

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

Listen to the Report

House Dems Face Time Crunch As Lam Duck Agenda Remains Unclear

Although there is appetite among House Democrats to move significant policy during lame duck, what can be accomplished remains to be seen, Minority Leader-elect [Rep. Ranjeev Puri](#) said Tuesday.

"You're seeing a very robust committee schedule this week. I think that's going to continue into next week," he said. "There's a huge appetite to get a lot of things done. We're going to be doing what we can to get 56 members here, and if we can get 56 votes on something, then it will get done, but I don't have a guess on how many that will end up being."

Puri's comments come as House Democrats continue to face attendance issues in the waning days of their majority. [Rep. Reggie Miller](#) (D-Van Buren Township) will be absent all this week as she continues to recover from surgery, and [Rep. Rachel Hood](#) (D-Grand Rapids), who prior to the legislative break for Thanksgiving threatened not to attend session unless her party moved on big priorities, was not present Tuesday.

"There is intention to have all 56 of our colleagues here next week," Puri said.

The House agenda was light on Tuesday, and Wednesday's tentative agenda is even lighter.

Puri acknowledged House Democrats were running out of time.

"We have (a) finite amount of time here to continue to meet the needs of Michiganders. The goal here should be to improve the quality of their lives," he said. "When you're saying the legacy that we want to leave, we want to meet the needs of Michiganders and to make sure that we did whatever we could with the time we had."

Governor Gretchen Whitmer is pushing road funding as a priority for lame duck, and both Republican and Democratic members of the House introduced plans in recent weeks. Both proposals suggest taking a portion of the Corporate Income Tax currently directed toward the Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve Fund and directing it toward roads.

Puri, who chairs the House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, said although he was serious about finding a solution to bridge the funding gap for roads, there was not one individual solution.

"I am in the camp of thinking that we cannot do that without raising new revenue. I don't think that the state right now has the budget to be able to just move things around in order to meet that \$3.9 billion gap, or come close to that," he said. "I want to ensure that we're meeting the full needs of the financial gap that exists and not just checking a box to say that we had the conversation."

In terms of what could work, Puri said there were a finite number of options.

"You've got to fill up your plate with an assortment of things, but there's only a finite number of things we can pick from," he said. "There are conversations happening out there about what could be possible, and I hope that we are serious about finding a real solution to generate new revenue, but those conversations are still not ready for prime time."

With the governor seemingly laying down the gauntlet to pass something for road funding, Puri stressed that the House, Senate and the governor's office were on the same team, but it was inaccurate to say that the governor was setting the agenda, on road funding or any other piece of legislation.

"We are three individual bodies," he said. "It would be foolish not to admit that we're the same team as the governor. We have a healthy relationship with the governor and the Senate... but I think it's a mischaracterization to say that we have to have her approval to be able to get something to move in the House."

There are still several significant pieces of legislation outstanding that the Senate has passed that the House hasn't touched. Among those are expanding FOIA to the Legislature and the governor's office and making changes to no-fault auto insurance.

[Rep. Tyrone Carter](#) (D-Detroit) said his constituents are frustrated that the Legislature hasn't passed any fixes to auto insurance.

"We need to do something about this auto no-fault," he said. "That is at every coffee hour that I have, because folks still cannot afford it.... We need 56 votes. That is always an issue. It's not leadership. We talk about this all the time... 56 House, 20 Senate and get the governor to sign it. It's still a work in progress, but hopefully we can get it there."

The Senate passed legislation a year ago to repeal caps on payments to those providing care to persons catastrophically injured after the 2019 overhaul of the no-fault law took effect. It has sat dormant in a House committee since then.

More controversial Democratic priorities, such as productivity credits for prisoners or providing driver's license to undocumented people living in Michigan, are not off the table for lame duck, Puri said.

"Some of those bills are going to come down to a vote or two," he said. "I don't think any of those are off the table of things that can get done in December, but obviously some of these are going to be party line votes, so they probably won't happen this week."

Puri also commented on Monday's announcement from General Motors that the company was selling its shares in the Lansing-based battery plant.

"These are nuanced conversations...I am someone that has had a good relationship with our industry here in Michigan, I think that it's a pivotal piece of making sure Michigan is successful," he said. "But I think if you have situations where there are public dollars being invested, that there are some guard rails that should be put in place to make sure that those investments are returning the ROI and are meeting the goals that should be benefitting the state of Michigan for the long haul."

On the Republican side of the House, many members are resisting Democratic attempts to rush bills through the chamber.

"My message to the Republican caucus is, if you like that bill, then in about one month, you're going to be in a majority position to work on that bill, so let's just give that a shot and hold off," said [Rep. Graham Filler](#) (R-Duplain Township). "If a bill is being jammed by one side right now... then they should wait and work on those things next year."

– By Elena Durnbaugh

[Back to top](#)



Copyright 2024, Gongwer News Service, Inc. All rights reserved.

[Terms of Service](#) [Privacy Policy](#)

