it accountable for results. Within my first year, I would work to get that money into the state budget and require us to track how many federal defense research dollars Michigan actually wins. We have the universities, engineers and manufacturers. We should be getting a bigger

Sources and data notes

1. **State of Michigan, published defense-and-aerospace industry figures and FY2025 strategic report.** https://www.michiganbusiness.org/industries/defense/
2. **U.S. Department of Defense, Michigan State Fact Sheet (FY2024).** https://www.repi.mil/Portals/44/Michigan_StateFacts_1.pdf
3. **U.S. Army TACOM, "Serving at the Detroit Arsenal".** https://tacom.army.mil/about/detroit-arsenal
4. **Macomb County Planning & Economic Development, A&D Intel Quarterly (March 2025).** https://www.macombgov.org/node/53/news/intel-quarterly-march-2025
5. **State of Michigan, "Reimagining the Arsenal of Democracy" (July 2025).** https://www.michiganbusiness.org/news/2025/07/reimagining-the-arsenal-of-democracy-how-michigan-leads-the-defense-industry/
6. **State of Michigan, American Rheinmetall expansion announcement (Sept. 2025).** https://www.michiganbusiness.org/press-releases/2025/09/rheinmetall/
7. **State of Michigan, Saab Grayling facility announcement.** https://www.michiganbusiness.org/industries/defense/
8. **Detroit Regional Defense Coalition, Southeast Michigan regional defense-economy analysis.** https://theDRDC.org

Interpretation note

DRDC compiled, reviewed, and contextualized these figures as part of its independent defense-economic-development work. Counts are rounded and reflect the most recent authoritative or publicly reported figures located as of August 17, 2026. "Defense economy," "defense and aerospace," "suppliers," direct federal spending, and economic impact are not identical measures. The questionnaire keeps those measures separate to avoid double counting or implying a model-derived multiplier that the cited sources

do not establish. Citations identify original public sources and do not imply that any cited organization participated in, sponsored, approved, or endorsed this questionnaire.

Candidate certification

I certify that these responses reflect my positions and commitments as of the date signed and may be published verbatim.

Signature: Jamie Sonneberger Date: 8-28-2026

Printed name: Jamie Sonneberger

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