

Tuesday, October 8, 2024

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Whitmer On Key Statewide Dilemmas: Sick Time, Minimum Wage, Road Funding & MSU Trustee Removal

Governor [Gretchen Whitmer](#) made no specific calls to alter the paid sick time and minimum wage increase laws that are poised to take effect soon after the Michigan Supreme Court ruled to enact them at a press event on Tuesday.

Whitmer appeared in downtown Lansing to return her absentee ballot to the City Hall drop box location on Tuesday, taking various questions from the press afterward on the Harris-Walz campaign and the state of Michigan House races (see separate story).

The governor was also asked about the sick time and minimum wage increase laws, which are set to take effect in February. Some businesses remain worried that the laws as approved by the high court in *Mothering Justice v. Attorney General* (MSC Docket No. 165325) would be catastrophic on the wage and sick time fronts, and want the Legislature to make changes (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, September 26, 2024](#)).

Meanwhile, union groups have urged the Legislature to not make changes to the laws, even as hospitality workers recently pressed lawmakers with a large rally outside the Capitol (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, September 18, 2024](#)).

Senate [Majority Leader Winnie Brinks](#) (D-Grand Rapids) recently told Gongwer News Service that her caucus is still gathering information from stakeholders on the laws, but declined to say how long it make take for the Legislature to move any bill addressing the issues raised; nor did she say what specific potential changes might look like (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, September 17, 2024](#)).

On Tuesday, Whitmer was asked about the dilemma and what she would like to see changed. She was also asked what those changes might look like if floated to her leadership partners of Brinks in the Senate and [Speaker Joe Tate](#) (D-Detroit) in the House.

Whitmer said she wasn't going to unilaterally fix the situation or address it alone.

"I've got to work with the Legislature," she said. "I'm sure we're going to have conversations about that when they all get back to town."

Whitmer was also asked about whether she's decided to remove Rema Vassar (D-Detroit) and Dennis Denno (D-East Lansing) from their posts the Michigan State University Board of Trustees.

Vassar came under fire after an October 2023 letter from Trustee Brianna Scott (D-Muskegon) accusing the then board chair of bullying and breaches of bylaws. A report that came out in February substantiated some of the claims. The third-party report recommended the board ask Whitmer to review Vassar and Denno for possible removal.

In March, the board met on the issue. Vassar resigned as chair but said she would remain on the board. Vassar has defended her conduct, but the board stripped her of committee posts and other duties in addition to its request to Whitmer.

Whitmer said she asked the Department of Attorney General to look at the question and anticipates hearing back from [Attorney General Dana Nessel](#) soon. The governor also said she wasn't going to prejudge the situation until she better understands the legal mechanics of her authority there.

When asked why it's taken so long to get to that point, Whitmer said it was a rare gubernatorial power that hasn't been used frequently.

"The question is, 'is it a legitimate use of my power, and how would it work?'" Whitmer said. "There's a lot of unknowns. My first and foremost concern is making sure that I follow the law, and second, making sure that the university is thriving. It's been a tough time over there. I'm going to wait and see what happens."

Whitmer was also asked about whether it was time for the Legislature to take up a long-term fix to funding repairs and rebuilding Michigan's roads. Whitmer said she wants to continue that work as the state nears a

road repair funding cliff, and to keep up the work her administration has already done with road investments.

Asked if that meant a solution was coming during a potential lame duck session after the November elections, Whitmer said she would have liked to have had a solution from the Legislature "yesterday."

"We'd like to make sure that we get it done before I am done," Whitmer said, referring to her term limit as Michigan's governor.

– By Ben Solis

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