

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

STATE OF THE STATE JANUARY 27, 2021

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GOVERNOR WHITMER EMPHASIZES BIPARTISANSHIP, FIXING THE ROAD AHEAD IN STATE OF THE STATE

Governor Gretchen Whitmer gave her third State of the State Address via video and without an audience last night, focusing on her administration's positive achievements over the past year during one of the worst pandemics in history, her bipartisan accomplishments, and the need to find common ground in the near future regarding COVID-19 funding.

The Governor began her 30-minute speech with an overview of the historic converging crisis the state faced this year, including a world-wide pandemic, a 500-year flood event in mid-Michigan, nationwide calls against racism, and a divisive presidential race.

Despite all of these things, however, Whitmer said, "We took real bipartisan action to get things done for you and your family."

Whether as an olive branch to the Republican legislative leaders, or a reminder of necessary work to come, Whitmer underscored bipartisan accomplishments from the last year including: signing two bipartisan budgets, creating the Michigan Reconnect Program, passing and signing Michigan's criminal justice system's Clean Slate legislation.

Governor Whitmer also called on the legislature to work with her and pass legislation related to several initiatives including:

- The MI COVID Recovery Plan, which includes distributing vaccines, return to school, supporting small businesses, and specifically extending unemployment benefits from 20 weeks to 26 weeks
- Funding for local roads, providing local communities more options to fix roads and bridges
- Good Jobs for Michigan legislation
- The MI Clean Water Plan, a \$500 million plan for water infrastructure in the state
- Lowering the cost of prescription drugs as suggested by the bipartisan Prescription Drug Task Force

In addition to legislative initiatives, Gov. Whitmer announced her 2021 plans to "Fix the Damn Road Ahead" by "finding common ground to grow our economy and get families and businesses back on their feet," she said.

As part of the 2021 plan, the Governor announced the MI Classroom Heroes grant program, the Michigan Back to Work plan, the and the upcoming “Fixing the Damn Road Ahead” tour.

The MI Classroom Heroes grant program, to be disbursed in February, provides grants for up to \$500 each for teachers and support staff. They are designed to help offset some expenses and the extraordinary efforts Michigan’s educators have made.

The Michigan Back to Work plan will leverage state government resources to rebuild the economy. It aims to jumpstart the state’s economy by working with leaders in state government, business, and other areas to “create an environment where entrepreneurs can create more good-paying jobs for all Michiganders.”

Finally, the Governor announced the “Fixing the Damn Road Ahead” tour for 2021 to “engage with and learn from Michigan voters...focus on what unites us, improve how we talk to each other, and fix the damn road ahead.”

Other points of pride Whitmer underscored for Michigan during this difficult year were the development of the Pfizer vaccine, the establishment of the Futures for Frontliners college tuition program, and numerous completed and ongoing road construction projects.

Looking forward, Whitmer discussed a plan to vaccinate 70% of Michigan’s population over the age of 16 as soon as possible, and an upcoming budget proposal which will focus on building on a weighted funding formula for education, and the Return to Learn Advisory Council providing guidance to schools on how best to promote recovery in the schools and getting kids back on track.

Gov. Whitmer wrapped up her 2021 message with a direct message to the Legislature, saying “Let’s commit to the strong bipartisan action we took last year and focus that same energy to end the pandemic, grow our economy and get our kids back on track.”

The emphasis on bipartisan cooperation was another indication that there could be an intense, protracted fight between the Governor and the legislature as they both take different paths to helping residents and providing billions of dollars in already approved assistance.

Another sign of the tension between the Governor and Republican Legislative leaders was on display yesterday as the Michigan Senate blocked the appointment of 13 people to state boards and commissions, in what appears to be a response to COVID-19 related orders from the Whitmer administration and vetoes. House Republicans also announced a plan to delay or withhold billions of dollars of federal funding related to COVID-19 for education, unless Gov. Whitmer agrees to a law that strips the Governor and the Health Department of emergency health powers.