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GOVERNOR WHITMER ASKS FOR \$28M IN FEE HIKES

Governor Gretchen Whitmer is seeking a \$28 million increase in state fees for services that state officials say have not been raised in many years. Officials say most of the 140 fees for state services are needed to help pay for the staff who deliver the services.

Among the 140 fees that will see increases are EGLE facilities that generate, transport, store or dispose of hazardous waste, obtaining a traffic crash report from the Michigan State Police, looking up a driving record through the Secretary of State, and relating to operator certification, hazardous waste, land and water resources, and discharges from water ways and storm water systems.

If approved by the Legislature, the fees would likely take effect when the new fiscal year begins October 1st.

ENSURING ADEQUATE PROPANE DISTRIBUTION IS OBJECT OF LATEST EXECUTIVE ORDER

On Saturday, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed an executive order that temporarily suspends restrictions on commercial driver hours to allow the immediate delivery of energy to homes and businesses.

Specifically, it exempts motor carriers and drivers transporting propane and heating oil from compliance with maximum weekly driving and on-duty limit.

The order took effect immediately and will remain in effect through the end of the month.

SPEAKER WENTWORTH TAKES AIM AT LAME DUCK

House Speaker Jason Wentworth (R-Clare) told the House Elections and Ethics Committee that his HJR A would require a two-thirds majority vote for bills to pass in lame duck.

“House Joint Resolution A, along with House Bill 4001, would help restore the public’s trust in government, and that is our top priority, to get Michigan off the list of the least transparent states in the union,” Speaker Wentworth told the committee.

Representative Graham Filler (R-DeWitt) said he supports the idea of working to restore the public’s trust, but has concerns about “a small number of Legislators being able to hold legislation hostage.”

POVERTY TASK FORCE ROLLS OUT 35 POLICY IDEAS

Increasing access to Michigan’s Earned Income Tax Credit and expanding the Great Start Readiness program were just a couple of the 35 recommendations put forth by Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s Task Force on Poverty.

The policy recommendations cover the main areas of benefits, economics, criminal justice, health, safety and housing, and education.

Governor Whitmer included a \$1 million appropriation in her fiscal year 2022 budget recommendations to conduct research and planning to help lead the way towards improving the effectiveness of state benefit programs and address the barriers limiting individuals’ ability to access these programs.

SOS PILOT AUDIT AFFIRMS VOTER ACCURACY

According to Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, an audit of Michigan’s electoral process affirmed the state’s vote-counting machines are accurate and that Joe Biden won the state’s November 3rd presidential election.

In the state’s three largest counties, all of which use a different voting machine vendor, the audit results were also all within one percentage point of the November results, Secretary Benson said.

The Bureau of Elections is compiling a full report of the results, which will be published upon completion.

STATE AND ENBRIDGE TO SEEK DISMISSAL OF EACH OTHER’S LAWSUITS

U.S. District Judge Janet Neff held a pre-motion conference last week, where both sides discussed their separate lawsuits against each other over the Governor’s decision to revoke the 1953 easement agreement allowing the operation of the Line 5 dual pipeline in the Straits of Mackinac.

Both sides told the court that they will file briefs seeking to dismiss the other's lawsuit based on failure to state claim, which essentially means a failure to present sufficient presumed facts indicating a violation of law occurred. The state also will argue sovereign immunity, which means the government cannot be sued without its consent.

Governor Gretchen Whitmer and the Department of Natural Resources filed the suit in November. Enbridge countered with a suit of its own in federal court.

MIOSHA CLEARS HOUSE OF MASK-LESS ALLEGATION

After an investigation into whether the Michigan House violated COVID-19 workplace safety regulations, MIOSHA "strongly" recommended that lawmakers wear face masks within 6 feet of staff and by all people during in-person interactions where employees are present. However, no fines were levied.

According to House Business Office Director, Doug Simon, the lawmakers right to engage legislative activities can't be conditioned on forcing them to wear masks. He said there's no authority to condition the right of lawmakers to vote on bills and participate in the legislative process on the wearing of masks during session.

But House Minority Leader Donna Lasinski (D-Ann Arbor) isn't buying it. It's "simply untrue that the House cannot set rules that protect employees and legislators".

MIOSHA opened the investigation after receiving a complaint from a House employee alleging the violation of COVID safety regulations.

FORMER LAWMAKERS APPOINTED TO THE SOCC COMMISSION

Former State Budget Director Bob Emerson, former State Senator Vincent Gregory and former Representative Sheryl Kennedy, all Democrats, have been appointed to the State Officers Compensation Commission (SOCC) by Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

The panel is charged with making recommendations on the salaries for lawmakers, the Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, and the justices of the Michigan Supreme Court. The recommendations must be adopted by both the House and Senate to take effect, something the Legislature has never done until recently.

The Legislature hadn't approved any pay increases recommended by SOCC for any of the officers since 2001, until last session when they approved a 5% raise for justices, but that will not take effect until 2023 and 2024.

ONLINE WAGERING LOOKS LIKE A GOOD BET

If the first ten days of legal online gambling and online sports betting in Michigan is any indication, it appears the state placed a good bet.

Internet gambling gross receipts totaled \$29.4 million. Internet sports betting operators had \$13.3 million in total gross betting receipts from a total handle of \$115.2 million for the ten-day period.

Total taxes and payments to the state were \$4.4 million. The three Detroit casinos reported city wagering taxes and service fees of \$1.37 million and tribal operators reported \$428,615 of wagering payments to the tribes' governing bodies.

The taxes and payments from online gaming will provide funding for K-12 students, the City of Detroit and Michigan tribal communities.

BARNES RE-ELECTED MDP CHAIR

Without opposition, Michigan Democratic Party (MDP) Chair Levora Barnes was elected to a second term and the "establishment" unity slate won a majority of the seats on the party's state central committee.

ROE NAMED MRP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jason Roe, a long-time Republican political operative, has been named executive director of the Michigan Republican Party (MRP) and will be following in the footsteps of his late father, Jerry Roe, the party's executive director from 1969 to 1979.

Prior to his appointment, Roe led his own strategic consulting firm in Metro Detroit called Roe Strategic.