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### Whitmer Didn't Sign Off On SOAR Siphon

Gov. Gretchen WHITMER said "no" when asked if she agreed beforehand on a Senate substitute directing 50 percent of total Strategic Outreach and Attraction Reserve (SOAR) funding towards "transformative community investments," a move that could drastically change the SOAR fund's role in providing economic incentives.

Whitmer told the press during a scrum in Lansing that there was ongoing dialogue between her office and Senate Democrats before the legislation was substituted and moved, but said that "'running by' versus 'agreeing to mutually support' are two different things."

Sen. Mallory MCMORROW (D-Royal Oak)'s SB 559, was substituted on Tuesday night to ramp up the percentage of a SOAR Fund award dedicated to community investments from 20 percent to 50 percent. Also, SOAR was rebranded as the "Make it in Michigan Fund".

The bill was accompanied by SB 562, which helps to create a "Michigan 360 Program" to assist companies that receive economic incentives with community development.

Both bills passed along party lines.

"I'm confident that as the bills move into the House, we'll be able to have a little more thoughtful dialogue on that front," Whitmer said, adding that she is pleased the bills got out of the Senate.

"I think that's real progress," she said, and "now we've got an opportunity to continue to make them better."

When Tate was asked what sort of negotiations now need to occur to get the package to the Governor's desk, he said one of the things the House and Governor want to focus on is, "How are we making Michigan as competitive as possible?"

"This is just a continuation of that," he said.

### MICRC Votes Itself 40 Percent Pay Hike During Mapping Time

The Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) voted this week to give its commissioners a 40 percent pay raise for the nearly six months it's actively mapping, a move that boosts their pay from \$39,825 a year to \$55,755 a year.

The salary adjustment would be retroactive between Jan. 15 and March 3 when the MICRC redrew the Metro Detroit state House seats. Under the proposed schedule laid out at today's meeting, the MICRC would redraw the Senate districts in Metro Detroit between April 12 and July 31.

The pay hike was voted in at a time when the MICRC spent 55 percent of the \$3.3 million Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 budget four months into the Fiscal Year, as MICRC Executive Director Edward WOODS III laid out in the meeting.

Woods said an increase in commissioner travel came from the in-person map drawing sessions and the higher legal fees related to the appeals of the outstanding federal court case. The MICRC still has outstanding invoices from February and March that need to be paid, Woods said.

He stayed optimistic that a resolution could be reached with legislative leaders and the Governor's office by May.

The pay hike came after multiple attempts to raise the salary in previous meetings by Commissioner Brittni KELLUM. The last attempt in February failed by one vote.

Under the constitutional amendment, commissioners are required to receive compensation at least equal to 25 percent of the Governor’s salary, but they are allowed to approve a higher salary if they vote to do it. There is no limit in the constitution on how much they can be paid.

Commissioner Rebecca SZETELA called the proposed pay hike “extremely irresponsible” at a time when the commission needs to ask the Legislature for additional funds.

“It’s not good optics, and it’s not good public service,” she said. “This is still a part-time job.”

According to Szetela’s personal calculations, commissioners worked – prior to today’s meeting – 126.4 hours in 2024, which works out to 11 hours a week, and that’s with redrawing a House map. This equals out to \$63 an hour, a more than adequate salary considering commissioners don’t receive benefits.

If commissioners worked a 40-hour week, the salary came out to \$19 an hour, which was higher than the state’s living wage, she argued.

Szetela’s argument didn’t influence a majority on the board, though. The motion to increase the salaries passed 9-4 with Commission Chair Cynthia ORTON, Commissioner Erin WAGNER and Commissioner Rhonda LANGE joining Szetela in voting no.

Earlier in the meeting, Wagner said “it seems ridiculous” to ask lawmakers for more money at a time when salaries are being raised and the Commission was continuing to appeal the Agee court case in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Contacted on today’s development, Rep. Ann BOLLIN (R-Brighton) said today’s move “absolutely” should make the process of the MICRC getting more money from lawmakers a tougher sell. Commissioners have consistently voted for higher salaries for a position that was never intended to supplant a full-time job, she said.

With any job, sometimes it takes up more of your time, and sometimes it takes up less of your time, Bollin said. In this case, the commissioners are coming back because a court ruled their prior work unconstitutional.

This means commissioners should be tightening their belts, approving tighter ethics rules and improving their training, not raising salaries, Bollin said.

Later in the meeting, Commissioner Anthony EID was elected chair as the body continued its process of rotating the chair’s position. Eid, a consistent leader on the commission, has been the source of some controversy.

Szetela led an effort to remove Eid for allegedly tailoring maps to help some politicians and for accepting a position as deputy director of Michigan Voices, a group that interacts with the MICRC during redistricting.

Szetela sought to relitigate Eid having been expelled from medical school at Wayne State for alleged dishonesty, but her arguments were shut down by her fellow commissioners, who felt unearthing these old arguments didn’t have much value.

**Republicans Showing More Voter Enthusiasm than Dems**

Republicans are more enthusiastic about voting in the 2024 general election than Democrats or independents, a switch from this past June, based on polling conducted by Mitchell Research & Communications for MIRS News.

The survey of 627 voters on March 15 and 16 found 69 percent of Republicans said they were “very enthusiastic” about voting compared to 58 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of independents. Men (70 percent) responded that they were “very enthusiastic” at a higher percentage than women (57 percent).

And white voters (65 percent) responded that they were “very enthusiastic” at a higher percentage than Black voters (48 percent).

“The big question for both Democrats and Republicans is whether African Americans and younger voters who are flirting with the Republican Party will continue to do so as the election grows closer,” said Steve MITCHELL of Mitchell Research and Communications. “Even if they do not, the huge 10 percent enthusiasm gap favoring Republicans might be

enough to push (former President Donald) TRUMP over the goal line in November.”

The poll was conducted entirely by text messaging voter’s cell phones and sending them to a SurveyMonkey poll. The data was weighted by age, gender, party affiliation, education and the 2020 ballot questions to reflect the likely voter turnout in November.

The margin of error is +/-3.91 percent.

**MIRS QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

*“I have condemned pizza for burning my mouth in stronger terms than Hall condemned blatant white supremacist rhetoric from his own caucus member.”*

*- Progress Michigan Executive Director Sam INGLOT on how House Republican Leader Matt HALL spoke against the controversial social media posts of Republican Rep. Josh SCHRIVER.*

**State Unemployment Rate Remains Stable In February**

The unemployment rate in Michigan dropped from 4 percent to 3.9 percent in February, maintaining the stable rate seen for months, according to data released by the Michigan Center for Data and Analytics.

Employment went up by 2,000 people, while unemployment went down by 4,000 people. The statewide workforce went down by 1,000 people. The labor force participation rate slipped one-tenth a percent to 62.2.

“Michigan’s unemployment rate and labor force levels remained relatively stable in February,” said Wayne ROURKE, Michigan Center for Data and Analytics labor market information director.

Michigan matched the national unemployment rate in February.

Rourke said the payroll jobs rose significantly for the month, with the total nonfarm payroll jobs rising by 15,000 jobs. The job total for February was 4,472,000.

The education and health services sectors in the state went up by 9,000 jobs and the government went up by 4,000.

The two sectors have been the driving force of employment in Michigan, with government increasing employment by 21,000 and education and health services increasing by 20,000 over the year.

“With a low unemployment rate and strong labor force growth over the past year, Michigan has the momentum. More people are working, businesses are expanding, and commercial districts and restaurants are buzzing as we start spring and get ready for warmer weather just around the corner,” said Gov. Gretchen WHITMER.

Whitmer said she and the Legislature were working on the economic issues through economic development missions, housing and higher education focus.

“Michiganders are working hard as our economy continues to grow,” Whitmer said.

**\$160 M In Economic Impact Estimated For NFL Draft**

Visit Detroit President Claude MOLINARI said he expects an economic impact of around \$160 to \$170 million from hosting the 2024 National Football League (NFL) Draft, which is being kicked off by a \$10 million investment from Detroit’s organizing committee and the state to prepare the city.

Molinari was joined by Gov. Gretchen WHITMER and House Speaker Joe TATE (D-Detroit) to talk about the importance of hosting the 2024 draft, which will take place April 25-27 in downtown Detroit.

When asked about the cost of preparing the city, he said the city’s organizing committee, the Detroit Sports Commission, is spending around \$10 million, with some of that funding provided by the state and some through a fundraising effort.

“The economic impact of \$160 to \$170 million more than justifies a \$10 million local organizing effort,” he said, adding that the draft will be the “largest and most inclusive sporting event in the state of Michigan, ever.”

Those dollars will go towards construction, as well as things like taking down some stop lights temporarily, Molinari said.

He added that some road work has been accelerated a bit, but “the city has been going through a revival as it is,” and a majority of the work that’s going on downtown was already scheduled to take place.

As for the NFL, Molinari said he expects the League to spend around four times the investment of the organizing committee to ready the city.

In addition to the hundreds of thousands of visitors in Detroit, which Molinari said will likely help generate hundreds of millions in economic aid, “tens of millions of TV viewers

will get to see the beauty of Detroit, which will help inspire more visitors, more investment and more opportunities for people around Michigan to thrive.”

Tate said in 2006, during the end of his own NFL career, SuperBowl 40 was held in Detroit, and he gave away his tickets to his brother.

“I’m not going to lose out this year,” Tate said.

Whitmer shouted out Michigan State University’s (MSU’s) recent March Madness Update during her speech, but when asked if she scheduled the 2:30 p.m. presser to directly follow MSU playing, Whitmer laughed.

“I didn’t schedule the press conference,” she said. “I’m glad Michigan State won, but I don’t know who . . . picked the time. All I can say is I’m glad it’s before seven o’clock, when the Oakland U Grizzlies is, the next big game we’re rooting for.”

**THIS WEEK IN MICHIGAN HISTORY**

On March 24, 1936, the Detroit Red Wings played the longest Stanley Cup playoff game in history.

The contest against the Montreal Maroons combined for 60 minutes of regulation play and 116 minutes, 30 seconds of overtime. Detroit won 1-0 and went on to win the series and their first Stanley Cup.