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MICHIGAN POLITICS

## In Trump country, a local Democratic Party returns to life

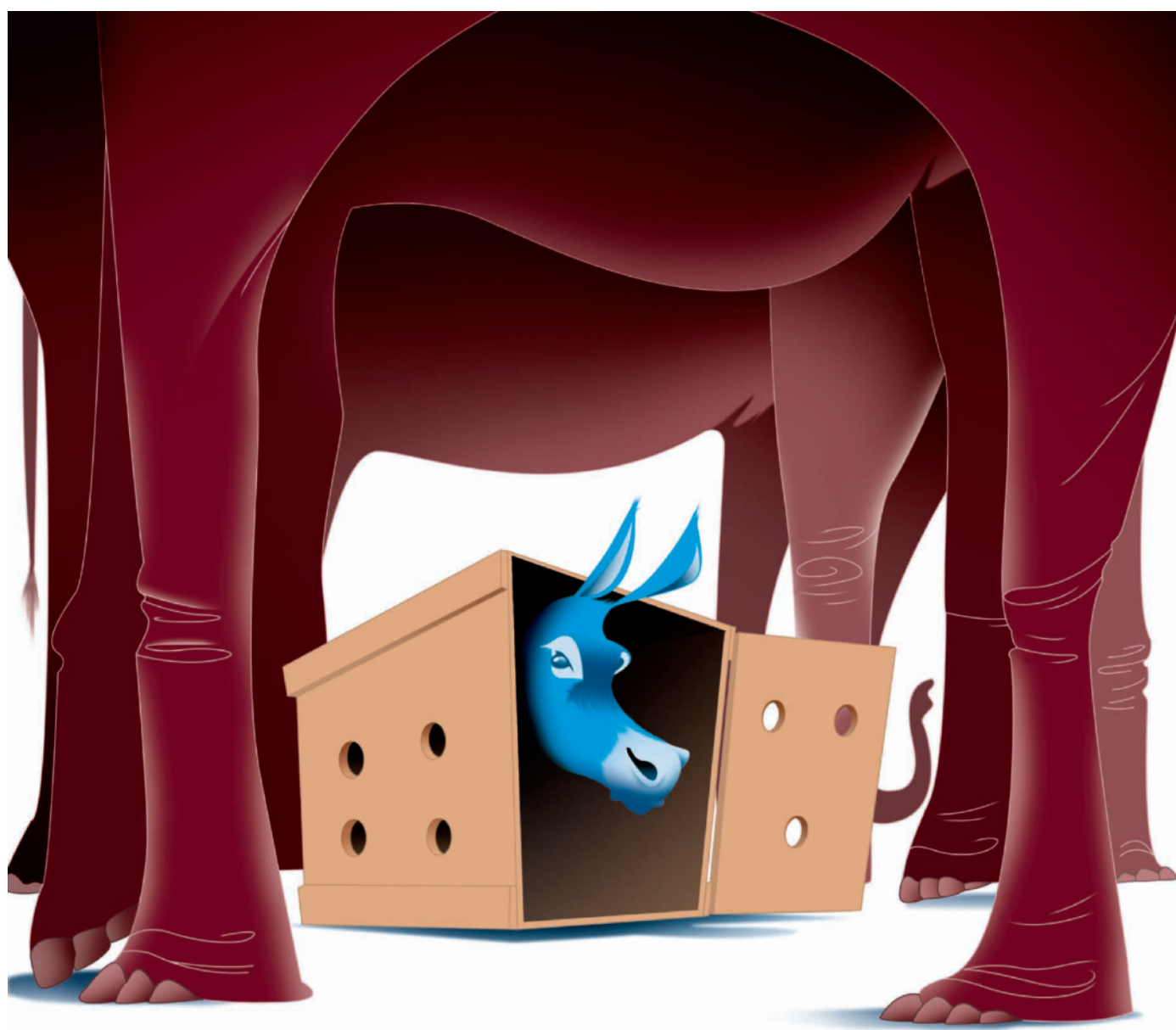


Illustration by Chris Morris, Advance Local

**The Montmorency County Democratic Party petered out in 2017. It was resurrected in December.**

**Matthew Miller** mmiller@mlive.com

ATLANTA — Joan Salmoni attended her first meeting of the Montmorency County Democratic Party in part because she was thrilled a Montmorency County Democratic Party actually exists.

This deeply red county in Northern Michigan went nearly a decade without a local Democratic organization.

The party was resurrected in December, a sign both of changing political winds and of the state Democratic Party's determination to compete in even the most heavily Republican districts.

Introducing herself to the dozen other people gathered in a board room at the Montmorency County Courthouse, Salmoni said she had been to protests in Alpena and Petoskey and had been "clicking on anything that says Democratic Party" and was "really anxious to come and see what a Montmorency County Democratic Party would be."

"I had people worried for my safety saying, 'I can't believe you're doing this here. Do you know what kind of community this is? You're going to have threats.'"

**Kristine Tolan, who was instrumental in restarting the Montmorency County Democratic Party and is now its chair**

**STARTING FROM SCRATCH**

The party is, for the moment, smallish. About 30 people have come to meetings, with another 20 or so snowbirds expected when the warmer weather rolls around.

It is also led by the cautiously optimistic. "I had people worried for my safety saying, 'I can't believe you're doing this here.

Do you know what kind of community this is? You're going to have threats," said Kristine Tolan, who was instrumental in restarting the Montmorency County Democratic Party and is now its chair.

She calls that fearmongering. "Especially when you talk about rural communities like here in Montmorency, we're all friends and neighbors," said Tolan. "We know one another, we all love our Talley's burgers, and we see each other at church on Sundays."

She is confident that the community can have civil conversations and work to solve common problems without "being pulled into the rhetoric of the us versus them."

**FIRST STEP TO WINNING**

"The first step to winning anything is to lose better," said Curtis Hertel, chair of the Michigan Democratic Party.

That's why the party has decided to organize in every one of the state's 83 counties, including the ones where Democrats haven't won an election in years.

Hertel pointed out that, when he became chair of the state Senate's Democratic Caucus Campaign Committee, the caucus had roughly as many members as the Wu-Tang Clan, a hip-hop music collective that had nine to 10 members at any given time.

**SEE MICHIGAN POLITICS, A3**

GREAT LAKES

## Carp project disrupted by another Trump feud

*Project management is moving from Illinois to Michigan, with no word on whether funding has been cleared.*

**Garret Ellison** gellison@mlive.com

DETROIT — Invasive carp moving toward Lake Michigan have a reputation for chaotic disruption. Lately, so do the politics surrounding the project meant to stop them.

The Brandon Road project in Illinois, a \$1.15 billion Great Lakes protection effort with broad bipartisan support and years of groundwork, is being dragged into a blame game over whether the Trump administration or a blue state governed by a potential 2028 presidential candidate who feuds with the president is responsible for delays.

Last week, the Army Corps of Engineers announced that management of the Brandon Road project was being moved to Michigan from Illinois, which is home to a chokepoint shipping complex on the Des Plaines River that's being fortified to repel invasive silver and bighead carp advancing through the Illinois Waterway toward Lake Michigan.

The Corps said the project, which has been delayed for months by an unexplained pause in funding, would "soon begin the next construction phase" but did not offer more details.

Thursday's project uprooting follows a White House visit by Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer on March 10 and a same day Truth Social post by Donald Trump about protecting the Great Lakes from "the rather violent and destructive" fish — which the Brandon Road Interbasin Project would prevent from colonizing the Great Lakes.

**BLAME GAME**

But project stakeholders, the state of Illinois and bipartisan congressional lawmakers from Michigan and Ohio say the Trump administration is withholding key funding that threatens to delay the yearslong project. Meanwhile, Trump appointees and Michigan House Republican leaders are leveling similar accusations against Illinois.

On Thursday, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works Adam Telle called Illinois "an unreliable partner" on social media and said project management is moving from the Corps' Rock Island District in Illinois to the Detroit District in Michigan.

Matt Hall, Republican speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives, jumped into the fray and issued a statement Friday praising Trump and blaming Illinois and former Democratic presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden for project delays.

**SEE GREAT LAKES, A5**



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