

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF MARCH 1, 2021

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REPUBLICAN-LED LEGISLATURE PASSES COVID-19 SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION BILLS

Several Tied to Restricting Whitmer Administration's Pandemic Powers

The volley between Republican Legislative leaders and Governor Gretchen Whitmer's administration regarding COVID-19 supplemental appropriation plans for coronavirus relief continued this week, with the Legislature approving a \$4.2 billion plan, without a deal with Whitmer.

The plan, which includes ways to limit the administration's pandemic-related powers, also does not allocate all federal aid immediately, as Whitmer had proposed.

It is assumed Whitmer will pick and choose which bills to sign from the passed package, blocking the bills which limit her powers, but potentially passing the \$3 billion in federal and state spending that does not have ties to her administration's powers.

Bills contingent on limiting Whitmer's pandemic powers include:

- House Bill HB 4047, approved 85-25, includes a provision that appropriates \$347 million in funds for COVID-19 testing—only if Gov. Whitmer also signs SB 1, which requires legislative approval to lengthen epidemic orders issued by the Department of Health and Human Services beyond 28 days.
- House Bill 4048, passed 77-33 by the House on Wednesday, appropriates over \$800 million in federal school funding—contingent on Gov. Whitmer signing HB 4049, which moves the authority to close schools for in-person instruction or prohibit sports from the state health department to the local level.

Whitmer's original proposal included \$5.6 billion in federal and state spending for coronavirus relief.

The recently passed Legislative package includes \$4.2 billion total to fund COVID-19 testing, vaccine distribution, school aid, emergency rental assistance, a 15 percent boost in food assistance benefits, and extend and increase direct care worker payments. The legislation also includes using state money to provide \$427 million in business relief, mostly through grants to cover some or all of business property taxes and \$150 million deposited from the general fund into the unemployment fund.

Democrats and Gov. Whitmer's administration are encouraged that the bills release \$2 billion more than what was first passed in the House, but still want to see all federal COVID-19 funding released.

SENATE HOLDS CONFIRMATION HEARINGS FOR DHHS DIRECTOR HERTEL, QUESTIONS GORDON'S SEPARATION AGREEMENT

A Senate panel holding the confirmation hearings for Department of Health and Human Services Director Elizabeth Hertel has questioned Hertel on the separation agreement between Governor Gretchen Whitmer and former Department of Health and Human Services Director Robert Gordon after it was recently revealed that Gordon was paid nine months of salary and benefits equivalent to \$155,000 in exchange for him signing a confidentiality agreement when he resigned in January.

Critics of Whitmer claim that the move was a complete turn-around from her push for transparency during her campaign and that she has been silent about the payout, answering few questions about the arrangement.

Former Deputy Director Sarah Esty also left as part of a separation agreement, including going on paid administrative leave from Jan. 31- Feb. 26, 2021, and her resignation effective Feb. 26. Esty also agreed not to sue the state, but there was not a non-disclosure part to the agreement.

Senate Republicans are now calling to reject Whitmer's appointment of Elizabeth Hertel to head the Department of Health and Human Resources. Hertel was appointed on January 22, and the Senate has until March 23 to reject or let the appointment stand.

Hertel appeared before the Senate Advice and Consent Committee this week and last as part of her confirmation hearing. She said she had no involvement in creating the agreement between Gov. Whitmer's administration and Gordon.

DHHS LOOSENS COVID RESTRICTIONS ON GATHERINGS

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services relaxed several COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions in the state this week, citing a recent low of 818 new COVID-19 cases on Feb. 21, with deaths and the number of people hospitalized continuing to decline. The numbers have shown a slight increase since Feb. 21 with the number of newly confirmed cases up to 1,071 on March 2.

DHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel announced that the new order would allow for more people to gather in social settings, greater capacity for Michigan's restaurants, bars and retail stores, and larger groups allowed in entertainment venues. The order, which will run through April 19, includes relaxed restrictions on visitors to nursing homes along with these changes:

- Up to 15 people from three different households can be together for residential gatherings. Outdoor gatherings at residential locations can now have up to 50 people with no limit on households involved, up from 25 among three households;
- Non-residential venues can have up to 25 people at indoor gatherings. This will open up city councils, school boards, township boards and county boards to meet in person.
- Outdoor non-residential venues can have gatherings up to 300 people;

- Seating for dine-in service can be at 50 percent capacity for restaurants and bars, however, the previous cap of 100 people total from the February 4 order remains in place. The curfew on dine-in service is now 11 p.m.
- Retailers, libraries and museums can operate at 50 percent of capacity
- Exercise facilities can operate at 30 percent of capacity
- Indoor pools can operate at 30 percent, and outdoor pools at 50 percent
- Ice and roller rinks can have 10 persons per 1,000 square feet
- Indoor sports stadiums with capacity under 10,000 can have 375 patrons, stadiums with more than 10,000 can have 750. Outdoor entertainment and recreation facilities can have up to 1,000 people.

Gov. Whitmer also announced the formation of a new workgroup on reopening offices for in-person work.

Organizations and politicians gave mixed reviews to the announcement.

WHITMER OPENS COVID-19 VACCINES TO 50 AND OLDER

Gov. Whitmer announced this week that Michigan residents 50 and older will soon be able to receive COVID-19 vaccines. Starting March 8, people who are 50 and older with medical conditions or disabilities and caregiver family members and guardians who care for children with special health care needs, can receive the vaccine with all residents 50 and older eligible to receive the vaccine beginning March 22.

The expansion is a result of more than 40 percent of those 65 and older in the state being vaccinated, and the announcement of President Joe Biden that there will be enough vaccines for all adults in the U.S. who want to receive one, by the end of May.

"The more people we can get the safe and effective vaccine, the faster we can return to a sense of normalcy. I urge all eligible Michiganders to get one of the three COVID-19 vaccines to protect you, your family and your community. We've already administered over 2.3 million doses to Michiganders of all races and backgrounds, and yesterday's announcement that our national supply will be enough to protect all Americans by the end of May is incredible news," Whitmer said in a statement.

MM&A Briefs

U.S. Senate Confirms Granholm as New Energy Secretary

Former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm became the new secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Feb. 25. Past Michigan residents who served as Cabinet members include Betsy DeVos who served as secretary of the U.S. Department of Education for former President Donald Trump, former U.S. Sen. Spencer Abraham was Energy secretary to former President George W. Bush, and Governor George Romney who served as the secretary of Housing and Urban Development under then-President Richard Nixon.

Granholm tweeted her thanks to the Senate, along with writing, "I'm obsessed with creating good-paying clean energy jobs in all corners of America in service of addressing our climate crisis. I'm impatient for results. Now let's get to work!"

Calendar of Important Events

March 8 Sen. Paul Wojno (D-Warren) Fundraiser

Location: 12 p.m., Virtual

March 9 Sen. Jim Runestad (R-White Lake) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates Lansing

Rep. Julie Rogers (D-Kalamazoo) Fundraiser

Location: 8 a.m., Virtual

Rep. Ryan Berman (R-Commerce Twp.) Fundraiser

Location: 11:30 a.m. Midwest Strategy Group, Lansing

March 10 Rep. Graham Filler (R-DeWitt) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

Sen. Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan) PAC Fundraiser

Location: 8 a.m., Capitol House, 322 West Ottawa St., Second Floor, Lansing

Rep. Cara Clemente (D-Lincoln Park) Fundraiser

Location: 9:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing

Rep. Andrea Schroeder (R-Independence Twp.) Fundraiser

Location: 11:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

Rep. John Damoose (R-Harbor Springs) Fundraiser

Location: 4 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing

March 11 Rep. Sarah Lightner (R-Springport) Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing, 7:30 a.m.

Rep. Sue Allor (R-Wolverine) PAC Fundraiser

Location: 7:30 a.m., Marketing Resource Group, Lansing

Rep. Padma Kuppa (D-Troy) Pi Day Fundraiser

Location: 10:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing

March 15 Sen. Sean McCann (D-Kalamazoo) Fundraiser

Location: 4 p.m., Virtual

- March 16** **Rep. Robert Bezotte (R-Howell) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m. Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Helena Scott (D-Detroit) Fundraiser**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Sen. Curt VanderWall (R-Ludington) PAC Fundraiser**
Location: 4:30 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- March 17** **Rep. Bronna Kahle (R-Adrian) PAC Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m. Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Ben Frederick (R-Owosso) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Marketing Resource Group, Lansing
- Sen. Lana Theis (R-Brighton) Fundraiser**
Location: 8 a.m., Lambert, 114 West Allegan St., Lansing, 8 a.m.
- Sen. Jim Ananich (D-Flint) PAC Fundraiser**
Location: 8:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Sen. Wayne Schmidt (R-Traverse City) PAC Fundraiser**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Tim Sneller (D-Burton) Fundraiser**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Rep. Pat Outman (R-Six Lakes) Fundraiser**
Location: 4:30 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- March 18** **Rep. Timmy Beson (R-Bay City) Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Roger Hauck (R-Mt. Pleasant) Fundraiser**
Location: 8 a.m. Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Rep. John Cherry (D-Flint) Fundraiser**
Location: 10:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing