



In Michigan, HB4770, HB4771 and HB4772 would license qualified interior designers. And in October 2007, the bills — sponsored by State Reps. Bill Huizenga and Andy Meisner — passed on the Michigan House of Representatives floor. As of February, the bills have been referred to the Senate Committee of Commerce and Tourism, and are awaiting a hearing date. Republican Huizenga is serving his third term in the House, where he is Co-chairman of the Joint Select Committee on Oversight of 21st Century Job Funds. Democrat Meisner, also serving his third term, has fought for state investment in job creation and entrepreneurship.

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Perspective: Why is legislation to license interior designers needed in Michigan?

Huizenga: Michigan recently passed a building code that says if you're going to be pulling permits, you need to be licensed or registered. Interior designers in Michigan are neither. There is also a gray area: Some building officials enforce it, others don't.

Meisner: Economic development is the biggest reason [to pass this legislation]. We've got a law that is hurting the development of entrepreneurs, and it's a very serious problem. We need to encourage these people in their business. Everyone who graduates from an interior design program will go work for an interior design firm or potentially start their own practice, and provide a real jolt to our economy. That's critical for Michigan.

Huizenga: [Furniture manufacturers] Herman Miller, Haworth and Trendway are all in my district, and Steelcase is very close. They've even experienced issues with interior designers in terms of what they can and can't do [by law].

Perspective: Without legislation, will interior design graduates look elsewhere for work?

Meisner: Many recent graduates — our best and brightest who we've just spent considerable amounts [of money on their education] — fear they will have to leave, and many have left because of this problem. That represents a real strategic challenge for the state because interior designers are professional, educated, creative people. They're entrepreneurs. At a time when the state has lost hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs, and we're looking for ways to diversify our economy and grow in other areas, it's particularly painful to lose these promising young people.

Perspective: Why hasn't interior design legislation been passed before now?

Huizenga: There's a lack of understanding about what interior designers do. They aren't architects; they aren't engineers; they certainly aren't decorators. We've even had to educate members on our own committee that Interior Design is not about simply choosing colors.

Meisner: The fact is interior designers are trained in building codes and materials. Having someone choose a carpet for a high-traffic commercial setting who doesn't pick a fire-retardant material — that could be life and death for people. It creates a real public safety concern.

Perspective: How do you go about getting legislation like this passed?

Meisner: The thing that has helped us more than anything has been our coordinated strategy of bringing in constituents to meet with their representatives; to talk about what Interior Design is and what it isn't; to bring in college students who say, "This isn't theoretical. I am going to have to leave the state." 