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# Senate Dems renew attacks on Hall over budget; won't commit to releasing a road funding plan

Senate Democrats on Wednesday renewed their accusations of House [Speaker Matt Hall](#) being the main obstacle to passing a state budget with six weeks remaining in the fiscal year, while expanding their attacks to include a lack of collaboration and movement on policy bills.

Hall, R-Richland Township, countered by repeating his call for Democrats to have [Gov. Gretchen Whitmer](#) lead in negotiations for a budget and long-term road funding deal.

Senate Democrats during a Wednesday press conference also did not commit to releasing their own road funding plan when asked why they have not made public a proposal of their own.

Senate [Majority Leader Winnie Brinks](#), D-Grand Rapids, said the state is barely 40 days from the end of the fiscal year and a potential government shutdown.

"House Republicans are obstructing the legislative process, stalling the critical passage of a state budget and pushing us toward a point of irreparable harm, all in a shameful attempt to score some political points," Brinks said. "For them, chaos appears to be the core value."

Brinks said she still has not had direct contact with Hall since last week, when she said the two of them had not spoken directly one-on-one in about a month.

She added that ongoing dialogue is still going on between appropriations members as well as staff in the offices of leadership to keep lines of communication open.

Hall, speaking to reporters during session Wednesday, pushed back on assertions that he is the problem.

"When we propose our budget, it's really going to be the perfect budget, and it's really going to set us up well for the negotiations," Hall said. "I will say we've had an education budget sitting in the Senate for months, and we could very easily pass that right now."

Brinks and Democrats on Wednesday were asked about why their caucus has not put out a road funding plan in response to proposals released earlier this year by Hall and Whitmer.

The majority leader said conversations are still happening on roads and reiterated her long-held stance that roads and the budget need to be done together.

"I refuse to make the choice between funding schools and funding roads," Brinks said. "We are not going to gut school funding to fund roads, but we're more than happy to have a conversation about how all the pieces of the budget work together."

Hall repeated on Wednesday his suggestion that Whitmer should lead negotiations on the budget and roads for the Democrats.

"We have a good relationship. We can get deals done," Hall said. "We need these other legislative leaders to empower her so she can make that deal. If they do that, we could get the deal done very quickly, probably two weeks."

When asked how much longer there needs to be discussions before a road funding plan comes out, [Sen. Sam Singh](#), D-East Lansing, said between what Hall and the governor have proposed, there simply needs to be serious negotiations.

"We can take a look. There are some elements of the governor's plan we like," Singh said. "There are some elements that we don't like, but you have to have everyone in the room to do the negotiation. You don't need to have five, six different plans. ... We have the frameworks. We've said that we're willing to negotiate that, but we have to do it within the context of the budget."

By not having a full House budget proposal and the beginning of negotiations, Singh said, discussions on all elements of the budget cannot happen.

He did not elaborate on which elements of the governor's proposal with which Senate Democrats agree or disagree.

**Sen. Jeremy Moss**, D-Southfield, said school officials and families and students are facing uncertainty as the new school year begins with the lack of an education budget. He said the Senate has done its job so far by passing its proposal and has stood ready for months for engagement on a budget.

"While we've been advocating for these critical priorities for months, House Republicans have still failed to propose a substantive budget, and with only days before the school years starts and weeks left until our government runs out of funding, and they haven't even proposed a general budget at all," Moss said. "It's been three or four months of them telling all of you that they're dropping their budget next week. You know, even Taylor Swift when she said the album is dropping at 12:12, the album drops at 12:12. House Republicans don't believe in the same philosophy."

Moss listed bipartisan bill packages that could see movement in the House if not for Hall, including expanding the Freedom of Information Act to include the Legislature and governor's office, allowing daycare facilities to have automatic door locks like schools to protect from potential shootings and strengthening protections for vulnerable adults from financial exploitation.

**Sen. Kevin Hertel**, D-Saint Clair Shores, said there appears to be a lack of interest to move any bills in the House. He said nearly 50 bills have passed the Senate unanimously this session, and dozens more with some level of bipartisan support.

"We need a serious partner in the House," Hertel said. "He keeps saying that he's not taking up our bills because, they're, quote unquote 'not ready,' but he refuses to give us specifics on what he wants changed. ... He refuses to simply put in the work."

As to the state budget, he said the uncertainty, particularly for schools, is a major concern. He said his children's school district has issued a notice that it may not be able to provide free school meals after September due to budget uncertainty. Hertel added that many districts across the state are in a similar position, and some may have to lay off teachers.

Singh said passing a budget is one of the basic tasks that lawmakers have and that the House is failing to govern responsibly.

"It isn't integrity, it isn't leadership, and it certainly isn't what the citizens of Michigan expect from their state policymakers," Singh said.

Hall took a swipe at Senate Democrats and their recent ramping up of attacks on his leadership.

"These are very negative people, and it's very depressing when you listen to them," Hall said. "Imagine if they spent this much time negotiating a deal – and it's very personal with them."

– By Nick Smith; Elena Durnbaugh contributed

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