

Antrim County Times

Volume 1 – Issue 1

"Educating Antrim County about Michigan News & Michigan Politics,...one reader at a time"!!!

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Dear Editor,

The Antrim County Conservative Union (ACCU) is totally AGAINST Gov. Whitmer's proposed state budget of \$60.2 Billion (a 3.6% INCREASE over Michigan's current operating 2019 budget) AND her proposed \$.45 per gallon INCREASE in our fuel taxes (\$10 extra on every average fill-up), which if implemented would become the HIGHEST in America.

After being the ONLY state in the Country to lose population per the 2010 U.S. Census, we will once again see Michigan losing population after the 2020 census.

The over taxation, wasteful spending and outdated models currently operating in Lansing,...MUST STOP NOW!

The ACCU believes that Lansing must perform a "forensic accounting" of EVERY department and reduce their budgets, in order to find the tax dollars necessary to repair our roads and bridges, WITHOUT raising our current state's budget or fuel taxes any further.

Michigan needs to pass reforms to; a) Cut our car insurance rates, by 50%. (Michigan is #1 in having the highest rates in America) b) Lower our electric rates by eliminating the current 90% monopoly. c) Eliminate Michigan's State Income Tax. And d) Return Lansing to a Part-Time Legislature, which we had until 1963.

The ACCU meets the 3rd Monday of each month (next meeting 4-15-19), at the Forest Home Township Hall, 321 Bridge Street, Bellaire, MI at 7:30 pm.

Randy Bishop
ACCU – Chairman
Visit our website at; acconservatives.org

Is It Obvious Yet That The Budget Won't Get Done By June or July?

Michigan lawmakers have been able to tear themselves away from beautiful downtown Lansing for the better part of eight consecutive summers.

The reason? Because they've been able to get the annual budget wrapped up by about July 1 or sooner. Looking back over the decades, however, these past eight years were the exception, not the rule. From a more traditional viewpoint, banging out a budget has been a multi-month pursuit usually culminating in early autumn.

This year the budget is just one of three major issues on the legislative table. Fixing the "damn roads" and reforming the state's auto no-fault insurance system are also in the spotlight. Gov. WHITMER has proposed a budget that intertwines with fixing the "damn roads." Meanwhile, legislative Republicans insist reforming the auto insurance system is Priority No. 1 to them.

If that wasn't enough of a complication, last week Senate Majority Leader Mike SHIRKEY (R-Clarklake) told reporters Senate Republicans will treat the budget and fixing the "damn roads" as separate issues. Isn't that enough to make visions of the upcoming summer look more like sessions, all-nighters and bartering instead of soda, pretzels and beer?

That's basically what MIRS asked a panel of political pundits. Have we reached a point where the logical default prediction should be that finding the fix for the "damn roads" and finally hammering out a budget will be post-Labor Day events?

Q. Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey told reporters last week that Senate Republicans are treating the budget and road funding as separate issues. Does that virtually assure that neither will get done until September?

"Divided government and the gulf between the Governor's ambition to make this Year Zero and pretend the last eight years either didn't happen or that everything that happened in Lansing since Jennifer GRANHOLM left was in chaos, means that September is the earliest anything will happen," said David FORSMARK of Winning Strategies.



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State of Michigan Won't Let Religious Adoption Agencies Say "No" To Same-Sex Couples (MIRS News Service)

State-contracted child welfare agencies must comply with the state's non-discrimination requirements and accept all qualified families -- including same-sex couples -- interested in foster care or adoption.

The announcement came Friday, 3-22-19 as part of a negotiated settlement in Dumont v. Gordon, a federal lawsuit challenging the state's practice of allowing state-funded child-placing agencies to use religious standards to turn away same sex-couples. (See; "ACLU Suit: Same-Sex Couples Face Bias In Adoption" 9-20-17).

"Discrimination in the provision of foster care case management and adoption services is illegal, no matter what the rationale," Attorney General Dana NESSEL said today on the settlement. "Limiting the opportunity for a child to be adopted or fostered by a loving home not only goes against the state's goal of finding a home for every child, it is a direct violation of the contract every child-placing agency enters into with the state."

Lori WINDHAM, senior counsel at Becket Law, the Washington, D.C.-based law firm representing St. Vincent Catholic Charities, said the AG and ACLU's efforts are "trying to stop the state from working with faith-based adoption agencies" and the result will be "tragic."

"This settlement violates the state law protecting religious adoption agencies," she said in a statement. "This harms children and families waiting for forever homes and limits access for couples who chose to partner with those agencies."

In a tweet, Michigan Catholic Conference echoed Windham's sentiments, saying it does nothing to protect foster children looking for loving families, but the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which represented the plaintiffs, called it a "victory for the nearly 12,000 children in foster care."

Plaintiffs Kristy DUMONT and Dana DUMONT, of Dimondale, praised the settlement agreement.

According to Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), each agency provided foster care case management or adoption services for one or more children referred to them by DHHS.

Because the plaintiffs were not seeking direct-placement or private adoption services and because they were not referred to the agencies through MDHHS, the agencies could not reject them under existing state law, Nessel said, noting that she and legal experts determined DHHS could be subject to liability on the plaintiffs' claims.

The Dumont couple and another couple, Erin BUSK-SUTTON and Rebecca BUSK-SUTTON, filed their complaint in September 2017, alleging they approached St. Vincent Catholic Charities and Bethany Christian Services directly to adopt children the agencies had accepted through referrals from DHHS.

The plaintiffs claimed the agencies refused to work with them in violation of the non-discrimination provisions in the agencies' contracts with DHHS.

The settlement has already sparked criticism with the Republican led Legislature, which passed a 2015 law allowing adoption agencies to refuse to work with members of the LGBTQ community (See "Faith-Based Adoption Bills Signed Into Law," 6/11/15).

Senate Majority Leader Mike SHIRKEY (R-Clarklake) disagreed with the settlement, saying "Nessel has shown she cares little for the Constitution and even less for the vulnerable children who need forever homes. Her actions make it clear that she sought the office of attorney general to further her own personal political agenda. This settlement goes against legislation passed to protect our religious freedoms and prevent discrimination." Shirkey said.

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Polling On Whitmer's Budget, No-Fault Reform In The Field

A polling firm identified as CM Research is in the field for an unknown client to test likely 2020 voter reaction to Gov. Gretchen WHITMER's budget, potential auto insurance reforms and the prospects of a prescription drug consumer protection board.

A live operator contacted MIRS looking for a former employee. When MIRS' editor picked up the phone, the operator asked if they could poll him instead. The conversation took nearly 14 minutes, all of which was recorded.

The operator said CM Research is based in the Midwest, but not Michigan. She was not able to say who paid for the poll. Calls to Whitmer's office, the House Republicans, Senate Republicans, the Michigan Democratic Party, the Freedom Fund and the Business Leaders for Michigan yielded denials from each that they were behind the survey.

The questions asked were as followed:

- I know it's a ways off but in 2020 there will be elections in Michigan for President, U.S. Senate and U.S. Congress. As things stand now, how likely are you that you'll vote in the November 2020 election?

- What do you feel is the most important issue or problem that the Governor and state Legislature should make a top priority?

- When you think about election for the state Legislature, are you more likely to vote for Republican candidates or Democratic candidates.

- Now I'd like to ask your perception of people and groups. As I read each one, tell me whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each. Donald TRUMP? Gretchen Whitmer? Gary PETERS? The Michigan state Legislature? Democrats in the state Legislature? Republicans in the state Legislature?

- I know it's a far away off, but in the 2020 election for president, if the election were held today, would you vote for the Republican, Donald Trump or the Democratic candidate?

- In the November 2020 election for U.S. Senate, if it were held today and the candidates were John JAMES, a Republican, and Gary Peters, a Democrat, who would you vote for?

- I know it's early, but how would you rate the job Gretchen Whitmer is doing so far as governor? Excellent, good, not so good or poor?

- How would you rate the job Gary Peters is doing as U.S. senator? Excellent, good, not so good or poor?

- As you may know, Gretchen Whitmer released her plan for the state budget last week, how much have you heard of her proposals? A lot, some, a little, or nothing?

- Here are some of the proposals that were in the Whitmer \$60.2 Billion budget plan. For each one, tell me if you favor or oppose the proposal.;

- Fix state and local roads paid for by raising the gas tax 45 cents?

- Eliminating the state tax on retirement income paid for by making business owners pay the same tax rate as all companies and individuals?

- Investing in skilled training to get kids and adults on a path to better-paying jobs at a cost of \$20 million?

- Making community college free for any Michigan high school graduate, as long as they keep their grades up, at a cost of \$20 million?

- A full four-year scholarship for any Michigander who gets a B or better in high school, as long as they keep their grades up, at a cost of \$20 million?

- Adding \$507 million of school funding for each year to rely less on property taxes and make funding more equal for each community?

- Adding \$120 million in funding to remove lead pipes and clean up toxic chemicals in local drinking water?

- After hearing this information do you think the proposed budget will move the state in the right direction or the wrong direction?

RIGHT DIRECTION WRONG DIRECTION

Whitmer Won't Sign Budget Without Road Funding Fix

Gov. Gretchen WHITMER said today she will not sign any Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 spending plan that doesn't include a road-funding piece, a response to House and Senate Republicans ranking road funding third on their 2019 session priority list behind auto-insurance reform and the budget (See "House, Senate GOP Hold Joint Caucus," 3/21/19).

Senate Majority Leader Mike SHIRKEY (R-Clarklake) said last week that the road funding issue and the budget process are separate, as far as the Senate Republicans are concerned (See "Senate R's To Keep Roads And Budget Separate," 3/19/19).

Speaking during the recording of next week's MIRS Monday podcast, Whitmer said holding out for additional road funding will mean "It'll be a long summer."

"People need to prepare to work here and stay here until the job is done because that budget is absolutely interlinked," Whitmer said. "Our ability to fund our education system, to clean up drinking water is linked with our ability to rebuild roads in this state. So, I'm not signing anything until it's all done together."

Asked if this meant this could put state government into a potential shutdown-like situation, Whitmer said, "We're not going to shut down because we're going to stay working here all summer long to get this done."

"I am serious about it. The people of the state elected me because I believe they want me to fix the damn roads. They want honesty in budgeting. They want real solutions, not half measures and shell games and that's exactly what I put on the table."

An answer doesn't have to be a 45-cent-a-gallon gas tax, she repeated. If their alternative gets the state \$2.5 billion in additional funding on a yearly basis for the next 10 years, "I'm all ears. But until then, let's get serious about talking about my budget and getting it passed to fix these problems."

The scenario Whitmer is trying to head off is the Republicans sending her an FY 2020 spending plan with possibly some additional road-funding dollars, but nothing close to \$2.5 billion. Under the 2015 road-funding plan, the state is required to put in \$325 million in additional income tax money into the roads.

Shirkey responded to Whitmer's remarks by writing to MIRS, "We would never think of advancing a budget sans dollars for roads."

His Press Secretary, Amber McCANN added, "She's in luck. There's an entire Department of Transportation portion of the budget."

MIRS followed up with the Governor to make sure the Legislature simply passing a budget with the expected level of transportation funding wouldn't be good enough. Her response was that she isn't signing a budget that depends on a fix for road funding coming later. It must be "one proposal and one solution."

Over in the House, the press secretary for Speaker Lee CHATFIELD (R-Levering) noted, "We'd all be a lot further down the road on this issue if the Governor had delivered a workable plan, or least a realistic starting point. Unfortunately that didn't happen. As it is, conversations are continuing now."

Chatfield responded, "We are currently spending a record amount on roads and are serious about further investing the right amount to fix the problem. But if that doesn't qualify as a fix, I could put her gas tax hike on the board and watch it fail."



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Colbeck: State Social Studies Standards Have Swung Left

The latest draft of the state social studies standards are out, and former Sen. Patrick COLBECK, now the executive director of the Michigan Freedom Center, said this version has veered too far to the left.

"Unfortunately, what I see in these standards continues progressive indoctrination in a lot of key areas," said Colbeck, who was involved in providing feedback on the 2018 edition of the standards that have now since been revised.

And Tom McMILLIN, a GOP member of the State Board of Education (SBE), hadn't taken a deep dive into the standards today, but said he wasn't planning to be "quiet on this issue" if the standards went too far left, which he suspects it has from what he has seen so far.

The standards have been under construction at the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) since 2014. MDE spokesperson Martin ACKLEY said 20,000 hours have been devoted to developing and revising them.

The SBE has requested additional feedback on the standards on multiple occasions, as the board has gone from a 6-2 Democratic majority to a 4-4 party split and now back to a 6-2 Democrat majority in that time period.

One of those iterations caught the eye of Colbeck and other GOP lawmakers in 2015, who saw what they said was too much political bias in the standards (See "Colbeck, Other Lawmakers Allege 'Political Bias' In Social Studies Standards," 10/26/15).

But after another revision process, the 2018 version of the standards was blasted by Democrats and others who blamed Colbeck and other conservatives for asserting too much influence (See "Democrats Fire At Colbeck For Role In Social Studies Re-Write," 6/13/19).

Now, MDE is ready to present a revised set of standards to the SBE. The standards are up for review at the SBE's April meeting but aren't scheduled for a potential final vote until June.

MDE officials said today it didn't take into account people's political persuasions in garnering feedback during this most recent round, but Colbeck said he wasn't involved and was "specifically, by name, excluded" although he said he applied to take part in the process.

Now, Colbeck has qualms with language in the revised standards about the gay rights movement, saying it's not balanced with a discussion on religious liberty rights. He also sees the standards as "promoting Islam to the exclusion of Christianity."

"Whenever they talk about progressive policies, they talk about it as a reform, and then they refuse to highlight that there are conservative perspectives on how to approach those policies, as well," he said.

Colbeck said he originally got involved with the process to make sure the standards were "politically neutral and accurate" which he said meant that if the standards "promote a contentious progressive worldview, then you balance it with a discussion of what the conservative viewpoint is."

McMillin said he's concerned about how climate change will be treated in the standards, saying the topic needs to be taught as a "theory and not as a fact."

McMillin acknowledged social studies standards "are a tough area" and a "very political area." McMillin went on to suggest making it "lighter" where the standards focus on the most important things but leave the rest to local control.

(Source: MIRS News Service, Lansing, Michigan)

Nessel: Line 5 Tunnel Law Unconstitutional; Gov. Whitmer Halts State Action On It (Source: MIRS News Service)

Attorney General Dana NESSEL opined today the Line 5 tunnel law is unconstitutional, saying its provisions go beyond the scope of what was disclosed in its title, according to a press release issued by her office today.

Gov. Gretchen WHITMER had requested Nessel's opinion on the law on her first day in the office this year. After reviewing what Nessel said, the Governor today issued an executive directive barring state departments and agencies from doing anything more related to the law.

"I agree with the conclusion reached by Attorney General Nessel," the Governor said. "The Great Lakes are our most precious resource in Michigan, and because of their significance, I've instructed state departments and agencies to halt any actions in furtherance of this law."

Whitmer had asked Nessel six questions on the law, Public Act (PA) 359 of 2018 (See "Gov Asks Nessel To Opine On Line 5 Tunnel Law," 1/2/19).

Nessel said the law violates the state constitution's title-object clause, specifically citing those provisions transferring all authorities related to a utility tunnel from the Mackinac Bridge Authority to the Straits Corridor Authority and requiring the Corridor Authority to enter into an agreement for the construction of a tunnel if a proposed agreement was presented by a specific date and met listed criteria.

The AG argued in the opinion the "amended title does not provide 'fair notice' of an imminent tunnel agreement authorizing the construction of a utility tunnel." Nessel argues later that the three sections of law she deemed unconstitutional aren't severable from the rest of the law, because "doing so would be inconsistent with the intent of the Legislature."

The opinion concludes that any "court determination that Act 359 is unconstitutional would likely apply that decision retroactively, and conclude that the Mackinac Straits Corridor Authority, its Board, and any action taken by the Board are void from their inception."

Nessel's opinion contrasts with one issued by a Court of Claims judge earlier this month, which had upheld most of the law (See "Judge Upholds Line 5 Authority But Strikes Down Board's Term," 3/11/19).

Environmental groups that have questioned housing Line 5 in a tunnel -- or allowing the pipeline to continue operating at all -- approved of today's developments, and some called for Whitmer and company to go further and decommission Line 5.

The Michigan Environmental Council and the Michigan League of Conservation Voters said the move "opens the door" for a Line 5 shutdown, according to a joint press release. For Love of Water (FLOW) called Nessel's opinion a "major step toward restoring the rule of law."

"We applaud Attorney General Nessel for clearly recognizing the legislative overreach, restoring the rule of law, and stopping the attack on the Great Lakes and the state Constitution, which demands that the state's air, water, and natural resources are treated and protected as 'paramount,'" said Liz KIRKWOOD, executive director of FLOW, in a statement.

Oil & Water Don't Mix, Clean Water Action, Sierra Club, and the National Wildlife Federation were other groups that supported the news today.

Yet, Rep. Triston COLE (R-Mancelona) called Nessel's opinion "flimsy," arguing "construction of the tunnel would mean jobs for northern Michiganders and would lower their out-of-control energy rates."

"I will not allow the well-being of hardworking Michiganders to be put in jeopardy while the attorney general splits legal hairs for political brownie points," Cole said in a statement. "This is more of the same blatant disregard for the needs of Michigan families outside of the state's major cities. I will not stand for it." Cole said.

Enbridge, the owners of Line 5, issued a statement that it intends "to seek clarification from the Administration on a path forward. Line 5 will continue to safely operate, as it has for more than 60 years.

(Source: MIRS News Service, Lansing, Michigan)

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MCCA Increases Assessment By \$28 More A Car - Gov. Whitmer Calls For Audit (Source: MIRS News Service, Lansing, Michigan)

Auto insurance policyholders will pay an additional \$28 per year, per vehicle for their unlimited lifetime catastrophic coverage, the association charged with setting these rates announced and Gov. Gretchen WHITMER isn't happy.

The Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA) set the new rate for July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020, at \$220 per insured vehicle, up from the 2018-19 assessment of \$192, a 14.6% increase. The charge will cover \$177 for anticipated new claims and \$43 to start working down a \$3.9 billion estimated deficit related to existing claims.

Still, Whitmer said drivers will pay an MCCA fee in 2019 that is double what it was in 2008. The fee paid to cover catastrophic medical claims increased 6.3 percent in 2017, 13 percent in 2018 and 14.5 percent in 2019. Whitmer told the Department of Insurance and Financial Services (DIFS) to audit the MCCA to conduct an "accelerated financial examination into the MCCA."

"Today, we told the MCCA that we were concerned and strongly urged them to provide more information so the public can understand the basis for this fee increase," said DIFS Director Anita FOX, who sits at MCCA meetings. "To provide greater transparency, we welcome Governor Whitmer's direction to conduct a financial examination into the association's operations."

The MCCA is a private non-profit association made up of insurance company executives that provides unlimited lifetime coverage for medical expenses of more than \$555,000 that result from auto accidents.

Senate Insurance and Banking Committee Chair Lana THEIS (R-Brighton) said today's announcement regarding the "record-breaking" rate "makes it even more clear how desperately broken and unsustainable our auto insurance system is." Theis and her House counterpart, Rep. Jason WENTWORTH (R-Clare), are holding concurrent but separate meetings on why Michigan's auto insurance rates are the nation's highest.

Wentworth said the new rate shows on "out-of-control" the system is. "Just look at how absurd these numbers are," he said. "The very first per-insured-vehicle assessment issued by the MCCA in 1978 was \$3. Over the next 30 years, it reached \$104.58 in 2008. Within the last decade, it's risen to \$220 – an increase of 110 percent. This is becoming an exponential financial burden for Michigan motorists and is symptomatic of the underlying problems with the no-fault system. Special interests continue to profit off the status quo while hard-working families and seniors on fixed incomes continue to be sapped.

"Skyrocketing costs have made car insurance unaffordable in 97 percent of Michigan's ZIP codes. Over 20 percent of Michigan motorists are illegally operating uninsured, and this MCCA fee increase makes matters worse," Wentworth said. "This on top of the governor's lazy 45-cent per gallon increased gas tax proposal is going to drive residents out of the state and hurt Michigan's economy."

The Insurance Alliance of Michigan (IAM) also issued a statement urging reform. The Michigan Coalition to Protect Auto No-Fault (CPAN) pointed to the \$23 billion in the association's reserves, which is there to cover the costs of future claims.

"Every year it asks for more money, yet it refuses to show us the rate-making data it uses to determine its financial health and set its annual assessment," said CPAN President John CORNACK. "This is yet just another example of the auto insurance industry again not being held accountable due to a lack of strong consumer protections in Michigan. We need to bring full transparency to the MCCA as part of any No-Fault reform package that needs to happen, now." Said Cornack.

Law center files federal lawsuit against the AG and the State's Civil Rights Director (Source: The Detroit News)

An Ann Arbor-based law center filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Michigan Attorney General - Dana Nessel and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights Director - Agustin Arbulu for a policy it says unjustly targets the group for its political stances.

The American Freedom Law Center's lawsuit asks the Western District of Michigan U.S. District Court to rule both Nessel and Arbulu's policies unconstitutional because they rely in part on the Southern Poverty Law Center's list of 31 alleged Michigan hate groups, a list that labels the American Freedom Law Center "anti-Muslim."

The lawsuit says the recent policy announced by Nessel and Arbulu legitimizes the "radical and leftist" Southern Poverty Law Center's efforts to "marginalize" political opponents by labeling them hate groups.

The lawsuit stems from an announcement in which Nessel said her office would form a hate crime unit to prosecute hate crimes and review any groups identified in the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2018 list of hate groups. Arbulu also announced plans to create a database to track bias and hate incidents that don't rise to the level of a crime.

Nessel's office declined to comment on specifics of the American Freedom Law Center lawsuit as the office had not yet been served late Thursday morning. But her spokeswoman Kelly Rossman-McKinney reiterated assurances made last week that the department will rely on more than just the SPLC list to determine wrongdoing.

"We will rely on our own research and investigation in making a determination as to what organizations are operating as hate groups in this state, and what action is required in order to ensure the public is safe from any illegal activity which stems from such organizations," Rossman-McKinney said.

Arbulu said he had not yet been served the lawsuit, but noted that "understanding the extent of hate and bias incidents" is an important mechanism to protect Michigan residents.

"The Michigan Department of Civil Rights has a long & proud history of protecting everyone's civil rights and will continue to do so." Arbulu said.

DEEP TISSUE TREATMENTS by Tracey Sedlacek

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Forest Home Township Hall, 321 N. Bridge St., Bellaire, MI

We discuss news and political current events (National, Michigan & Local) that are of interest to our members like those in this newspaper and we discuss how we can educate the people here in Antrim County.

Additionally, we host elected officials/candidates running for office to ask them questions about their policy positions and what they will advocate for while in office. We will produce and distribute "Voter Guides" prior to elections.

The public is welcome,...Come join us!!!