

2026 Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Tom Kunse

Email Contact: tom@votekunse.com

Phone Contact: 989-205-4133

Campaign Website URL: www.votekunse.com

1. Purpose and Responsibility

Why are you seeking this office, and how would you define the responsibility of the office to the people of northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula?

- I want to continue serving the people of northern Michigan as a voice for practical, limited-government solutions with a focus on individual liberty, fiscal restraint, and local control.
- The responsibility of this office is to be a steward of taxpayer dollars, advocate for our rural districts, and ensure state policies support—not hinder—families, small businesses, farmers, and veterans.
 - This means prioritizing infrastructure like roads (which was my legislation), protecting property rights, promoting transparency in government spending (LDSI procedure was my legislation), and blocking overreach that raises costs or burdens families. My focus remains on making government smaller, more accountable, and responsive so our region can thrive.

2. Jobs, Investment, and Competitiveness

What specific policies would you support or develop if elected, to ensure northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula can compete for jobs, investment, infrastructure, and other state and federal resources?

- I support policies that reduce burdens and unleash private-sector growth: targeted tax relief (including further property tax reforms like eliminating "pop-up taxes"), streamlining regulations and permitting, and ensuring fair access to infrastructure and resources.
- Specific ideas include:
 - Advocating for dedicated road and broadband funding that benefits rural areas.
 - Cutting red tape that disadvantages small businesses and manufacturers against larger competitors.
 - Promoting workforce-aligned economic development without corporate welfare.
 - Working to secure state and federal resources equitably for rural infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing.

- I would push for performance-based incentives and transparency in how resources are allocated, ensuring investments deliver measurable returns in jobs and opportunities rather than expanding bureaucracy. Holding the House majority is key to preventing a Democrat trifecta that would lead to higher taxes and additional regulation.

3. Housing and Regional Partnerships

NMCA's policy framework calls for housing solutions and regional partnerships to address the region's critical housing shortage. What policies or ideas do you have in which you can partner with the Alliance to make a positive impact?

- Housing shortages in rural northern Michigan and the UP stem from regulatory barriers, high costs, and limited development. I support market-driven solutions and targeted partnerships that respect local control and private property rights.
- I would partner by:
 - Advocating for streamlined permitting and zoning reforms to speed up affordable and workforce housing without mandates.
 - Supporting incentives for infill development, rehab of existing structures, and manufactured housing where communities choose them.
 - Backing regional collaboration on infrastructure (water, sewer, broadband) that enables private builders.
 - We have already voted on the elimination of the Pop-Up Tax, which would increase "fluidity" in the housing market.

4. Workforce Development and Talent Attraction

What are your views on programs such as Going PRO, Michigan Reconnect, and talent attraction programs? What would you do to help attract, retain, train, and grow the workforce needed by northern Michigan and Upper Peninsula employees?

- Programs like Going PRO and Michigan Reconnect are valuable when focused on high-demand skills and private-sector needs. I support refining and expanding them with accountability for outcomes and taxpayer return.
- To attract, retain, train, and grow our workforce:
 - Strengthen career and technical education (CTE) in K-12 and community colleges, aligned with local employers in manufacturing, trades, tourism, healthcare, and agriculture. I have CTE legislation in the pipeline.
 - Reduce taxes and regulations to make the region more affordable, encouraging young people and families to stay or return.
 - Promote Michigan's rural quality of life—outdoor recreation, tight-knit communities, lower costs—through targeted talent attraction that highlights real opportunities.

5. Childcare Access

Please describe your view of the need for childcare in the region, and what would you do to enhance access to this resource?

- Childcare access is a real challenge in rural northern Michigan and the UP due to sparse population, workforce shortages, and costs. Families need flexible, affordable options, but government expansion isn't always the answer. I support removing barriers to increase supply—such as easing licensing/zoning for home-based providers, family networks, and church/community programs.
- Specific ideas include:
 - Targeted tax credits or incentives for providers and working families.
 - Partnership with local employers for on-site or shared childcare.
 - Exploring cooperatives or expanded school-based options where feasible.
 - Ensuring state funding prioritizes outcomes over bureaucracy.
 - Strong families are the foundation, and policy should support—not supplant—them.

6. Education Outcomes and Funding

What do you believe is the best action you could take to support growth in measurable outcomes for k-12 students in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula? How well is Michigan's funding of our higher education systems working, and would you make any changes to the way we fund education in this state?

- The best action for K-12 outcomes is accountability and choice: transparent metrics, curriculum focused on basics, teacher retention through competitive pay without mandates, and reducing administrative bloat. Northern and UP schools deserve equitable funding formulas that account for rural challenges (e.g., sparsity, transportation) without pitting districts against each other.
- Michigan's higher education funding sustains institutions but needs reforms for affordability, workforce alignment, and efficiency. I would support performance funding tied to graduation rates, credential completion, and job placement—especially in high-demand fields—while controlling costs to taxpayers and students. Expand dual enrollment and CTE pathways.
- Overall, shift from inputs (spending) to outcomes, empower parents/local control, and ensure funding follows the student where possible.

7. Regulatory Climate and Small Business Growth

What regulations, permitting processes, taxes, mandates, or compliance burdens do you believe most limit small business growth in our region? What would you do to make our state's regulatory environment more predictable?

- Excessive regulations, lengthy permitting, property tax instability (e.g., pop-up taxes), mandates, and compliance burdens most harm small businesses in our region—especially in agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, and trades.
- I would:

- Push for regulatory reform with sunsets, cost-benefit analyses, and small business impact statements.
- Streamline permitting processes for infrastructure and development.
- Reduce taxes and eliminate unnecessary mandates.
- Increase transparency and predictability in rules so businesses can plan and invest confidently.
- My record includes support for tax stability and fiscal restraint.

8. Affordability and Economic Vitality

What meaningful changes do you believe would help advance Michigan's economic vitality by making this state a more affordable place to live, work, and do business?

- To boost Michigan's economic vitality and affordability:
 - Tax relief: Further property tax reforms, income tax cuts, and eliminating wasteful spending.
 - Energy and costs: Oppose mandates that raise electricity and fuel prices; prioritize reliable, affordable energy.
 - Housing and regulations: As noted, ease barriers to supply.
 - Workforce and education: Align training with jobs and control higher ed costs. CTE is a top priority of mine.
 - Infrastructure: Dedicated funding for roads and broadband without new taxes.
 - Focus on limited government, transparency, and personal responsibility to lower living/doing-business costs. Preventing a Democrat trifecta is critical to avoiding higher taxes and overreach that hurt families and small businesses. **Rural Michigan thrives when government gets out of the way.**