State of the State 2013: Gov. Rick Snyder proposes road funding, changes to voting, education

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Gov. Rick Snyder, shown here at a press conference late last year, gives his State of the State speech tonight.*File photo*

LANSING, MI - Gov. Rick Snyder is ready to take another crack at trying to raise money to fix up Michigan’s pothole-riddled road system.

Some highlights of Snyder’s speech were shared with media late this afternoon, ahead of his third State of the State speech scheduled to start at 7 p.m. at the state Capitol. The media briefing came as union protesters and others gathered outside the Capitol to protest some of Snyder's policies, including his backing of a right-to-work law approved late last year.

[**He plans to call for raising**](http://www.mlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2013/01/tim_skubick_michigan_businesse.html) an estimated $1.2 billion in additional annual revenue for roads and transportation projects. But he’s not likely to nail down too many specifics, leaving options on raising money somewhat open to try and get a Republican-led Legislature to go along with asking motorists for more money.

He wants the issue to begin to be addressed as early as possible.

“The big deal is roads – road funding,” Snyder strategy director Bill Rustem told reporters prior to Snyder’s speech.

Snyder wants the funding addressed soon, but knows it will be a tough issue.

Snyder also is expected to propose online voter registration and no-reason absentee voting, proposals to help veterans and some possible boosts to early education in his speech.

The road money plan could include raising vehicle registration fees. It also would shift the tax system from the current 19-cent per gallon tax paid at the pump to a percentage of the wholesale cost of gasoline, which would rise with inflation and could bring in more money. Snyder also would consider backing local options to raise more money at the county level, such as additional vehicle registration fees.

Both Republicans and Democrats have generally agreed Michigan needs more money for road repairs and transportation system improvements. But there has not been consensus on how to pay for the improvements, even after years of debate. Proposals to increase the gas tax and vehicle registration fees have been unpopular because they would directly raise the cost of driving.

Snyder is expected to tell Michigan residents that some facets of the economy are improving, and his plans for continuing that trend in 2013.

Other topics:

**Elections and voting:** Snyder is expected to back some form of online voter registration and no-reason absentee voting. It would require some steps aimed at security, such as entering Social Security numbers with registration and other features.

**Jobs:** Snyder is expected to push for ways to better help Michigan workers develop the skills needed for high-tech, health care and other high-demand job areas. It's not clear how much of that will come up in tonight's speech, however. One item that is expected to be mentioned is a[**special emphasis on military veterans**](http://www.mlive.com/jobs/index.ssf/2013/01/walmart_commits_to_hiring_more_veterans.html) for some types of jobs. Snyder also is expected to announce other steps, including accreditation of a veterans affairs agency, to help better deliver services to veterans.

**Education:** Great Start and other early childhood education programs could get more of an emphasis in the state budget, which will be proposed in early February. Snyder also is expected to renew his call to expand the state’s Education Achievement Authority. It now includes 15 schools in Detroit, but it could potentially expand to include many of the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools in the state. Proposals that could have put the EAA in state law and expanded that program fizzled in the state Legislature late last year, but likely will be resurrected.

**Social services:** Snyder is expected to address expanding a program that would put more Department of Human Services workers into elementary schools. The goal would be to help children and families get basic services, so educators can focus more on education. Much of the emphasis could be on Detroit, Flint, Saginaw and Pontiac.

**Insurance:** Snyder is expected to call for turning the state’s Office of Financial and Insurance Regulation into a full-fledged department. That could help make the state more attractive to insurance companies, his administration says. Snyder also is pushing for changes to Michigan’s no-fault auto insurance system, which he considers too costly. Snyder also will likely again call for changes to law related to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan. The Legislature passed the changes late last year, but Snyder vetoed them because they included language about abortion.

**Great Lakes:** Snyder has said he wants to help protect the Great Lakes basin by re-establishing a water use advisory council. He plans a governor’s summit of Great Lakes states for this summer to talk about invasive species and other issues.

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