

POLITICS

Attorney general hopeful Eli Savit's travel cost taxpayers, records show



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Update: [Washtenaw County prosecutor to repay thousands in gas purchases](#)

Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit has repeatedly used a government gas card to purchase fuel for his travels to and from campaign events for his bid to become Michigan's next attorney general, according to internal county records obtained by The Detroit News.

The News compared the location of gas stations where Savit's county government card was used over the last 12 months with posts on his Facebook page and elsewhere about his campaign stops, finding at least 21 instances where the purchases matched locations Savit was campaigning.

All of those 21 locations — places where Savit's county card purchased about \$838 worth of gas — were outside Washtenaw County.

Savit, who's a Democrat and was first elected Washtenaw County prosecutor in 2020, said his use of the county resources to get him to campaign stops around the state over the last year has been legal because his county compensation package provides him "unlimited use of a county-provided vehicle."

"Expenses related to any personal use ... are tracked and reported as 'personal,'" Savit said Thursday. "The value of those personal trips is part of my personal

income."

Yet, it seems unlikely that some of the taxpayer-backed income Savit has received would have happened if he weren't campaigning for a higher political office.

Michigan law bans government employees from using money or equipment to contribute to a candidate.

Bob LaBrant, a longtime Michigan lawyer and a campaign finance expert, said Savit should have used his personal credit card, not the county's card, to purchase gas.

"I think this is a clear example of a violation of Section 57 of the campaign finance law, using public resources for a campaign," said LaBrant, former general counsel for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce.

The documents obtained by The News raised new questions about Savit's work as a county prosecutor ahead of Sunday's Democratic Party convention in Detroit, where Democrats will decide whether to nominate Savit, Oakland County Prosecutor Karen McDonald or longtime public defender William Noakes to be the state's top law enforcement official.

Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat, can't run again because of term limits.

Where Eli Savit traveled

The News obtained an internal county record tracking the use of Savit's gas card. It showed a clear pattern of purchases connected to campaign events since he launched his bid for attorney general in May.

Savit's card bought more than \$3,300 in gas outside of Washtenaw County during the last 12 months.

In late September, Savit made a series of campaign appearances in the Upper Peninsula.

"Thank you to the Dickinson County Dems for hosting me — and for the great conversation spanning consumer protection, workers' rights and healthcare accessibility in the western UP," Savit wrote on Facebook on Sept. 30.

Over those same days, in late September and early October, the government gas card purchased \$41 in fuel at a station in Ontonagon on Oct. 1 and \$31 at a station in Iron River on Sept. 29, according to county records.

Ontonagon is about 551 miles away from Ann Arbor, where Savit is the elected county prosecutor.

Savit posted on Facebook that he attended the Ottawa County Democratic Party's summer picnic on July 13. That same day, the county gas card purchased \$48 in fuel at an EZ Mart in Grand Haven, about 165 miles away from Ann Arbor.

On July 4, Savit posted on Facebook that he walked with Democrats in the Clarkston Independence Day parade. The card purchased \$39 in gas at Speedway in Clarkston that day.

On Oct. 11, Savit posted that he had spent time that day canvassing for a candidate for Southfield city clerk. He included photographs of himself holding campaign materials for the candidate. Also, on Oct. 11, Savit's card purchased \$15 in gas at an ExxonMobil in Southfield.

Later that day, Savit participated in an event in Sault Ste. Marie for Democrats there. A photograph on Facebook showed Savit holding campaign brochures. On Oct. 12, Savit's card bought \$36 in gas at a station in Sault Ste. Marie.

Earlier this year, the Michigan Black Summit, which drew an array of Democratic candidates, took place Feb. 6 and 7 in Benton Harbor. Savit's gas card purchased \$39 in fuel at a Shell station in Benton Harbor on Feb. 6.

Are gas purchases part of Savit's compensation?

If he becomes Michigan's next attorney general, Savit has vowed to "take on corporate polluters, protect workers and consumers from exploitation and hold powerful interests accountable."

Savit said he uses the county gas card for trips with the county vehicle because it allows him to track his travel for tax reporting purposes.

Like his paycheck, Savit contended the money from the county "ceases to be county funds when it's allocated to me as part of my compensation."

As of the end of last year, Savit's campaign hadn't disclosed any in-kind contributions from Savit for the gas purchases for the various campaign events. Michigan campaign finance law indicates travel expenses over \$500 in a calendar year should be disclosed.

Asked about McDonald's campaign travel, Olivia Bradish, a spokeswoman for McDonald's campaign, said the campaign and the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office are "separate operations."

"The campaign reimburses the county for any campaign-related mileage," Brandish said.

Republican attorney general candidate Doug Lloyd is Eaton County's prosecutor. The Eaton County Prosecutor's Office only has one vehicle, and it's used for "county official business," said Gary Koutsoubos, spokesman for Lloyd's campaign.

"For the campaign, Doug uses his personal vehicle or his son's vehicle to travel the state, both of which have over 200,000 miles," Koutsoubos said.

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