

FAREWELL TO THE 98th LEGISLATURE

Lawmakers left town last week ending the lame duck session and bringing to a close the 98th Michigan Legislature.

Several pieces of legislation are on their way to Governor Rick Snyder's desk for his signature or potential veto. Others were left to die and be reintroduced next year.

ENERGY REFORMS MAKE THE CUT

An 11th hour compromise on legislation (SBs 437 and 438) designed to shore up Michigan's electricity market amid declining in-state production gained final approval after two years in the making.

Governor Snyder will sign the bills as he was directly involved in the final deal along with the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce.

What is included in the compromise?

The percentage of electricity customers being served by choice marketers could roll backward if the percentage of customers falls below the current 10 percent cap, customers who leave their choice provider to commit to DTE, Consumers Energy or the other incumbent utility to stay for six years, AES companies avoid paying a four-year fee to cover costs of an incumbent utility's new power plant under certain conditions, gives customers a chance at seeing rate relief in times of lower than expected energy needs, and raises the amount of energy Michigan would need to generate from renewable sources from 10 to 15 percent by 2022.

UI INSURANCE FUND SURPLUS TO HELP BALANCE STATE BUDGET

Under legislation (SB 1008) headed to the Governor's desk, \$10 million in unemployment insurance funds would be transferred to the General Fund to help balance the state budget. Governor Rick Snyder is expected to sign the bill because the administration signed off on the transfer as part of the overall budget plan for 2017.

NURSES TO PRESCRIBE DRUGS?

Governor Rick Snyder will have to decide whether to sign into law legislation that would allow state-regulated nurses with advanced degrees, known as advance practice registered nurses (APRNs), to prescribe drugs and controlled substances.

GAS STATIONS CAN SELL BEER

Legislation (SB 929) to allow gas stations to sell beer and wine along with fuel has been forwarded to the Governor. It is a companion bill to recently passed House Bill 4895 that allows big-box stores to sell beer and wine from gas stations they operate close to their property.

STEP ON THE GAS

If Governor Rick Snyder agrees, speed limits on nearly 1,500 miles of Michigan's rural highways could see a 5 to 10 mph increase. The legislation would only allow speed limit increases on highways where the Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Michigan State Police conduct traffic safety and engineering studies to determine at least 85 percent of motorists are already driving at the proposed increased speeds.

DRONES DROP ON GOVERNOR'S DESK

Drones, or Unmanned Aerial Systems, have been given a regulatory home. Under the legislation (SB 992), a 27-person task force would be charged with hashing out further regulations and passing them along to the Legislature.

WHAT LEGISLATION WAS NOT TAKEN UP IN LAME DUCK?

NO FAULT

Fifty-five votes could not be found in the House to pass a compromise deal over a lingering proposal that would cap the number of hours a family member could be paid for caring for a catastrophic car accident injury victim and cap benefits at \$400,000 for those without a Michigan auto insurance policy.

VOTER ID

Legislation (HBs 6066 thru 6068) giving voters showing up on Election Day without an ID card seven days to present one to a local clerk in order for their vote to count died in the Senate.

FOIA

The 10-bill package of legislation (HBs 5469 thru 5478) that would open up legislative offices and the Governor's office to open record laws was taken off the table in the Senate.

GOVERNOR'S PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

Among the Governor's top priorities, the issue stalled in the House out of concern that it would clear the way for toll roads.

TIF

Legislation that would allow "transformational projects" to recapture up to \$50 million in state tax money in its first year of existence died in the Local Government Committee. The measure was being pushed by Detroit developer Dan Gilbert.

PENSIONS/OPEB

Lawmakers backed off legislation that would have put all new teachers into a 401(k)-style retirement system plan, effectively closing teachers' pension plan.

A thirteen-bill package to scale back local governments' obligation to pay retiree health benefits also failed to get support.

RAINY DAY MONEY

A proposal to put away 25 percent of any General Fund money left over at fiscal year's end into the Rainy Day Fund.

OIL, GAS PERMIT RESTRUCTURING

With three days of lame duck remaining, House Energy Policy Committee Chair Rep. Aric Nesbitt (R-Lawton) decided not to take up a bill to restructure how the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) issues oil and gas permits and their appeals.

ANTI-PICKETING

Legislation that would make it much more difficult and expensive for people to picket businesses was shelved by Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof (R-West Olive).

LONG-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR WOULD COST BILLIONS

Governor Rick Snyder's-created commission has determined the state needs billions of dollars in long-term infrastructure repairs.

How many billions? The state needs to put up \$4 billion per year for 20 years to close the investment gap of more than \$60 billion in its infrastructure, according to the commission report.

On a forecasted annual basis, there is a \$2.7 billion gap in transportation infrastructure. For water, it is \$1 billion, and another \$70 million for communications.

The 15-member 21st Century Infrastructure Commission's report included several ways to raise the money including real money in the multiple billion dollar category along with smaller amounts in the \$100,000 range. Bonding is another option.

However, there was no discussion by the group about dipping into the state's General Fund to pay for a host of projects.

STATE BUDGET DIRECTOR IS LEAVING

State Budget Director John Roberts has announced he will be leaving for the private sector after the Fiscal Year 2018 budget presentation in February.

House Appropriations Committee Chair Rep. Al Pscholka (R-Stevensville) is being strongly considered to replace Mr. Roberts.

The Governor's office indicates a replacement is expected to be announced before the end of the year.

MEEKHOF SAYS NO

Senate Majority Leader Arlan Meekhof (R-West Olive) has announced he will not seek the Republican nomination for governor in two years.

For months, he had refused to answer the question, "Are you running for governor?"