

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF AUGUST 5, 2019

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L. BROOKS PATTERSON DIES AT 80

Oakland County executive L. Brooks Patterson, 80, died last week from pancreatic cancer, heralding the end of a political era in the county. Patterson served 26 years as executive and was in the middle of his seventh term.

The politically-charged process to replace Patterson is already underway.

By law, the Oakland County commissioners have 30 days to appoint an interim successor to serve out Patterson's term through 2020. If they do not appoint someone, a special election will be held to fill the remainder of Patterson's term. Chief Deputy County Executive Gerald Poisson, who was the acting executive, will hold the position until a decision is made or the special election next spring.

Two Democrats--county Treasurer Andy Meisner and county board Chairman Dave Woodward-- announced they were running for the seat before Patterson announced he had cancer.

Woodward, after calling a special meeting to discuss a possible appointment on Thursday of this week, resigned his commission seat on Wednesday. State law prohibits a current commission member from being appointed, and Woodward reportedly hopes to get the appointment himself.

Following Woodward's resignation, acting board chair Marcia Gershenson, (D-Bloomfield Twp.), set a meeting for the morning of Patterson's funeral to consider the new appointment. The meeting date was changed to Friday, Aug. 16, after backlash from Patterson's family. The board will consider an appointment following a five-day public application process and committee review of applications to finish out Patterson's term which expires Dec. 31, 2020. Woodward has said he will be submitting an application to become county executive.

Oakland County Treasurer Andy Meisner slammed the board's move to quickly appoint a new executive, calling for an "open and transparent process" to fill the vacancy, and said he will continue working to seek the nomination in 2020.

If the commission doesn't agree on a replacement, then the special election would be held with a primary during the March 20 presidential primary next year, and a general election in May.

CARO MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITAL TO STAY OPEN

Officials from the Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that the 84-bed Caro mental health hospital will remain open, but it will not undergo an expansion.

Plans were in place after legislation to build a new 200-bed hospital in Caro was passed in 2017, with a groundbreaking last fall. After taking office, however, Governor Gretchen Whitmer stopped construction work on the new hospital and there was talk that the facility should be closed.

Opponents say that keeping the hospital open but not expanding it will not help those who are on a waiting list for hospitalization. The hospital, which is the largest employer in Tuscola County, will maintain its staffing levels.

ISSUES REMAIN AS BUDGET DEADLINE DRAWS NEAR

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer told reporters this week that getting a budget deal done before the Sept. 30 is one of her top priorities, but she will refuse to sign any budget that doesn't appropriate funding toward rebuilding Michigan's infrastructure.

The state's fiscal year ends on Sept. 30. In the recent past, the budget deals have been finalized before the summer recess began.

"As we get closer to the end of this fiscal year, it will be weeks after weeks after weeks like this where they haven't been in session to do their job. That will be to blame if we get close to that end of the calendar year. I'm going to do everything I can in my power to avoid that," Whitmer said earlier this week before an event at Zeeland Farm Services.

Both the Republican-led House and Senate have sent budget proposals to Whitmer in response to her proposed 45-cent fuel tax, with the House wanting to move sales tax revenue on fuel to roads spending, and the Senate version moving more general fund money to fixing roads.

Whitmer said at the event that she will do what she can to avoid a government shutdown, which would be "bad for everyone."

CIVIL RIGHTS DIRECTOR IN HOT WATER FOR COMMENTS

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said she has serious concerns about Civil Rights Director Agustin Arbulu, while House Minority Leader Christine Greig calls for Arbulu's resignation after his comments regarding a woman to a male colleague within the department came to light.

Arbulu has acknowledged he made comments regarding a woman's appearance. The comments were exposed after an anonymous email was sent to media outlets saying that the commission held a closed session and reprimanded Arbulu. The Commission released the story only after the email on August 1. The Commission has said it is committed to keeping Arubulu as director.

MM&A Briefs

Senate to Return One Week Early

The Michigan Senate announced it will return a week early from summer recess, the week of Aug. 26, to begin voting on legislation, with a focus on "completion of the budget and passage of a long-term funding plan for roads," according to a spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake).

Former MSU Dean Strampel to serve 1-year sentence

Michigan State University's former Dean of the College of Osteopathic Medicine, William Strampel, was sentenced this week to serve one year in the Ingham County Jail for misconduct in office and willful neglect of duty in the sexual assault case of Larry Nassar. Strampel was Nassar's former boss, and reinstated Nassar in his position at the university in 2014 after sexual abuse complaints against the physician.

Calendar of Important Events

- August 12 Senate Republican Campaign Committee**
Location: 6:30 p.m., Bay Harbor Golf Club, Bay Harbor
- August 15 House Democratic Caucus Fundraiser**
Location: 5:30 p.m., 1651 North West Torch Lake Drive, Kewadin
- August 16 Rep. John Reilly (R-Oakland Twp.) Fundraiser**
Location: 6 p.m., 2940 West Buell Road, Oakland Twp.
- August 18 Rep. Matt Koleszar (D-Plymouth) Fundraiser**
Location: 2 p.m., Millennium Park, 45769 Six Mile Road, Northville
- August 19 Rep. Terry Sabo (D-Muskegon) Fundraiser**
Location: 7 p.m., Aquastar Cruises, 500 Mart St., Muskegon
- August 22 Rep. Lynn Afendoulis (R-Grand Rapids Twp.) Congressional Fundraiser**
Location: 5 p.m., 2633 Middleboro Lane NE, Grand Rapids