

CAPITOL NEWS UPDATE

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 6, 2021



McAlvey Merchant
& ASSOCIATES

BUDGET PROCESS GOING WELL, MORE DEBATE TO COME

Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) was optimistic about the budget this Thursday, saying that he believes the legislature should be voting within two weeks.

Shirkey also said that although the process has been going well, the difficult issues are ahead including the higher education budget that is expected to be more contentious.

"Higher ed is going to be one of the ones that we're going to have to wrestle with a little bit. But ... I like the trajectory. I like the engagement of the House, the Senate and the Executive Office. I'm very optimistic that we're going to be able to start putting language together," Shirkey said.

Shirkey also said the allocation of federal COVID-19 relief funds would happen after the Fiscal Year '22 budget is complete.

The Legislature passed a K-12 budget in June with record funding, but the remaining budgets are up for negotiation until the deadline which is midnight on Sept. 30, 2021.

DHHS ISSUES COVID GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS

The Department of Health and Human Services issued new guidance on Wednesday, allowing masked, fully vaccinated students to stay in school and not quarantine if they have been exposed to a COVID-positive student.

The guidance, which is not a rule and cannot be enforced by the DHHS if schools choose to ignore the suggestions, provides for very specific examples of when a student can and cannot attend schools and what criteria needs to be met for in-person learning to continue.

"When layered prevention strategies such as masking, distancing, testing, isolation and quarantine are applied consistently, school-associated transmission of COVID-19 is significantly reduced – which keeps kids in the classroom so they can learn," DHHS Director Elizabeth Hertel said in a statement. "However, if someone is exposed to COVID at schools, it's important for them to follow quarantine guidance to prevent spread to other children."

Many school districts are already operating under similar levels of guidance which they have worked out with their county health department. Examples of the DHHS guidance include:

- If a fully vaccinated student is exposed, regardless of if they wore a mask, the exposed student "can remain in school if they wear a mask and monitor symptoms for 14 days after their exposure." A student should test for COVID three to five days after their last exposure. If the student at that point tests positive, then they should isolate and follow directions from their local health department under the guidance.
- If all students in the situation are masked and the students stay within three to six feet away from the infected student, the exposed kids only need to monitor symptoms for 14 days.
- If all parties are masked, but the students were less than three feet away, the exposed students should either take a daily COVID test for a week and monitor symptoms for 14 days or stay home for seven days. They can return to school in a week with a negative COVID test, or in 10 days without any test.
- In instances when everyone is unmasked, the exposed student should stay home for a week. They can return to school after seven days with a negative COVID test, or in 10 days without a test.
- All COVID-positive students should quarantine, even if they don't have symptoms.

Critics question if the testing guidance portion is reasonable, including who will be responsible for the daily testing if necessary.

HOUSE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CRITICAL OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AGENCY

Republicans in the House Oversight Committee questioned Acting Unemployment Insurance Agency Director Liza Estlund Olson this week, asking her to address issues including slow payment of benefits, and a notification sent to nearly 700,000 residents saying they may need to repay their Pandemic Unemployment Assistance they received in the past 18 months.

In addition to defending the agency's operations and asking for more funding for employees and to meet claimant needs, Olson said the agency is looking at different unemployment benefits and employer tax systems in order to replace the system the agency has used since 2012.

Olson did address the thousands of recertification notices sent to individuals who had certified for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) on reasons that the federal government later determined to be invalid. Some individuals received notices from the UIA saying they could owe more than \$20,000 for collecting benefits when they should not have. Olson assured the committee that these payments would not come at the expense of claimants, saying that if a dollar amount is still showing on a person's unemployment account, then they have received benefits but later been determined not eligible. She said individuals can submit a hardship waiver to the UIA, and that no waivers sought for the requalification process have been denied.

Committee chair Rep. Steve Johnson, (R-Wayland), said after the hearing that he does not believe the agency needs additional funding from the Legislature.

"We think they just need better leadership over there. ... It's not a money issue – that's what they keep falling back on – at the end of the day, it's a leadership issue," Johnson said.

In addition to the hearing, Speaker of the House Jason Wentworth had previously called on Gov. Gretchen Whitmer to remove Olson from her position, citing failure to open its offices for in-person appointments during the pandemic, a lack of transparency about processes and being slow to issue payments.

According to Olson, the state unemployment agency paid out \$38 billion dollars to 2.4 million Michigan workers since the beginning of the pandemic. It has processed more than 5.3 million claims, 26 times the normal workload and has been getting 23,000 calls a week since April.

MM&A BRIEFS

CRAIG TO LAUNCH GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGN NEXT WEEK

Republican and former Detroit Police Chief James Craig said he plans to officially launch his campaign for governor on Belle Isle in Detroit at 10 a.m. Tuesday, followed by events in Flint and Grand Rapids.

Craig formed an “exploratory committee” in July. He is running in part on how his department handled the Detroit protests following the 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, according to the Detroit Free Press.

SINGH, ANTHONY TO FACE OFF FOR STATE SENATE

Democrat and former state House Minority Leader Sam Singh could be facing off against current state Rep. Sarah Anthony (D-Lansing) in 2022 for the 23rd Senate district seat, one that could change in the redistricting process.

Anthony announced her campaign this week, prioritizing abortion rights, affordable higher education and helping Michiganders recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Singh has said he is entering the race to focus on protecting voting rights and access to quality education.

Anthony, who has represented the 68th state House district since 2019, is a former Ingham County commissioner. Singh served in the state House from 2013 to 2019 and was a former mayor of East Lansing.

CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

- Sept. 13 Sen. Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) Compete Michigan PAC 2**
Location: 10 a.m., Country Club of Jackson, 3135 Horton Road, Jackson
- House Democratic Caucus - Road to Majority Event**
Location: 6 p.m., Firebird Tavern - 419 Monroe St., Detroit
(Special Guest, Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist)
- Sept. 14 Rep. Thomas Albert (R-Lowell) Fundraiser**
Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Rep. Matt Hall (R-Emmett Twp.) Fundraiser**
Location: 8 a.m., Michigan Realtors - 720 North Washington Ave., Lansing
- Rep. Beth Griffin (R-Mattawan) Reception**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Sen. Aric Nesbitt (R-Lawton) Majority Fund**
Location: 4 p.m., Michigan Association of Realtors, 720 N. Washington Ave., Lansing
- Sept. 15 Sen. Roger Victory (R-Georgetown Twp.) OC Values Fund**
Location: 8 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Sen. Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia) for State Senate**
Location: 8:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Rep. Angela Witwer (D-Delta Twp.) Fall Luncheon Capitol Fundraiser**
Location: 12 p.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Sept. 16 Rep. David Martin (R-Davison) Summer BBQ**
Location: 6 p.m., The Leonard Residence - 14048 Nichols Road, Montrose
- Sept. 17 Rep. Terry Sabo (D-Muskegon) CTE**
Location: 12 p.m., Lincoln Golf Club - 4907 Whitehall Road, Muskegon
- Friends of Sen. Jon Bumstead (R-Newaygo)**
Location: 6 p.m., Yoberosa - 2100 Groesbeck Avenue, Hesperia
- Friends of Rep. Ranjeev Puri (D-Canton)**
Location: 6:30 p.m., Preservation Park - 500 Ridge Road North, Canton

- Sept. 18 Sen. Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) Reception**
Location: 1:30 p.m., RSVP for Address
- Sept. 21 Rep. Cara Clemente's (D-Lincoln Park) Fall Lunch Reception**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Capital Area Veterans Host Afghan Fundraiser**
Location: 5 p.m., The Nelson Gallery, 113 S. Washington Sq., Lansing
- Sept. 22 Rep. Doug Wozniak (R-Shelby Twp.) for Senate Fundraiser**
Location: 7:30 a.m., Karoub Associates, Lansing
- Rep. Lori Stone (D-Warren) "Back to School" Fundraiser**
Location: 11:30 a.m., Michigan Beer and Wine Wholesalers Association, Lansing
- Sen. Mike Shirkey (R-Clarklake) Compete Michigan PAC 3**
Location: 5 p.m., Yankee Rebel Tavern, 1493 Astor St., Mackinac Island
- Sept. 23 Sen. Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan) - CTE**
Location: 9 a.m., Arnold Freight Dock, 7235 Main St., Mackinac Island