

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF DECEMBER 11, 2017

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OPIOID BILLS REACH THE GOVERNOR

The House and Senate approved a package of bills this week which seek to help in the fight against the growing opioid crisis at the prescription drug level. The bills require doctors to use a new online prescription and tracking state database, ensure there is a “bona fide relationship” between doctors and patients, and limit the number of opioid prescriptions.

The database is designed to keep track of doctors who prescribe too much and help doctors know if patients are office-hopping to get pills.

Another requirement—that doctors review a patient’s history on MAPS (MI Automated Prescription System) before prescribing opioids—passed but there is disagreement on whether or not the system should remain voluntary or become mandatory.

The bills have been sent to Gov. Snyder for consideration.

LEGISLATURE FAILS TO ACT ON DRIVER RESPONSIBILITY FEE

A bipartisan plan to forgive driver responsibility fees stalled in the House and Senate at the end of session this week, with a standoff between Gov. Rick Snyder and Republican legislative leaders.

The House and Senate approved their own plans earlier this fall, which proposed different levels of forgiveness for hundreds of millions of dollars in driver responsibility fees. House Speaker Tom Leonard is pushing for full forgiveness and a quicker deadline. A scaled-down Senate version would incur a smaller cut in state revenue, and calls for forgiveness only on debts that are at least six years old.

Driver responsibility fees were originally passed in 2003 as a way to help fill the state budget. The fees, which range from \$100 to \$1000, depending on the severity of driving offenses, are imposed in addition to normal fines and court costs.

Thousands of people have not been able to afford the fees and have lost their licenses because of it.

Lawmakers passed a bill in 2014 phasing out the fees altogether by 2019, and allowing 168,000 people to pay off their fees by community service.

Leonard, who supports speeding up the phase-out, has called the fees a “blatant money grab.” Others view it as a double punishment.

Gov. Snyder has said he supports the repeal of the fees along with continued discussion, but is concerned about \$2.1 billion in upcoming budget issues and the effect the plan would have on revenues.

LAWMAKERS SETTLE ON TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RETIREMENT BENEFIT OVERSIGHT

After numerous capitol rallies, hours of debate, and late-night legislative sessions, the legislature unanimously passed bills that defaulted to the task force recommendations for requiring local governments to address unfunded pension and health care liabilities.

A vocal coalition of police officers and fire fighters had strongly opposed the original version of the legislation, saying it allowed for too much state control.

The final legislation more closely followed the recommendations of the Governor's Responsible Retirement Reform for Local Government Task Force which supported giving local governments the tools they need to solve their challenges on the local level.

Republicans were disappointed that the final version did not have any of the oversight measures they had included.

The final bills require local governments to pre-fund retiree health benefits for new hires and retiree premiums, and mandates more reporting to the state by 2018.

Plans short of funding 40 percent of future health care obligations and 60 percent of pensions would be subject to extra scrutiny by the Treasury Department. Municipalities that don't receive a state waiver would be overseen by a three-member Michigan Stability Board made up of people appointed by the governor.

SUPPLEMENTAL GIVES MILLIONS TO FIGHT THREAT OF PFAS CONTAMINATION

Lawmakers appropriated millions of dollars for state testing and remediation of PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances this week to help communities affected by the contaminate in Michigan.

The appropriation for fiscal year 2017-18 sets aside \$23.2 million for PFAS testing, remediation, equipment, and staff. Two Michigan communities facing severe public health and environmental threats and concerns are Oscoda, near the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base; and northern Kent County near Wolverine World Wide dumpsites.

Man-made PFAS chemicals were used in firefighting foams, cleaning products, cookware, carpeting, food packaging, and military application for more than 50 years. Studies have shown they can lead to increased cancer risks, low infant birth weights, thyroid problems, and more.

MM&A Briefs

Schor ready to take on new role as Lansing Mayor

Rep. Andy Schor gave his farewell speech to the House this Wednesday before he resigns and begins his new position as the mayor of Lansing. Schor won the mayoral election last month, and will replace outgoing mayor Virg Bernero. Prior to being a state representative, Schor served on the Ingham County Board of Commissioners, and began his career in the Michigan Legislature as a staffer for the now-U.S. Sen. Gary Peters (D-Bloomfield Twp.) who was a state senator at the time.

List of Michigan legislators eyeing Congress grows

The list of Michigan legislators and others lining up to run for Congress is growing with no fewer than three open seats in the U.S. House.

In the 9th District, retiring U.S. Rep. Sander Levin leaves an open seat drawing the interest of Democrats including Sen. Steve Bieda (D-Warren), Martin Brook, and Levin's son- Andy Levin. One republican, Canidus Stearn is running so far.

In the 11th District, four Republicans are running to replace U.S. Rep. Dave Trott including Lena Epstein, co-chair of President Trump's 2016 campaign in Michigan; Plymouth Township Supervisor and former state senator Kurt Heise; Rep. Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Twp.); and former state representative Rocky Raczkowski. Five Democrats running to date are Rep. Tim Greimel (D-Auburn Hills); Suneel Gupta, brother of CNN medical correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta; Dan Haberman; Haley Stevens; and Fayrouz Saad.

Also, with U.S. Rep. John Conyers (D-Detroit) resigning amid sexual harassment accusations, several people are considering running for the 13th district. This list includes Conyer's son, John Conyers III; his grand-nephew, Sen. Ian Conyers (D-Detroit); Sen. Coleman Young II (D-Detroit); and Michael Gilmore.