

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF OCTOBER 19, 2020

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LAWSUIT QUICKLY FOLLOWS BENSON'S ORDER TO BAN OPEN CARRY FIREARMS FROM POLLS

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson's directive to local election clerks banning the open carry of firearms at or within 100 feet of polling precincts on Election Day has been quickly followed by a lawsuit challenging its legality by Thomas Lambert, Michigan Open Carry, Michigan Gun Owners and the Michigan Coalition for Responsible Gun Owners. The lawsuit has been placed on an expedited schedule by the Court of Claims and Judge Christopher Murray. Judge Murray has called for Benson to file a response brief to the lawsuit by 5 p.m. Monday, with oral arguments, if held, scheduled for 2:30 p.m. Tuesday.

Benson's directive said that the "open carry of a firearm is prohibited in a polling place, in any hallway used by voters to enter or exit, or within 100 feet of any entrance to a building in which a polling place is located." The ban does not apply to on-duty law enforcement.

It also notes that concealed carry is prohibited in any buildings that already prohibit concealed carry unless the person is authorized by the building to concealed carry.

In addition, the directive states that outside of the 100 feet of a polling place, clerk's office or absent voter counting board "if any person is acting in a way that would tend to intimidate, hinder or impede voters on the way to the polls, election inspectors should immediately contact law enforcement."

Benson said that Attorney General Dana Nessel and Michigan State Police Col. Joe Gasper support her statement and that there will be "preparations to ensure Michigan voters are safe and secure when voting by informing local law enforcement agencies and ensuring that the ban on openly carried firearms is enforced statewide."

The lawsuit against the ban said that the "pronouncement has a chilling effect on the fundamental rights of open carriers," and that the order is void for lack of constitutional or statutory authority and was issued in violation of the requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act.

Proponents of the ban include the ACLU, who issued a statement today that said, "just as people are not allowed to carry signs or pass out political literature within 100 feet of polling places, people should not be allowed to openly carry guns."

The National Conference of State Legislatures has said that 10 states, not including Michigan, ban guns and weapons in polling places

WHITMER SIGNS COVID-19 BILLS PROTECTING WORKERS AND BUSINESSES

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed into law a series of bills on Thursday that enable workers to stay home without repercussions if they have COVID-19 symptoms or were exposed to the virus, and also gives businesses legal protection if they follow state rules related to the virus.

For workers, the signed legislation allows them to stay home after they have been exposed to or show symptoms of COVID-19, without retaliation from their employer. Employers who violate the law could be forced to award damages to employees starting at \$5,000.

For businesses, the legislation provides protection from unwarranted lawsuits to those that comply with “all relevant COVID-19 related statutes, orders and rules as issued by federal, state and local authorities.” The laws include protection from liability if a worker gets sick at work under the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Representatives for both labor unions and the Chamber of Commerce cheered the bipartisan nature of the legislation.

HOSPITALS ISSUE JOINT WARNING AS COVID CASES RISE IN STATE

The chief medical officers of 110 hospitals in Michigan issued an unprecedented joint statement on Thursday warning that COVID-19 hospitalizations are up 80 percent in the past few weeks.

In the past 10 days, the number of hospital-reported adults suspected of having or confirmed of having COVID-19 has risen from 928 adults to 1,198, with the number of people visiting emergency departments with COVID-related conditions going from 738 to 1,112.

Compared to one month ago, there were 675 newly confirmed COVID-19 cases versus 1,682 this Thursday. The number of deaths is also increasing with 231 COVID-19 deaths from August 27 – September 23, 2020, compared to 370 deaths from September 24 through October 21.

The joint statement from chief medical officers cited concern for the risk of another capacity crisis, and additional stress and risk to doctors, nurses, therapists, custodians, food services and support staff.

“If Michigan doesn't change its approach to this disease, we could have crowded hospital emergency departments and approach exceeding the capacity of our hospitals as we did in southeast Michigan this past spring,” the statement said.

Hospitals have reported that there is a capacity for 22,492 in-patients, with the current rate at 17,145 in-patients at hospitals. The group of chief medical officers urged the public to wear masks, stay 6 feet apart, avoid crowds and wash their hands frequently.

Both the governor and a spokesperson for the Republican Speaker of the House Lee Chatfield said that after passing two sets of COVID-19 related bills, they are hopeful they can continue working together to navigate strategies to address the concerns.

STAFF CHANGES IN GOVERNOR’S OFFICE

Several members of Gov. Whitmer’s Executive Office Staff were promoted to deputy chiefs of staff this week, along with other changes in her team.

Changes include:

- Community affairs director Melanie Brown will become a deputy chief of staff managing appointments, community affairs and constituent services division. The new public affairs director will be Sarah Gonzales Triplett who is currently the deputy director of public affairs.
- Legislative and public affairs director Jen Flood will now oversee legislative affairs, federal affairs, policy, public affairs and scheduling as deputy chief of staff. The governor's new legislative director will be George W. Cook III, who was most recently with Toyota North America.
- Communications director Zach Pohl will continue to manage communications and additional strategic planning responsibilities in his role as deputy chief of staff.
- Brom Stibitz has been moved from acting director of the Department of Technology, Management and Budget to the permanent director of the agency.
- Poppy Hernandez, the west Michigan outreach director for Whitmer, will now fill a new position in the administration as the equity and inclusion officer, reporting to Chief Operating Officer Tricia Foster.

STATE SEES INCREASE IN HUNTING LICENSE SALES

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has reported that the state has seen a record 95-percent increase in hunting license sales for first-time hunters since March – the largest increase in 20 years.

The DNR also reports that 440,780 people purchased hunting licenses through Oct. 12, with more than 64,000 of those bought by first-time hunters. With a 144% increase in license sales for people ages 10-16 across all species. The total number of new fishing licenses also increased by 42 percent. In addition to hunting and fishing, parks and trails have reported record visitors this year.

MM&A Briefs

Peter Secchia, Philanthropist, Businessman and Former Ambassador, Dies at 83

Peter Secchia, a Grand Rapids businessman, philanthropist and former U.S. Ambassador to Italy died Wednesday at the age of 83.

A spokesperson for the family said that Secchia passed away after experiencing health issues for several months and that COVID-19 was a contributing factor in his death.

Secchia, raised in New Jersey, graduated from Michigan State University and began his career at a commercial lumber company, Grand Rapids-based UFP Industries Inc., formerly Universal Forest Products. He later purchased control of the company and served as CEO until 1989. President George H.W. Bush appointed Secchia as the U.S. Ambassador to Italy where he served from 1989 to 1993.

Secchia was known across the state for his philanthropy and scope of giving, but especially in West Michigan and at Michigan State University. A close friend and supporter of former President Gerald Ford, Secchia was deeply involved in state and national Republican politics including serving as chair of the Kent County Republican Party, and Vice Chairman of the Republican National Committee. According to *MLive*, the family is planning a small, private funeral service.

Whitmer's Campaign Benefits from National Attention

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's campaign fund is reporting that it has raised more than \$5 million since January from more than 25,000 contributions – an unheard-of amount for an incumbent who is not facing re-election for two more years.

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Calendar of Important Events

- Oct. 23** **10th House District candidate Mary Cavanagh (D) Fundraiser**
Location: 5:30 p.m. 12126 Centralia, Redford

- Oct. 26** **Rep. Alex Garza (D-Taylor) Fundraiser**
Location: 6 p.m., Big League Brews, 20248 Ecorse Road, Taylor

- Oct. 28** **47th House District candidate Bob Bezotte (R) Fundraiser**
Location: 5 p.m., home of Gary and Mary Helfmann, 601 N. Grand Ave., Fowlerville

- Nov. 3** **General Election**