

Legislative Report for MAT
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Governor Jennifer Granholm is expected to issue an executive order that will merge the Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Quality and Natural Resources.

As the sponsor of legislation to combine the DEQ and DNR, McManus said she opposes putting the Department of Agriculture (MDA) in the mix without some input and discussion from the groups that would be involved in a combination.

"Agriculture is the only industry that is thriving in this state and it's disappointing that this administration hasn't recognized that," McManus said. "It's important that this particular department stays at the top of what the administration does with reorganizations, either as a stand-alone department or combined in some fashion."

Earlier this session, Senator Gerald VanWorkoem, R-Muskegon introduced legislation to move forestry programs to the Department of Agriculture.

The DNR budget has completed legislative action. The controversial cord mandate will stay in the bill. The mandate requires 63,000 acres of state forest lands to be treated. Language was added to the bill to require the DNR Commission and the DNR Department to work with stakeholders to determine a more efficient bidding process.

We continue to await action on HB 4404, legislation to provide a sales tax exemption on certain sawmill equipment and SB 198, legislation to provide a use tax exemption on certain sawmill equipment. The hold up is the Department of Treasury. Originally, they opposed the bills, but now have pledged to make certain language changes so they can take a "neutral" position on the bills. The chairs of the Senate and House Tax Committees have pledged to schedule the bills for debate once the Department of Treasury signals neutrality.

We continue to work towards a solution to require Amish businesses to be treated by the Department of Labor the same as commercial loggers and sawmill operators. Amish businesses are not required to pay workers compensation or other related business taxes and do not have to abide by child labor laws which all create unfair competition.

Unfortunately, the budget process this year took Michigan to the brink again. Lack of trust and political bickering continues. Political games continue as developing solutions are all but stalled.