



The Conservative Heartland

*A Political History of the
Postwar American Midwest*

EDITED BY
JON K. LAUCK AND CATHERINE MCNICOL STOCK



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*For Howard Lamar,
a Southerner
who became an expert on Westerners
while working with Easterners
and was always glad to help two Midwesterners*

97. Alan Rinzler, ed., *Manifesto Addressed to the President of the United States from the Youth of America* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); see also Anthony Harrigan, "Sensing the News: Conservative Alternative," *Clovis News-Journal*, March 29, 1972; Dawson, "Emmett Tyrrell Had No Alternative"; Buckler, "Conservative Journal," 5.

98. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 115-116, 126-141; Jerome Tuccille, *It Usually Begins with Ayn Rand* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971).

99. Tyrrell, "Introduction," *Orthodoxy*, xi; Regnery, *Upstream*, 276; York, "Life and Death," 91-110.

7

A New "State of Superior"

Political Fracture and Antienvironmentalism in the Upper Midwest

CAMDEN BURD



In the late summer of 1978, Dennis Ellis, proprietor of the Ellis Motel and Restaurant in Trout Lake, Michigan, opened his mailbox to find an envelope from the office of Dominic Jacobetti, a Democrat and state representative from the nearby mining town of Negaunee. Carefully unpacking the envelope's contents, Ellis began reviewing the first document with a headline that profoundly read, "Ten Reasons Why the Upper Peninsula Should Be and Operate as a Separate State."¹ The proclamation outlined a series of grievances regarding factors that Jacobetti and other residents of Michigan's Upper Peninsula believed crippled the economic conditions of the region. "The Upper Peninsula . . . is not deemed important to our present congressional delegation," argued the Democrat, who believed most of the state's politicians "expend their efforts on behalf of the highly urbanized areas where the votes lie such as Lansing, Flint, Detroit, Pontiac and other cities."² Ellis continued paging through the materials, reading through a slew of reasons for Upper Peninsula statehood, ranging from improved political representation to promises of new legislation meant to "help create business investment and job opportunities" in the region.³ Separate statehood, Jacobetti ultimately argued, offered regional residents increased autonomy and greater economic growth.⁴

Jacobetti's plea for secession stemmed from a growing sentiment among regional residents who believed that downstate politicians encumbered the peninsula's economic growth with recently passed environmental legislation. "The major reason for the decline in Michigan's position as an industrial state has been the ill-designed legislation passed at the federal and state levels which almost completely destroys the ability for wise development of our natural resources," the materials outlined.⁵ Responding to a recent wave of environmentally focused legislation in the late 1960s and 1970s, Jacobetti hoped that a separate state might "handle its own resources . . . by eliminating most of the unnecessary environmental costs in the production of its natural resources."⁶ Facing chronic unemployment and a grim economic outlook, many residents in Michigan's Upper Peninsula called for a separate state of "Superior" by championing a platform formed in direct opposition to recently introduced environmental legislation.

American political fracture hardly began when Dennis Ellis received Jacobetti's secession proposal in 1978. No, Americans had experienced nearly two decades of political turmoil before Jacobetti's materials reached residents' homes. The desegregation of the military, school integration, the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War protests, political radicalism, the arrival of the hippie movement—all served as points of fracture for the Democratic Party throughout the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1960s, many long-time Democratic voters, moved by a "restorationist impulse," readily voted for Richard Nixon, who called on the "silent majority" to support law, order, and a virtuous return to the pretumultuous years.⁷ The once-dominant coalition splintered as Americans shifted their party affiliation. Like the rest of America, Michigan's mining communities were not immune to the nation's growing discontentment. Yet among the varying political movements flowing through the country, none shook the residents of the state's mining communities quite like the rise of modern environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

Born from the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, the environmental movement prompted Americans to think critically about the ecological ramifications of industrialization and consumerism.⁸ Industrial dumping, air pollution, and increased waste from mass consumption drew criticism from onlookers who soon realized that such practices might be harmful to their health as well as their beloved landscapes. Lyndon Johnson led the first wave of environmental legislation, passing a slew of laws including the Clean Air Act, the Water Quality Act, and the Wilderness Act. Environmentalism, it seemed, might even be a bipartisan phenomenon after Richard Nixon continued the trend by creating

the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970. States throughout the Great Lakes region also faced their own environmental issues in the 1960s and 1970s. The once-thriving pulp and paper industry in the Upper Midwest brought on massive deforestation and the growing presence of toxic chemicals used in the process, including sulfur dioxide, dioxins, and chlorinated phenols.⁹ The taconite mines in the region also led to a new host of toxic threats. Mining companies often dumped tailings, the excess debris removed from low-grade iron ore, and the accompanying chemicals into streams, rivers, and lakes, causing a drastic depletion of Great Lakes fish populations as well as overall clouding of waterways.¹⁰ Those pollutants brought about the use of other chemicals that industrialists used to diminish the harmful effects of the new practices. DDT, copper sulfate, arsenic, and toxaphene became popular tools to combat the rise in algal blooms and the noxious pests that thrived in their harmful green pools surrounding taconite mines.¹¹ In the Upper Midwest, levels of mercury steadily increased, affecting humans and wildlife alike.¹² Several states soon adopted their own legislation to curtail harmful environmental practices. Michigan politicians, being some of the most active legislators in this regard, passed the Michigan Environmental Protection Act, the Michigan Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Act, the Great Lakes Shorelands Management Act, and the Inland Lakes and Streams Act.¹³

As politicians at the state and national level began to champion policies focused on curtailing the harmful productions of twentieth-century industrialization, several of Michigan's lifelong blue-collar Democrats began to question their allegiance to the party. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, no one came to embody this form of political wavering quite like Dominic Jacobetti. By the time the mailer arrived in residents' mailboxes, Jacobetti was already a household name. Born in Negaunee, Michigan, in 1920, Jacobetti, like many others, found employment in the nearby iron mines after completing his high school education. He won the trust of his peers, and members of the United Steelworkers Union elected him to serve as president of the local chapter. As an advocate for miners and mining communities in the region, Jacobetti successfully ran for state office, and in 1955 he began his first term as representative of Marquette County. As a legislator, he epitomized the New Deal coalition. Throughout the 1960s, Jacobetti celebrated Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs and even crafted his own legislation that sought to increase funding for schools, hospitals, and roads in the Upper Peninsula. He was a staunch, blue-collar Democrat, and it was not until his colleagues began to promote, then pass, environmental legislation in the 1960s and 1970s that Jacobetti broke away from the party line.

Most political histories of antienvironmentalism typically ignore voices from the Upper Midwest.¹⁴ A majority of scholarship focuses its attention on the rise of the New Right in the American West as an indicator of a growing political agitation and backlash to modern environmentalism. Historians correctly track a group of legislators from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming—where the federal government owned more than 50 percent of the land—that coalesced around arguments of political autonomy to control lands they believed might be beneficial to the development of their economies.¹⁵ The movement quickly became at odds with wilderness movement activists, who believed certain areas of the country should be shielded from development for various reasons, from iconic beauty to the protection of certain flora and fauna.¹⁶ Tensions culminated in a loud, though loosely organized, sagebrush rebellion whose advocates continued to fight against environmentalism, believing that such policies infringed on notions of private property, liberty, and free enterprise. Politicians of the New Right championed the antienvironmental movement, including Ronald Reagan, who quickly began to roll back environmental rules and reduce funding to the EPA.¹⁷ Since 1980, Republican platforms have championed probusiness policies ranging from a “wise use” of America’s resources to complete disbelief in scientific findings on industrial pollution or climate change.¹⁸ This history, though important to the narrative of American conservatism, ignores other populations and regions undergoing similar political transformations.

Like conservatives in the American West, many residents of the Upper Midwest opposed modern environmentalism for economic reasons. Though his rhetoric sounded familiar to conservatives who made up the New Right, Jacobetti understood that his constituents faced unique economic circumstances different from those embroiled in the sagebrush rebellion. Unlike their western counterparts, who believed untapped economic development lay across the region, those in the Upper Midwest struggled to remain economically viable in the wake of decreased mining and logging activity. Though environmentalism became the target of residents’ criticism, the decline of mining in the region long predated the new environmental legislation of the late 1960s and 1970s. The copper-mining boom that first transformed the Keweenaw Peninsula into one of the nation’s most active mining regions by the second half of the nineteenth century was a shadow of its former self by the 1960s. The largest extraction of native copper in the region peaked in 1915, and overall demands for copper dwindled after World War I. Remaining copper veins required deeper digging and greater investment—forcing companies to question

the commercial viability of pursuing copper mining in the region. Mining in the American West quickly outpaced production in the Keweenaw throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century, resulting in a mass exodus of companies, jobs, and residents from the region.¹⁹ The last copper mine ultimately closed its doors in the late 1960s, leaving the region’s dominant industry a fixture of history.²⁰

Iron mining also made up a sizable portion of region’s economy throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Iron ore, discovered not long after the copper deposits, led to massive investment and development in the central region of the Upper Peninsula. Unlike the copper mining, the iron industry proved economically sustainable in the region as new technologies automated large portions of extraction. The rise of taconite mining also allowed companies to extract low-grade iron from the ranges with less manpower, although this came with greater environmental costs. Mining companies in Michigan also faced new competition in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The growth of western mines and the presence of cheap imported steel negatively affected the iron-mining regions of the Upper Midwest. The outside competition became especially apparent throughout the 1960s, when operational mines dropped from thirty underground mines in 1960 to nineteen a year later—nine of which barely managed to survive in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.²¹ The decline in production combined with automated mining processes led to a wave of layoffs and an overall rise in unemployment in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

The increase in unemployment led to massive depopulation as residents emigrated from the Upper Peninsula in search of better jobs in urban hubs such as Detroit, as well as in other mining operations in the West. “In the past 20 years over 20,000 people have out migrated because of lack of jobs the Western Upper Peninsula . . . and the two Eastern U.P. counties,” Jacobetti decried in one 1972 speech.²² One disgruntled resident noted that depressed mining activities left the region devoid of economic opportunity, leaving behind only “a series of caved-in areas, subsidence areas, and fenced-off areas,” as evidential remnants of the once-thriving industrial landscape.²³ Jacobetti also correctly noted that diminished mining activity affected all aspects of the Upper Peninsula economy, including agricultural pursuits. “I would like to bring to your attention the rural areas of the Upper Peninsula,” he proclaimed from the floor of the Michigan Senate in 1970.²⁴ “In 1960, there were 5,251 operating farms in the 15 counties of the Upper Peninsula. In 1970, the number of farms had fallen drastically to 2,700 an almost 50% decrease.”²⁵ The region’s demographic trends became a central theme of Jacobetti’s political rhetoric throughout

the late 1960s and 1970s. He believed that depopulation and economic recession remained the twin afflictions facing the region, and he began to oppose any legislation that he believed might further exacerbate the struggle of the people of the Upper Peninsula.

In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental legislation became the primary target of the Democrat's criticisms, as he argued that "the loss of jobs and the economic impact of the loss of the payroll to the citizens" could be directly attributed to "the implementation of the federal EPA regulations."²⁶ In countless memos and speeches the politician attacked modern environmentalism, believing that federal and state laws hindered economic development in the region. He believed federal air regulations had "horrendous effects . . . on the people, businesses and industries of the State of Michigan."²⁷ In one report, Jacobetti claimed that many regional businesses too often failed due to the "maze" of EPA laws.²⁸ Though his experience as a union leader traditionally positioned the Democrat against large industrial forces, the rise of modern environmentalism shifted his politics. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s he found himself sympathizing with big business in order to repeal and fight what he believed to be the detrimental impacts of American environmental legislation.

In the wake of new environmental regulations, Jacobetti often contacted industrial leaders in order to better design his antienvironmental agenda. Disgruntled with federal air pollution regulations, Jacobetti wrote to companies in order to better gauge how such laws might affect their businesses. "I have had serious reservations about the adverse impact that may be imposed on Michigan industry and business by the rash programs that are being carried out to implement the federal EPA and Michigan air pollution regulations," he wrote to managers at several companies.²⁹ There was no mistaking the intended purpose of his letter. Rather, he made his antienvironmental leanings apparent from the outset when he asked for surveys from several companies about the perceived financial impact of such laws. Wanting to repeal, or amend, the new antipollution measures of state and federal agencies, he hoped industry leaders might help to craft "new legislation that will be more realistic in the economic considerations that are so important for business to provide more jobs in Michigan."³⁰ One prominent paper mill responded that "the combined impact on profit is, indeed, serious."³¹ Detroit Edison returned their questionnaire, informing Jacobetti that "our costs must be passed on to our customers."³² Consumers Power Company seemed to echo Jacobetti's complaints, stating that "we strong share your abhorrence of any 'tunnel vision'" to solve environmental problems.³³ Defending corporations from a perceived onslaught of environmental regulations, Jacobetti hoped to

build a case against environmental movement by pointing to higher consumer costs as well as an overall loss of jobs.

When Kenneth Dorman, Jacobetti's chief legislative aide, reviewed the responses, he wrote the politician, "I think we really hit the jackpot on this questionnaire."³⁴ Dorman's position on modern environmentalism rivaled his boss's. In his dual leadership roles with the Upper Peninsula Development Bureau and the Upper Michigan Tourist Association, Dorman saw firsthand how diminished mining activity affected all aspects of the regional economy. He wholeheartedly distrusted modern environmentalism, believing that the movement hindered business. He even suggested that environmentalists corrupted America's youth and threatened the future of Michigan. "I have teenagers in college and when they and other students, especially those who have been brain washed by overzealous environmentalists read such notices . . . they are wrongly impressed," he wrote on a separate occasion to the chairman of Michigan's Air Pollution Commission.³⁵ Worst of all, "they visualize that almost every industry in our state are big, bad, smoke polluting guys in black hats and they should be against them."³⁶ Hoping that efforts such as the questionnaire might slow environmental legislation and kindle sympathy for Michigan's corporations, Dorman often promoted initiatives that offered "immeasurable value to slow down environmental legislation and to dramatize the need for jobs."³⁷ Believing that environmental legislation threatened the region's economic future, Jacobetti and his supporters promoted probusiness, antienvironmental platforms.³⁸

Jacobetti's initiatives to slow or diminish environmental legislation exemplified a larger trend in the Upper Peninsula. His voice, though often the loudest, was one of many in the region that opposed the environmental movement. Jacobetti received letters from various constituents with their own complaints about new environmental legislation. Entrepreneurs and employees of several extraction-based industries railed against environmentalism, believing that the new laws threatened their traditional way of life. When Michigan politicians took up the issue of decreased fish populations in the Great Lakes, they proposed laws to protect and conserve existing populations in order to sustain the industry. Throughout the 1970s, Michigan's Department of Natural Resources issued fewer commercial fishing licenses and banned the use of gill nets in an effort to protect and conserve the industry from complete exhaustion.³⁹ Their efforts met a wave of backlash from Lake Superior fishermen. One wrote to Jacobetti, "There is no way we can operate our fish market under the conditions of this bill."⁴⁰ The letter continued, "We have been commercial fishermen for years and the [Department of Natural Resources] has taken

most of our fishing and now they are trying to put out our fish market business!"⁴¹ The entrepreneur never mentioned decimated fish populations. Nor did he note the overall decline in commercial fishing that predated the 1970s legislation. Rather the fisherman attacked the new law as an immediate and certain threat. "Thank you for your recent letter," Jacobetti responded. "You can be sure that I will vigorously oppose this bill."⁴² Jacobetti was sympathetic to the fisherman's complaints and responded in complete agreement that the legislation was governmental overreach.

By the early 1970s, the politician began to connect his antienvironmental rhetoric with the increased desire for the region to secede from the Lower Peninsula. In a letter to another commercial fisherman, Jacobetti drew a direct connection between the rise of environmental legislation and his desire to secede from the State of Michigan. "You well know the problems I have had with the Department of Natural Resources in the last 10 or 12 years in their policy affecting all northern Michigan and especially the commercial fishermen," he wrote.⁴³ "This is one of the prime reasons that I sponsored the movement suggestion that the Upper Peninsula be a separate state." Again, Jacobetti returned to his call for secession, arguing that increased political autonomy allowed residents to "manage our natural resources as we see fit for the best interest of everyone concerned."⁴⁴

Critiques of modern environmentalism often overshadowed the very real efforts of state and national politicians who believed that environmental legislation might improve the economic realities of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. In fact, many environmentalists argued for the creation of recreational landscapes that might boost the region's tourist-based economy.⁴⁵ For example, Philip Hart, a Democrat and United States senator from Michigan, first introduced the bill to create the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in 1961. The bill proposed to create a park from the sixty-seven thousand acres of land along the south shore of Lake Superior—a patch of land historically used for logging that now sat mostly unused, or abandoned, in the wake of the depressed economy. Hoping to tap into a growing tourist economy that had sprung up in the region throughout the twentieth century, he envisioned using federal dollars to create a new national park out of the depressed Upper Peninsula economy. By encouraging national visitors to hike among the mixed coniferous forests and marvel at Lake Superior's grandeur from jagged sandstone cliffs, Hart and other environmentalists saw real economic benefit from modern environmentalism.⁴⁶ Though his proposal for Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore sought to uplift the regional economy, his plans met immediate resistance from those who believed the creation of a national park hin-

dered traditional economic activities that had defined the economy for more than one hundred years.⁴⁷

Jacobetti was a regular critic of Hart's proposal and any other legislation that supported the nation's burgeoning wilderness movement. Though he knew tourism to be an important part of the region's economy, he hesitated to support any legislation that called for further protection of natural spaces. His aversion grew from the unique demographic realities of the Upper Peninsula. In the sparsely populated region, nearly 40 percent of the region's residents lived within a ninety-mile stretch of land between Marquette and Houghton. To the untrained eye, most of the peninsula already appeared to be a wilderness born of a deflated economy. "I believe this clearly illustrates that wild scenic areas of areas becoming more wilderness add little or nothing to the basic economy of the area," he proclaimed in one speech.⁴⁸ Instead he argued against efforts to permanently set aside lands from future development, believing that the policies would "seriously curtail job opportunities in the state."⁴⁹

Opposition to modern environmentalism was hardly limited to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. In fact many residents throughout the Upper Midwest opposed the wilderness movement throughout the 1960s and 1970s, believing that the effort threatened traditional economic activities. Echoing the sentiments expressed in Michigan, citizens of northern Minnesota fought proposals to create the Superior National Forest and the Boundary Waters Canoe Wildlife Area out of large swaths of the northern landscape. Wilderness areas hindered potential logging opportunities, and industrialist groups bitterly fought the legislation. Other voices of opposition sprang up from cottage-industry entrepreneurs whose businesses relied on downstate residents traveling north during the summer months. Operating on a lease system established in the 1940s, many cottage owners heard the wilderness rhetoric as a threat to their businesses' bottom lines. The wilderness movement slowly revoked those individuals' licenses, so that areas such as Minnesota's Chippewa National Forest saw a complete disbanding of summer home permits by 1973—a massive shift from the 150 permits assigned in 1940. The new environmental movement brought about political discontentment. As one historian has noted, "North Woods residents and cottage owners were far from quiet . . . they fought for control over the region's future."⁵⁰ In Minnesota a coalition of industrialists, regional residents, and cottage industry businesses raised their voices to oppose increasingly unpopular environmental legislation.

Not to be left out of political dissatisfaction in the Upper Midwest, several residents of northern Wisconsin also expressed their displeasure

with downstate politicians when, in 1975, they began to promote their own statehood movement. Also imagining their own state of "Superior," those in the northern reaches of Wisconsin argued for statehood on the premise that Madison-based politicians denied them political autonomy in the face of economic recession.⁵¹ Groups such as Northern Wisconsin 51st State of Superior, Inc. dedicated their efforts to secession, even releasing a regular tabloid, the *Superior Idea*, to promote their cause.⁵² Wisconsin secessionists, though aligned with Jacobetti, never coordinated with the Michigan politician. Ted Albert, one of Wisconsin's biggest advocates for "Superior" and an affiliate of Northern Wisconsin 51st State of Superior, Inc., backed Jacobetti's movement and was emboldened to learn of the "wide support for the 51st state."⁵³

Though other regions of the Upper Midwest echoed Jacobetti's anti-environmental and secessionist rhetoric, only the Michigander's movement managed to corral a wide coalition of residents who found fault in the current political and environmental trends. "Goddammit, Dominic," wrote one resident of the Upper Peninsula "if my arm was long enough I'd reach from Munising to Lansing to shake your hand."⁵⁴ He continued, informing the state representative, "I've been a strong advocate of Statehood for the Upper Peninsula since I was old enough to realize that the bloodsuckers from Lower Michigan have been siphoning our lifeblood."⁵⁵ Offering his time and services to "help organize Alger County," the enthusiastic supporter of secession was just one of many Upper Peninsula residents attracted to Jacobetti's proposal.

A wide coalition of residents with various economic and professional backgrounds found themselves attracted to Jacobetti's anti-environmental rhetoric. In addition to those professionals whose livelihoods were directly linked to the extractive industries, the argument for statehood brought together a unique coalition of public employees, lawyers, and small-business owners.⁵⁶ Jim Tallman, an entrepreneur in Munising, said, "I own two stores here in town and I feel that your proposal to make the U.P. a separate state is a sound one," ultimately indicating that a different government structure might improve his business.⁵⁷ Not far from Tallman, union members of the local municipal government advocated for secession with enthusiasm: "This Union and all its members hereby pledge 100% cooperation to this endeavor."⁵⁸ Jacobetti even received letters from Michiganders in the rural portions of the Lower Peninsula, such as Wallace D. Nunn, the executive director of the Tawas Area Chamber of Commerce. "I am very much interested in your proposal to make the Upper Peninsula the 51st State, 'Superior,'" Nunn wrote the politician,

though he hoped that "there was a possibility of adding all of the counties in the Northern half of the Lower Peninsula to your proposed state."⁵⁹

The call for secession also brought together unlikely allies. Union members rubbed rhetorical elbows with staunch conservatives such as Dennis Paper, chairman of the Committee for Free Enterprise who found Jacobetti's proposal "a sound one."⁶⁰ Calls for Upper Peninsula statehood appealed to individuals like Paper who argued for smaller government and increased political autonomy on the local and national level. In the letter, Paper thanked the politician "for standing up for the people in the U.P."⁶¹ He also affixed a bright red sticker that read "Get Us Out! Of the United Nations" to the correspondence.⁶² The Michigan politician received numerous letters, notes, and pamphlets from various conservative organizations that, like Paper, celebrated Jacobetti's anti-environmental, probusiness rhetoric. The United States Industrial Council delivered one pamphlet titled *What Is Free Enterprise?* outlining current national trends—including environmental regulation—that undermined "the free enterprise system."⁶³ Seamlessly linking government regulation to socialism, organizations such as the United States Industrial Council raised alarm about rising environmental reform as a direct threat to the very principles of the nation.

The disparate allies rallied their support for statehood, indicating to Jacobetti that his movement was on the rise. The movement became so popular that he soon made T-shirts and gave speeches calling those in Michigan's Upper Peninsula to support his imagined "Superior." The secession movement soon caught the attention of news organizations outside of the state, including the *Green Bay Press Gazette*.⁶⁴ By 1975, "Superior" made national news, appearing in articles in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*.⁶⁵ The statehood movement finally gained enough traction that in 1976 the attorney general of Michigan, Frank J. Kelley, considered the actual legality of secession. Reviewing the arguments for secession, Kelley identified the necessary steps that residents of the Upper Peninsula needed to take in order to separate themselves from their downstate counterparts. First, he noted that a majority of residents of the Upper Peninsula must agree to secession.⁶⁶ Second, representatives from the designated area must prepare, adopt, and petition the United States Congress to adopt the proposed land as the nation's fifty-first state.⁶⁷ The biggest hurdle for Jacobetti, however, was Kelley's provision that the Michigan state legislature must vote and agree to allow the designated area to break away from the state's original boundaries.⁶⁸ With the legal process of statehood identified, Jacobetti quickly began to gauge the broader interest for

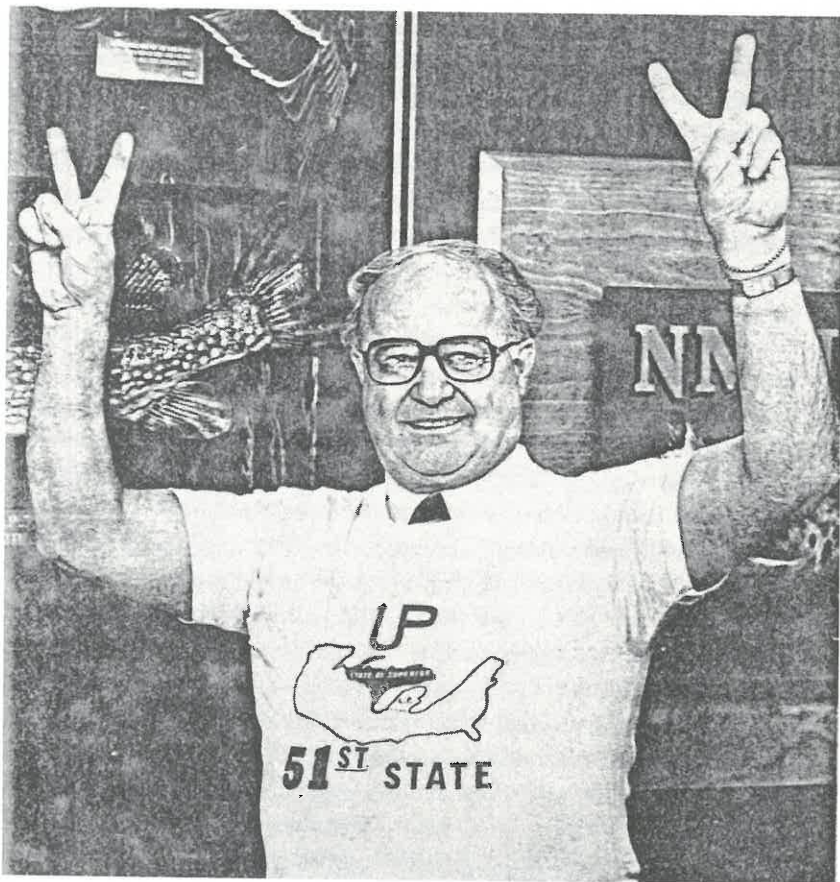


Figure 7.1. Image of Dominic Jacobetti with "UP 51st State" Shirt. Courtesy of Dominic Jacobetti Papers, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Marquette, Michigan.

secession among regional residents. Over the course of the next two years he sent the aforementioned packets of information to residents across the Upper Peninsula, hoping to capitalize on the momentum from the 1976 legal opinion and subsequent news cycle.

Unsurprisingly, environmental groups expressed the most vehement opposition to the Democrat's efforts. The Marquette-based Citizens to Save the Superior Shoreline took direct aim at the politician's movement, arguing that secession debate was part of the "frantic efforts" of politicians to exempt the region from environmental legislation. The advocacy group viewed Jacobetti's proposal as a threat to region's "environmental heritage" and a move to continue to deface the environment.⁶⁹ Further-

more, they insisted that secession simply represented the latest iteration of America's "historic quest for economic growth"—a venture that all too often held little regard for the natural world. The push for statehood, they argued, was an attempt to transform "the unspoiled wilderness of our state's Upper Peninsula" so that "jobs" and "progress may once again return to our north country."⁷⁰ Advocating for a "more tranquil [and] placid country where one can stand and view the wonders of nature uninterrupted by telephone pole, smokestack, automobile, and human discretion," Citizens to Save the Superior Shoreline railed against Jacobetti's secession movement.⁷¹ Other environmental groups echoed the group's disgust, including Jane Elder of the Mackinac Chapter of the Sierra Club, who responded to Jacobetti's politicking with feelings of "shock, disgust, and simple rage."⁷²

At the same time environmental groups expressed opposition to Jacobetti's plans for the Upper Peninsula, other residents of the region cautiously weighed the realities of living in the fifty-first state. "I heard you speak on the radio two or three weeks ago . . . talking about independent Statehood for the Upper Peninsula," wrote one hesitant supporter from Chassell, Michigan.⁷³ "I listened intently at that time and have been turning your words over in my mind since then."⁷⁴ Although he was confident that the "present system of 'rule' by Lower Michigan is not in our best interest," the listener feared that independence might deplete budgets and reduce "services that are now being afforded some of our citizens."⁷⁵ Even Dennis Ellis, who received his packet of information in 1978, responded to Jacobetti with equal parts interest and hesitance. Though he feared "uncontrollable higher taxes" due to a loss of downstate tax revenues, Ellis believed that "the battle would be half won" if Jacobetti could provide proper "facts and figures" proving the sound financial merits of the proposal.⁷⁶

Questions regarding the new state's proposed budgets revealed the limits of residents' political will for the movement. In a state where citizens had come to value certain aspects of Michigan's progressive policies, the fear of a much-decreased tax base threatened several aspects of the Upper Peninsula economic and civic landscape. Several onlookers questioned if a separate state could manage the new burden of maintaining roads or funding hospitals without financial support in the Lower Peninsula. Others feared that a separate state might prove disastrous to the handful of colleges and universities that heavily relied on both downstate dollars and students. Of course, Jacobetti tried to quell their fears by promoting potential policies to generate economic growth, including licensing casinos across the region as well as developing nuclear power plants

in the Upper Peninsula.⁷⁷ A handful of communities even held preliminary referendums to gauge local support for the statehood movement in 1975—though the results were not encouraging to the politician. In Marquette, the secession idea was rejected by a vote of 1,842 to 770.⁷⁸ In Iron Mountain, the margin was smaller—1,601 to 745—yet still dispiriting for advocates for the statehood movement.⁷⁹

Though Jacobetti's proposal to create a new state from Michigan's Upper Peninsula ultimately failed, the movement does provide an important lens to understand political fracture throughout the Midwest. Facing massive layoffs and unemployment, traditional Democrats challenged the party's increased concern over environmental issues. Fearing that such legislation threatened an already struggling economy, Jacobetti and others split from the party line in order to prevent what they believed to be further economic catastrophe. The environmental movement provided a point of fracture for the Democratic coalition in northern Michigan as well as other regions of the Upper Midwest. Arguing that environmental legislation hindered economic possibilities and threatened notions of political autonomy, politicians and residents throughout the region disputed much of the new environmental legislation of the 1960s and 1970s, driving a wedge through traditional Democratic strongholds throughout the Great Lakes region.

Though Jacobetti's movement ultimately lost steam in the late 1970s, the political movement for Upper Peninsula statehood never truly disappeared. The secessionist spirit reappears every few years—often in times of economic recession. In the early 1980s, Jacobetti once again sounded the anthem for statehood when he proposed a larger secessionist movement to include several northern counties in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Abandoning "Superior," advocates for the state of "North Michigan" imagined a landscape where politicians could "cut high (tax) costs," reduce "'state services' to local control," in order to free "more citizen and business money."⁸⁰ They hoped to remove the shackles of existing government controls in order to use the landscape as they saw fit. The call for secession appeared once again in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008 when in 2012 members of the Marquette County Board of Commissioners breathed new life into Jacobetti's movement.⁸¹ "We have one-third of the land mass and 3 percent of the population," argued one county commissioner who believed downstate politicians curtailed the economic possibilities of the state.⁸² Seeking greater autonomy of *their land*, the secessionists critiqued bureaucracy, political disadvantages, and the land management policies of larger political entities. As in the 1970s, many Michiganders today believe that environmental regulations restrain eco-

omic growth in the region. The promise of future development runs through a blurred filter of industrial nostalgia and often clouds the devastating realities that secessionist policies might mean for public services and overall human health—two factors that have ultimately grounded the political movements. In Michigan, secessionists still dream of some imagined alternative that all too often ignores the region's financial realities or, worse, flatly denies the environmental consequences of the proposals.

NOTES

1. "Ten Reasons Why the Upper Peninsula Should Be and Operate as a Separate State," mailing packet ca. 1976, Dominic Jacobetti Papers, Central Upper Peninsula and Northern Michigan University Archives, Marquette, Michigan (hereafter Jacobetti Papers).

2. "Ten Reasons Why."

3. "Ten Reasons Why."

4. For previous scholarship on the statehood movement in the nineteenth century, see Charles E. Twining, "The Long Lost State of Superior," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61, no. 2 (1977–1978): 90–111.

5. "Ten Reasons Why."

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8

"The Little Guy for the Little Guy"

1969 Minneapolis and the White Working-Class Revolt

JEFFREY BLOODWORTH



George McGovern could not crack the white ethnic code. Try as he might, the earnest grandson of an Irish immigrant who grew up poor and dedicated his political life to the downtrodden lost the white ethnic and working-class vote in a landslide to Richard Nixon.¹ Making the outcome even more cruelly ironic for the preacher's son was the rationale. One working-class Milwaukeean told a canvasser, "I'd vote for him if he'd turn Christian."² In Scotty Reston's phraseology, McGovern had become the candidate of "acid, amnesty, and abortion," which convinced Middle America, in the words of another working-class voter, "McGovern? He's for dope."³

It was not McGovern, a clean-cut war hero, whom white ethnics viewed with suspicion as much as it was the senator's activist supporters. Though the senator understood his campaign's "main problem was the blue-collar Catholic worker," a key aide more accurately identified the gist of the issue: "What the workingmen resented was us."⁴ "Us" meant the self-described "New Politics liberals" who flocked to and ran the McGovern campaign. The young, educated, and middle-class "New Politics liberals," a label coined by the activists themselves, looked upon white ethnic voters with contempt.⁵ Horrified by working-class support for the Vietnam War and ambivalence on civil rights, they sought a new "coalition of conscience" that excluded white ethnics. Comprised of the young, poor, racial minorities and educated white liberals, this new alliance promised