

October 17, 2011

NITC UPDATE

A vote to move legislation (SBs 410 and 411) clearing the way for a second bridge across the Detroit River out of the Senate Economic Development Committee didn't happen last week.

Now, Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville (R-Monroe) is considering moving the bills to the Senate Government Operations Committee in an effort to get the New International Trade Crossing (NITC) measures moving to the full Senate.

Meanwhile, it is being reported that Senate Democrats will vote as a 12-member block to support the legislation for the Detroit-to-Windsor bridge IF the bills include community benefits language for the impacted community of Delray in Detroit.

And, if the Senate gets the votes to move the measures to the House, Speaker Jase Bolger (R-Marshall) says the legislation will go to the House Transportation Committee chaired by Representative Paul Opsommer (R-DeWitt) who has been skeptical of the proposal.

PANEL MOVES NO-FAULT TO HOUSE FLOOR

Legislation (HB 4936) that would let people choose between a three-tiered auto insurance coverage system has moved to the full House following a 9-7 vote in the House Insurance Committee last week.

The measure would allow people to choose between auto insurance coverage of \$500,000, \$1 million or \$5 million. The current system provides unlimited lifetime coverage for medical expenses resulting auto accidents.

If the bill passes both chambers, it will be referendum-proof because of a \$50,000 General Fund appropriation to the Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) to implement the measure.

Meanwhile, the Coalition Protecting Auto No-Fault (CPAN) has sent a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to the Office of Financial and Insurance Regulations (OFIR) as well as the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA) for information CPAN contends is very relevant to proposed changes in the bill.

SNYDER CREATES CYBER INITIATIVE

A victim himself of a cyber crime a few years ago, Governor Rick Snyder has announced the creation of the Michigan Cyber Initiative for the state.

Calling cyber crime "probably the most pervasive single crime in our country," Snyder said the new initiative would include a cyber command center, a cyber defense team and would partner with everyone from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to private businesses.

Snyder called the cyber initiative "a step," but also highlighted the need to educate people because operator error is responsible for many security breaches.

STATE'S ENERGY POLICY TO BE REVIEWED

Michigan's energy policy, which was overhauled in 2008, is going to be reviewed for the rest of this year by the Senate Energy and Technology Committee.

However, Committee Chair Senator Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek), who helped usher in the current policy, has not committed to taking up legislation to tweak the law and a spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Randy Richardville (R-Monroe) said energy issues have not been discussed by the GOP caucus.

Nofs said he plans three or four hearings on energy choice, two on the renewable portfolio standard (RPS) and a couple of hearings on energy efficiency.

HOUSE TARGETS SALES TAX LOOPHOLE

Bipartisan legislation is being introduced in the House that would close the sales tax loophole for online sales.

Dubbed the "Michigan Main Street Fairness Act," the measure would put on-line only retailers under the same sales tax laws as "brick-and-mortar" businesses.

A recent study released by Public Sector Consultants found the state would lose \$141 million in revenue this year due to out-of-state vendors selling merchandise on-line that is purchased by Michigan residents.

DEMS WANT DRUG IMMUNITY LAW REPEALED

Following a decision by the Michigan Supreme Court to hear a case about the drug Vioxx, House Democrats have launched a renewed push to repeal Michigan's "drug immunity law."

House Democrats have introduced a two-bill package of legislation (HB 4440 and HB 4650) that would repeal the drug immunity law and would set up consumer protections.

The current law was passed during former Governor John Engler's administration as a move intended to attract pharmaceutical companies to the state.

“PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION” BAN SIGNED INTO LAW

Legislation banning so-called “partial-birth abortions” has been signed into law by Gov. Rick Snyder.

Senate Bill 160 prohibits partial-birth abortion except when necessary to protect the life of the mother. House Bill 4110 criminalizes those who perform the procedure by subjecting them to a two-year, \$50,000 felony if convicted.

The bills mirror a 2003 federal ban on the procedure that was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2007.

A WARNING FOR “KEGGERS”

Beginning Nov. 1 persons buying beer by the keg in Michigan will have to fill out paperwork that identifies the buyer. Liquor stores must then place a tag on the keg identifying the buyer.

Under the new law, violators face a misdemeanor penalty of up to 93 days in jail and a \$500 fine for removing the ID tag from a keg or providing false information while purchasing a keg.

Stores that refuse to tag a keg face a \$50 administrative fine.

SNYDER RECALL EFFORT ENDS.

Voters will not have the opportunity to decide whether or not Gov. Rick Snyder should be recalled from office.

Organizers of the recall effort have officially ended their campaign having obtained only about half of the petition signatures they would have needed to put the issue before the voters on a February 2012 statewide ballot. Snyder was being targeted for killing the income tax exemption on pensions and cutting K-12 education in favor of reducing business taxes.

SNYDER CREATES REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION TASKFORCE

Gov. Rick Snyder, along with Detroit Mayor Dave Bing, is forming a task force on regional transportation. However, no details have been provided. The announcement comes a week before Snyder is scheduled to deliver a special address on infrastructure.