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STATE OF THE STATE EDITION

WHITMER CALLS 2020 A “YEAR OF HORRIBLES”; SEEKS “COMMON GROUND” IN 2021

In an unusually short 30-minute State of the State address, delivered virtually from her office in downtown Lansing, Governor Gretchen Whitmer captured 2020 as a “year of horrors” that featured a pandemic, a recession, the 500-year flooding near Midland, the racial inequity protests, and the presidential election.

But through all the divisiveness between her administration and the GOP-controlled Legislature over the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Whitmer is seeking “common ground” with Republican lawmakers for ending the COVID-19 pandemic and boosting the economy.

“My mission is to find common ground so we can emerge from this crisis stronger than ever,” Governor Whitmer said.

However, the GOP is looking dubiously at her outstretched hand.

Governor Whitmer announced a “Michigan Back to Work” plan that she said would include “initiatives big and small” to help grow the economy.

Although Governor Whitmer put forth no details, she did reference the Good Jobs for Michigan legislation, a business incentive plan that was formerly state law but has expired. Republicans were quick to take issue, calling it corporate welfare.

Governor Whitmer also said she would reconvene the Return to School Advisory Council to provide guidance on learning recovery programs for students who have had limited online learning for months.

Governor Whitmer called on the Legislature to pass her \$5.6 billion COVID-19 relief plan “immediately.” The plan, which relies on federal government dollars, features money for schools, economic development programs and extension of unemployment benefits.

Republicans are not supportive of the plan. They are calling for \$2 billion less overall (recommending \$3.5 billion) and tying the \$2 billion in education funding to giving local health departments the discretion to close schools and halt athletic seasons. Governor Whitmer also called on the Legislature to make permanent a \$2-per hour wage hike for direct care workers such as those in-home health care or childcare.

Governor Whitmer said she is launching a listening tour across the state called “Fix the Damn Road Ahead” to hear from residents across the state, an apparent reference to the deep political divisions after the election and constant debate over COVID-19.

As Governor Whitmer sought to “seek common ground” on issues dividing her and the GOP-controlled Legislature, she said, “let’s commit to the strong bipartisan action we took last year and focus that same energy to end the pandemic, grow our economy and get our kids back on track.”

That common ground was not apparent earlier Wednesday as the GOP-controlled Senate (without hearings) voted to block 13 of Governor Whitmer’s appointees...an apparent shot across the bow telling her the Legislature is a co-equal branch of government and give it say in discussions about the pandemic.

“It’s easy to look back on this last year and focus on the bad,” Governor Whitmer said. “But we cannot forget actions we took to protect ourselves and our families.”

“The state of our state is resilient.”