

# CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF FEBRUARY 15, 2021

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## **WHITMER RESPONDS TO COMPLAINTS FROM HACKEL AND EVANS ON STATE'S VACCINE DISTRIBUTION**

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer rejected recent criticisms from Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel and Wayne County Executive Warren Evans who said their counties are receiving fewer COVID-19 vaccines per person than other parts of the state this week.

Whitmer, along with Michigan's chief medical executive and chief deputy for health, Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, said that the problem is the total number of vaccines available, and not the number in each county.

Khaldun said the state determined how many vaccines to send to each county by analyzing the number of people eligible for the vaccine in each county, with the northern Lower Peninsula having a much larger percentage of residents age 65 and older than other counties in the southern Lower Peninsula, including Southeast Michigan where Wayne county reportedly has the eighth-lowest percentages of seniors making up their population among the state's 83 counties.

A chart published by the Senate Fiscal Agency, using Department of Health and Human Services data, showed that as of Sunday the northern Lower Peninsula region was seeing a seven-day average of 299 people per 100,000 receiving the first dose of the vaccine compared to 187 in the region encompassing Monroe, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties.

"What we have seen I think is that there just simply are not enough vaccines to meet demand right now. Every state in the nation has that story, and every local municipality is confronting that as well," Whitmer said.

Hackel had previously criticized the Whitmer administration saying that it was leaving senior citizens behind and setting up county health departments for failure.

"We have a limited amount of doses. You would think the simplest solution would be to focus on our seniors," Hackel said. "When more doses come in, then we can start opening up to other categories, but they're being left behind and that's the biggest concern I have right now."

## **NO FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS ON COVID SUPPLEMENTAL**

Officials are reporting that no formal negotiations have taken place regarding the COVID-19 Budget Supplemental, or Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's plan to appropriate federal COVID-19 aid.

Acknowledging that the Senate and House have released their own COVID spending supplemental versions, Whitmer continues to call for the Legislature to pass her plan, saying that it is time "that we figuratively get in the room and negotiate the details and get it done."

State Budget Office spokesperson Kurt Weiss said there have been "no formal discussions" or attempts to come to an agreement on the supplemental.

Whitmer released her COVID Recovery Plan on Jan. 19, with the House releasing its plan on Jan. 27, and the Senate releasing its version Feb. 9. Both the House and Senate plans spend billions less than Witmer's proposal.

### **PRESIDENT BIDEN TO VISIT PFIZER PLANT IN PORTAGE TODAY**

President Joe Biden is scheduled to visit Pfizer Inc.'s largest manufacturing plant in Portage, Mich. Friday afternoon and tour its COVID-19 vaccine production lines.

Gov. Whitmer and U.S. Sen Gary Peters are expected to meet with President Biden also on Friday. Biden is expected to discuss an initiative with Pfizer executives that would use the Defense Production Act to help Pfizer continue to ramp up production by getting additional equipment more quickly.

The tour comes the same day White House officials announced that severe winter weather caused a backlog of 6 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, which is about 3 days of delayed shipping.

### **REPUBLICAN LEGISLATORS CALL ON GOVERNOR TO EASE RESTAURANT RESTRICTIONS**

Republican lawmakers from both the Senate and House are calling on Gov. Whitmer to adjust and increase capacity limits for indoor dining, after restaurant owners testified at a House Oversight Committee hearing earlier this week.

One of the toughest hit industries during the pandemic, restaurants and bars closed to indoor dine-in service from mid-March to mid-June, and again from Nov. 18 through Jan. 31. After the latest round of openings, restaurants and bars are limited to 25 percent capacity and a 10 p.m. curfew, through March 29, a date that is much longer than the original Feb. 21 expiration date announced in a Jan. 22 order. The limits were extended through a new order issued Feb. 4 regarding the re-instatement of contact sports.

### **SHIRKEY SPOKESPERSON LEAVES FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE**

Amber McCann, deputy chief of staff and press secretary for Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake), left Shirkey's office this week to become a special projects director for Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel. McCann will be reporting to Nessel's Communications Director, Kelly Rossman-McKinney.

McCann was the primary spokesperson for the past three Republican Senate majority leaders. In addition, Nessel has been among Shirkey's most vocal critics, and Shirkey has voiced opinions about impeaching Nessel.

McCann is thought to have left following Shirkey's recent inflammatory public statements about the 2020 election, the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, and Gov. Whitmer. McCann has declined comment.

## **MM&A Briefs**

### **Chatfield to Lead Southwest Michigan First**

Former Speaker of the House Lee Chatfield, (R-Levering), was chosen as the new CEO for Southwest Michigan First, an economic development organization in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Chatfield, originally from Northern Michigan, served three terms in the house after being elected in 2014. Before being elected, he was an athletic director, teacher and coach at Northern Michigan Christian Academy in Burt Lake.

### **Dr. Joneigh Khaldun Appointed to Biden Pandemic Task Force**

Michigan's chief medical executive and chief deputy for health with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Joneigh Khaldun, was recently appointed to the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force, which was created by President Joe Biden by executive order in January. The taskforce is addressing COVID-19 related health and social inequities. Khaldun will be one of 12 non-federal members on the task force.

### **Former Sen. Knezek Joins Department of Health and Human Services**

Former Sen. David Knezek recently became the chief deputy director for administration for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services after leaving the Department of Attorney General, where he had been since losing his primary for a second Senate term in 2014.

## **Calendar of Important Events**

### **Feb. 22 Sen. Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) Fundraiser**

Location: 4 p.m., Zoom

### **Feb. 23 Rep. Thomas Albert (R-Lowell) PAC Fundraiser**

Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

### **Rep. Bryan Posthumus (R-Oakfield Twp.) Fundraiser**

Location: 12 p.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

### **Rep. Brad Paquette (R-Niles) Fundraiser**

Location: 5 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

### **Feb. 24 Sen. Kevin Daley (R-Lum) Fundraiser**

Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing

### **Sen. Roger Victory (R-Georgetown Twp.) PAC Fundraiser**

Location: 8 a.m., Lambert & Company, 114 West Allegan St., Lansing

- Feb. 24     Rep. Shri Thanedar (D-Detroit) Fundraiser**  
Location: 12 p.m., Midwest Strategy Group, 101 South Washington Sq.
- Sen. Ken Horn (R-Frankenmuth) Fundraiser**  
Location: 3:30 p.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Alex Garza (D-Taylor) Fundraiser**  
Location: 4:30 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing
- Sen. Curtis Hertel Jr. (D-East Lansing) Fundraiser**  
Location: 4:30 p.m., event location with RSVP
- Feb. 25     Rep. Mary Whiteford (R-Casco Twp.) PAC Fundraiser**  
Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Feb. 26     Rep. Julie Alexander (R-Hanover) PAC Fundraiser**  
Location: 5 p.m., Lead Bunker, 3791 Ann Arbor Road, Jackson
- March 2     Rep. Angela Witwer (D-Delta Twp.) Fundraiser**  
Location: 11:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- March 3     Rep. Greg Markkanen (R-Hancock) Fundraiser**  
Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- March 4     Rep. Jack O'Malley (R-Lake Ann) Fundraiser**  
Location: 7:30 a.m. Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Sen. Aric Nesbitt (R-Lawton) PAC Fundraiser**  
Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers, Lansing