

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

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GOVERNOR WHITMER TAKES LEGISLATURE TO TASK – PROMISES TO FIX ROADS - *Encourages Leadership to Find Long Term Solutions*

Governor Gretchen Whitmer gave her second State of the State Address in record time, taking just over 35 minutes to discuss her 2020 plans for roads, education, jobs and health care.

Keeping with her campaign promise to “Fix the Damn Roads,” Whitmer’s guest of honor was 13-year old Monty Scott from Muskegon Heights who took the problem of potholes on his street into his own hands by using dirt and a shovel to fill them.

“We the adults in charge should do everything we can to build a better future for them,” she said.

This story tied into one of Whitmer’s main plans for 2020 – an executive action to issue state road bonds.

“Let’s take a cue from Monty and dig right in,” she said. “When it comes to tackling Michigan’s problems, I have a plan A and a Plan B.”

After failing to get her Plan A passed in 2019 – a proposal to raise the fuel tax by 45 cents that would generate \$2.5 billion a year for roads, Whitmer plans to move on to plan B in 2020 – an executive action to sell state road bonds.

“Tomorrow I will ask the State Transportation Commission to issue state road bonds so we can start fixing the roads now. My plan is finance without an increase at the gas pump.”

Selling the bonds will give Whitmer the money she needs to fix the roads, and allow her to take credit for it. Bonding allows the state to get money but pay it off with interest over time.

Whitmer said the plan will save money by allowing the state to take advantage of today’s low interest rates but would only address problems with the State trunklines and important freeways.

“These new projects will only address the worst of our most highly traveled state roads,” she said. “We still need the legislature to come up with a real, long-term solution to fix the roads. So next time you’re driving down your local street and hit a pothole or see a bridge closed, call up the leadership in this building and encourage them to act.”

Whitmer said her plan allows the state to add and expand 122 major new projects, and double the amount of funds available to fix roads over the next five years.

Along with roads, Whitmer touched on her plans to focus on education in the state.

Whitmer, who has been critical of the law requiring students to meet reading requirements by 3rd grade or risk being held back, talked about plans to help families get the resources and support they need to meet the requirement.

She also talked about making pre-K universal for areas with low test scores and high poverty, and about plans to provide better access to childcare for parents who are in school or working fulltime.

In addition to tripling the number of literacy coaches in the state, she plans to work on having literacy coaches train the educators better. She said there would be more details about the program when she presents her budget in February.

Whitmer's additional education initiatives for 2020 include:

- Continuing work on an equitable funding formula
- Continuing the Michigan Reconnect Grant Program
- Launching the Governor's FAFSA challenge to encourage high schoolers in Michigan to complete the FAFSA forms and make sure there are no federal financial aid funds for secondary education left unused.

Other plans for 2020 include protecting the workforce by directing the Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity to expand the right to overtime pay to tens of thousands of Michigan workers. Currently, the law only requires workers making \$35,000 a year or less to have overtime rights.

Whitmer also talked about healthcare, and a Democratic plan to codifying the provisions of the federal Affordable Care Act to protect health care access for people with pre-existing conditions, and prevent insurance companies from discrimination.

Along with her plans for the future, Whitmer gave highlights of her first year in office including:

- Passing historic bipartisan No-Fault Insurance reforms to bring down the cost of car insurance. *"We preserved quality coverage options, strengthened consumer protections, and most importantly insured an average rate reduction for the next 8 years."*
- Raised the age for juvenile offenders from 17 to 18
- Launched redistricting efforts with the Secretary of State
- Held companies accountable that profited from opioids and polluted water with PFAS
- Created a bipartisan taskforce focused on county jails
- Created the Environmental Justice Advisory Council

Whitmer also addressed an “uptick in hateful and harmful language,” saying that there is no place for misogyny in the workplace or threats of violence online.

“Let’s debate. Let’s disagree. But then let’s all live up to our responsibility to stand up to hate and harassment. Remember, our children are watching. Diversity is our strength, doing is our strength,” she said.

Returning to her theme that impatience is a virtue when it comes to getting things done, Whitmer ended her address with a reference back to the example set by her young guest Monty.

“Let’s get to work. Let’s move some dirt.”