

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 30, 2020

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STATE WAITS FOR WHITMER'S DECISION ON EXTENSION OF COVID-19 CLOSURES

As the latest three-week closure ordered by the Department of Health and Human Services come to an end, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said it will take more information to decide if they will be extended.

Although the state's COVID-19 numbers still remain high, data has shown leveling of the numbers since the restrictions were imposed.

"I think a few more days of information under our belts we'll be in a much stronger position to really assess if there are some things that maybe are safer to do but if we have to make some extensions of the current pause in some realms, and that is sadly possible because of the just sheer volume of COVID," Whitmer said.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) issued a statement regarding the ability of Michigan restaurants to open. "Business owners deserve adequate time to ready their establishments for expanded operations. The food and beverage industry has repeatedly been targeted for shutdown orders despite restaurant owners proving themselves to be willing partners in adopting new health and safety standards to keep employees and patrons safe. We agree that individual businesses that violate workplace health and safety requirements should face consequences and we implore the governor to focus on addressing the bad actors rather than continue to impose mandates that threaten the livelihood of an entire industry."

The 7-day average for newly diagnosed COVID-19 cases dropped from 7,146 to 6,712 on Thursday, while hospitalizations this week also dropped from 4,240 on Wednesday to 4,150 adults hospitalized on Thursday. A surge in people dying, however, (1,219 people dying between Nov. 18-Dec. 1 is more than triple the number from Oct. 19-Nov. 1) has placed Michigan as having the third-highest number of people die from COVID-19 in the U.S. in the past seven days.

CHATFIELD TO FOCUS ON PANDEMIC RELIEF AS TERM COMES TO A CLOSE

House Speaker Lee Chatfield (R-Levering) has said that his final priorities for the 2019-20 term involve providing immediate relief to those negatively affected by COVID-19 and the closure and other pandemic-related orders from the administration.

Chatfield has also said to Gongwer News Service, that he looks forward to working with the Governor's office to find a consensus on COVID-19 relief, including about the \$100 million for COVID-19 relief which she requested, saying that is not unreasonable. He has also said that he hopes to see more federal assistance, and more flexibility in a second round of federal dollars.

"I mean, we have businesses ... they still have to pay their taxes and their payroll while being shut down. And the people who are employed in these restaurants, which happens to be a large percentage here in the state of Michigan, have been kicked to the curb. And it's not right," he said.

In addition to the \$100 million, Whitmer asked for the development of a state-based economic stimulus plan focusing on financial support for families and small businesses.

TRUMP CAMPAIGN MAKES LAST-DITCH EFFORT AT SENATE AND HOUSE HEARINGS IN MICHIGAN

In an unprecedented post-election environment, both the Michigan House and Senate held hours-long hearings in Lansing this week, on allegations of voter fraud said to have occurred at the TCF Center in Detroit during the Nov. 3 elections.

In both instances, both Trump supporters and some who have given sworn affidavits in court cases testified. Numerous claims that were made have already been rejected in the court cases. The Senate hearing lasted seven hours and included allegations of:

- Rude behavior directed at Republican poll challengers
- Lack of adequate access to various parts of the voting process
- Not being allowed to be within six feet of those counting ballots
- Dozens of boxes of ballots arrived hours after the polls had closed
- Running ballots through voting machines multiple times
- Military ballots being counted at one point of almost entirely consisting of votes for Democratic president-elect Joe Biden and few or no military ballots cast for Trump
- Names of voters being observed as not being listed in electronic pollbooks and dead people voting

The Associated Press has reported that U.S. Attorney General William Barr stated the U.S. Department of Justice has not found any evidence of widespread voter fraud stemming from the November 3 elections.

In the House Oversight Committee hearing on Wednesday night, House Oversight Committee Chair Matt Hall (R-Emmett Twp.) gave control of the much of the hearing to President Donald Trump's personal attorneys Rudy Giuliani and Jenna Ellis, who were allowed to question those testifying.

Giuliani spent more than an hour questioning Jessy Jacob, who told about perceived fraud which election officials said was a misunderstanding of the process.

Rep. Beau LaFave (R-Iron Mountain) asked Giuliani if he was asking the Legislature to hand Trump the state's 16 electoral college votes. Giuliani replied by saying "I didn't ask that," followed by talking about how the Legislature should take back its power because the state's election was fraudulent.

Jenna Ellis, a legal advisor for the president, told legislators at the beginning of the committee: "At the end of the evidence and the testimony that we present today, we are going to be asking you to take action. ... We will be asking you after taking a look at the testimony presented today to take that oath you have made as legislators very, very seriously. The law is on your side."

Earlier on Wednesday, Michigan Republican lawmakers received a letter from a Trump campaign official that said "The time for dramatic and Constitutional measures to right this injustice is now. A

joint resolution from the State House and Senate can allow Michigan to send electors for Donald J Trump to the Electoral College and save our country."

The Trump party is basing its arguments on the part of the U.S. Constitution which says legislatures shall direct the manner in which states award their electoral votes that the Legislature could vote to award Michigan's electoral votes to Trump. Michigan law, however, says the winner of the popular vote in Michigan receives its electoral votes.

Rep. Steve Johnson (R-Wayland) asked why the President's campaign did not request a recount and told another witness, Mellissa Carone, that her claim that the poll book was off by 30,000 votes, did not add up.

Chair Matt Hall (R-Marshall) said the hearing was necessary and hopes it will help create policy to gain back trust in the election process.

MM&A Briefs

Former U.P. Lawmaker Tom Casperson passes away at 61

Former Republican lawmaker Tom Casperson, 61, passed away on Sunday, Nov. 29, 2020 after a two-year battle with Stage 4 lung cancer. Casperson, from Escanaba, is remembered by friends and colleagues as a champion of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. He served in the House from 2003-2008, and in the Senate from 2011-2018, often working for the priorities of his constituents, and taking on the state's environmental regulatory agency in support of businesses. He was also known for turning from party lines if necessary and casting the deciding Senate vote in 2013 that opened the door for Medicaid expansion in Michigan.

Casperson graduated from high school in 1977, and went on to work in the family business, Casperson and Son Trucking, for more than 25 years, eventually taking over. Casperson is also well known for his 2002 election upset where he ran for an open seat in the 108th District in the Bay de Noc region, which until then had been a Democratic stronghold. Casperson beat then-Menominee Mayor Laurie Stupak, who was the wife of then-U.S. Rep. Bart Stupak.

Casperson is survived by his wife, Diane, and their four children.

Hammersmith to lead Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission

The Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission has chosen Suann Hammersmith as its executive director for its inaugural year. Hammersmith has served as the president of Better Philanthropy LLC and the Lenawee Community Foundation.

Governor's Staff Changes

Gov. Whitmer announced several staff changes including promoting Tiffany Brown from press secretary to communications director, a position formerly held by Zack Pohl, who has been promoted to chief of staff. Whitmer also announced that Kory Hall has been hired as director of community affairs. Staff member Dion Williams' role has also been expanded to director of faith-based and urban affairs.

Calendar of Important Events

Dec. 8 Sen. Rick Outman (R-Six Lakes) Fundraiser
Location: 8 a.m., Karoub Associates, 121 West Allegan St., Lansing

Dec. 10 Sen. Sean McCann (D-Kalamazoo) Reception
Location: 8:30 a.m., Michigan Beer & Wine Wholesalers, 332 Townsend St., Lansing