

# MICHIGAN

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# TRUTH SQUAD



Who: U.S. Senate candidate Pete Hoekstra, Democratic State Central Committee

Featured material: TV and Internet ads

Truth Squad call: Flagrant foul

## QUESTIONABLE STATEMENTS

**“Debbie spends so much American money. You borrow more and more from us. Your economy get very weak. Ours get very good. We take your jobs. Thank you, Debbie Spend-it-now.”**

If you thought Republican U.S. Senate candidate Pete Hoekstra’s “Debbie Spend-it-now” TV spot trafficked in cultural stereotypes, you’re not alone. The 30-second spot featured a Chinese-American actress pedaling a bicycle between what appeared to be rice paddies, coolie hat dangling down her back.

But never mind the broken English, the rice paddies and the hat. Because once you go to the spot’s accompanying [website](#), that Asian iconography is pushed aside by what looks like the banquet room decor at a Chinese restaurant, with splashy graphics in Chinese characters; a Chinese flag, folding fan, dragons, yuan coins, “the great wall of debt,” a teapot, a paper lantern, a dragon and everything but Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan.

The message, with or without proper English verb tense, is clear: Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow is responsible for more Chinese good fortune -- and American misfortune -- than a truckload of cookies with messages inside.

How does it stack up? It calls out Stabenow for her votes on various pieces of legislation -- the [2010 budget resolution](#), the [Affordable Care Act](#), the [stimulus package](#) and the [2010 appropriations bill](#). All are straightforward statements of fact, although it’s unclear how the health-care bill “helped the Chinese economy grow.”

Stabenow helped add to the “great wall of debt” how? By being one of the Senate Democrats who have failed to pass a budget resolution since 2009, but how that leads to “pouring American dollars into the Chinese economy” is unclear. [China is indeed the largest foreign holder of U.S.](#)

[securities](#), but most American debt is owed to other Americans. As for the growth of the Chinese economy -- 9.1 percent in the third quarter of 2011, compared to 1.3 percent for the U.S. -- it's true that China's rapid industrialization has led to explosive growth. But it's simplistic to compare the two economies directly; a 9 percent growth rate in the U.S. would carry its own set of problems, including inflation, a problem the Chinese government is struggling to control.

The ad further claims that "since ObamaCare and the stimulus passed, the unemployment rate in the U.S. has increased." The stimulus was passed February 2009, and the Affordable Care Act in March 2010. The [unemployment rate did rise afterward](#), to a high of 9.9 percent in April 2010. But it has fallen slowly since then. The most recent data, in January 2012, shows it at 8.3 percent, the same rate it was in February 2009.

Meanwhile, the Michigan Democratic State Central Committee [fired back with its own website and video](#), which uses as its centerpiece *another* ad (are you following this?) from former attorney general Mike Cox's own battle with Hoekstra for the GOP gubernatorial campaign in 2010. Cox's ad slams Hoekstra as a big-spending Republican, citing his votes for the [Wall Street bailout](#) and [raising the debt limit](#), among others.

Stabenow was one of 25 senators who [voted against the Troubled Asset Relief Program in 2008](#), popularly referred to as the Wall Street bailout. Until recently, debt-ceiling increases were rarely newsworthy votes, and were seen as routine business to allow the government to keep meeting its financial obligations, and have been undertaken in both Democratic and Republican administrations. Stabenow's [record on those votes is mixed](#), but in some cases, the debt-limit extension was bundled with other legislation.

### **OVERALL IMPRESSION:**

Ethnic insensitivity it has in spades, and that's drawn the most attention. But some of the factual analyses are non-sequiturs.

### **FOUL OR NO FOUL:**

Multiple calls here. First, flagrant foul for the racial stereotyping in the original Hoekstra ad. However, the specific votes cited in the Hoekstra ad check out with the public record, though the Hoekstra ad attempts to draw tenuous conclusions from those votes, so a technical foul there. The Democratic response ad also earns a technical foul for relying, in part, on a Mike Cox ad from 2010 that the Truth Squad already had called a "foul" for "playing a bit fast and loose by giving voters an incomplete look at Hoekstra's financial votes.