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Week in Review

March 15, 2019

As a service to the clients and friends of Governmental Policy Group, Inc. and RH Resources we would like to extend the following weekly update of events happening around Capitol Square.

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

A new report from the Ohio Board of Pharmacy on the use of the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System (OARRS) found the number of prescription opioids that were dispensed in the state declined for the sixth consecutive year in 2018. According to the report, the total number of doses of opioids in 2018 was 468 million, down from a high of 793 million in 2012, a 41 percent drop in that time frame. Over the same period, the total number of opioid prescriptions given to Ohioans decreased by 4.6 million.

While the rate of new HIV infections among Ohio's injection drug users has doubled since 2012, the Center for Community Solutions (CCS) says syringe services programs (SSP) in the Buckeye State have exceeded that increase in the last two years. The organization says Ohio will need more state funding to prevent HIV, hepatitis C and other diseases transferred by dirty needles. The state currently has 16 syringe programs in Cleveland, Portsmouth, Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, Canton, Athens, Marion and Zanesville, and in Gallia, Summit, Lucas, Greene, Jefferson, Darke and Brown counties.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost recently named Dublin Police Chief Heinz von Eckartsberg the new assistant superintendent of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) beginning on Monday, March 25.

Attorney General Dave Yost launched Sunshine Week Monday, March 11 by releasing 2019's **Sunshine Laws Manual**, the state's one-stop resource on the Ohio Public Records and Open Meetings Acts. The manual, also known as the "Yellow Book," reflects the previous year's statutory changes and legal decisions affecting Ohio's open government laws. More on Ohio sunshine laws, including a link to 2019 Yellow Book, is available at www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Sunshine.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Tuesday announced the formation of a new Office of Professional Integrity focused on identifying and preventing potential conflicts of interest among his legal staff. This office is charged with cataloging the work and external relationships of the approximately 400 attorneys in Yost's office. Former First District Court of Appeals Judge Charles "Chip" Miller will lead the effort.

Attorney General Dave Yost announced that his office will litigate administrative hearings for two dozen nurses cited Thursday by the Ohio Board of Nursing (OBN) for their role in administering excessively high doses of fentanyl and other drugs to critically ill or end-of-life patients of Mount Carmel Health System. Families of victims have filed more than two dozen wrongful death lawsuits against the hospital and former Mount Carmel Dr. William Husel in Franklin County Common Pleas Court. Allegations have led to the termination or removal of Husel, other physicians, nurses and pharmacists from patient care.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Thursday announced that Jeffrey Scott, president of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police, will become the new executive director of the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy (OPOTA).

AUDITOR OF STATE

Per federal requirements, the Ohio Auditor's Office Thursday released findings from a yearly audit of Ohio's federal financial assistance programs for FY18. Ohio administers 338 federal programs from 23 federal agencies, with expenditures totaling \$27.8 billion in FY18. There were 34 findings related to nine state agencies including six findings involving questioned costs of at least \$222,078. There was a seventh finding regarding questioned costs, but the amount could not be determined.

The Ohio Auditor of State's Office will now review state agencies and local government entities for public records compliance during every ordinary audit, Auditor Keith Faber announced Tuesday during a Sunshine Week event. Faber said the new procedure will also include a public records "scorecard" that will be available on the auditor's website. He said audits will be rated on accessibility, responsiveness and further standards that are still being developed with help from interested parties. Implementation of the new process is expected to occur in July.

Additionally, Auditor of State Keith Faber said he is working with Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) and the Ohio News Media Association on legislation that would expand the Ohio Court of Claims public records complaint mediation process to also include complaints regarding violations of open meetings laws.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine announced Friday the formation of a "Pay for Success" public-private partnership on home visiting geared towards increasing participation in and availability of home visiting programs. The announcement, which DeWine made at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, came on the same day as the final report and recommendations of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Home Visitation. They broadly recommended greater collaboration among agencies to better facilitate home visiting programs statewide, as well as targeting increased participation in home visiting programs among specific populations. DeWine will be asking the Legislature to double the funding of Ohio's home visiting programs, investing an additional \$50 million over the biennium into evidence-based home visiting programs, bringing the total state funding for home visiting to \$90 million over two years.

Gov. Mike DeWine Tuesday unveiled his next budget proposal, announcing that funding for an additional 30 specialty courts would be included in his budget recommendation for the upcoming FY20-21 biennium. He made the announcement while on a swing through Eastern Ohio. The recommendation includes \$2.5 million in FY20 to add 15 specialty dockets and \$5 million in FY21 to support the newly created specialty dockets and fund an additional 15.

Gov. Mike DeWine made a second FY20-21 budget announcement Tuesday during his swing through Eastern Ohio -- this one to provide additional funds totaling \$22 million in the upcoming budget for county mental health and recovery boards for crisis stabilization. The recommendation includes a total of \$37 million in crisis stabilization investments. In order to expand and strengthen crisis access points, the governor recommends a new \$12 million investment in mobile response teams, infrastructure developments, and other gaps in Ohio's crisis service network. In addition, DeWine recommends providing \$10 million over the biennium to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for a new crisis stabilization fund to meet the needs of local communities.

Gov. Mike DeWine continued to roll out proposals from his upcoming executive budget on Wednesday, stopping in Akron to introduce a tax incentive to attract investment to Ohio's "Opportunity Zones." According to DeWine's office, Ohio has 320 Opportunity Zones across the state, which were identified by local communities as having a high potential for new investment, development and job creation. DeWine's proposal would provide a 10 percent, nonrefundable income tax credit to those who invest in the state's Opportunity Zone.

Rep. Mark Romanchuk (R-Mansfield) opened Wednesday's packed hearing of the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee by telling members and the audience that he plans to start hearings in earnest on the human services portion of the FY20-21 state budget on Monday, March 25. He said, while the schedule is still being finalized, he plans to hold four hearings a week on Mondays through Thursdays for about three to four weeks. He did, however, hold out the possibility of a Friday session. Wednesday's hearing focused solely on the state's Medicaid program, with a presentation by Legislative Service Commission (LSC) Principal Economist Ivy Chen.

The RecoveryOhio Advisory Council released its initial report Thursday, just under two months since members were named, and Gov. Mike DeWine said many of the report's 75 recommendations will be reflected in the budget released Friday morning and represent a "blueprint" for his office and the Legislature.

A proposed state water quality initiative would create a special H2Ohio Fund to provide approximately \$900 million over 10 years, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Thursday. The H2Ohio initiative, first mentioned during DeWine's "State of the State" address earlier this, will be introduced as part of his proposed FY20-21 operating budget, according to the governor's office.

House Speaker Larry Householder's (R-Glenford) office released the list of state agencies assigned to each of the five subcommittees of the House Finance Committee, ahead of Gov. Mike DeWine's official release of the executive proposal and next week's commencement of budget hearings.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

A bipartisan bill that would send extra funds to counties with high profile death penalty cases received its first hearing in an Ohio House committee on Thursday, with one of the sponsors citing the recent high profile murders of the Rhoden family in Pike County as a major reason for the need for the bill. Reps. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) and John Rogers (D-Mentor-on-the-Lake) gave sponsor testimony Thursday before the House Criminal Justice Committee on HB85, which they dubbed "the extreme capitol case funding bill."

EDUCATION

Local school leaders told the State Board of Education on Monday they're concerned the lack of specificity in new rules on student transportation could substantially increase their obligations to send buses to private schools. The Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) lawyer suggested in response that the rules be withdrawn for further revisions. Changes to Ohio Administrative Code 3301-83-05 seek to codify in rule standard procedures that have been in place since the 1980s. The local officials said those procedures have worked well, but the revised rule omits specific direction found in the procedures for determining when a private school student is eligible for transportation provided by the home district.

A study committee evaluating funding for online schools wrapped up public testimony on the topic Monday and plans soon to start meetings to puzzle out recommendations. Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) and Rep. Bob Cupp (R-Lima), co-chairs of the Joint E-School Funding Committee, said

they've got several important questions to consider, including whether and how state policy should differentiate among general education e-schools, dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) e-schools and virtual learning offered by traditional district schools.

The State Board of Education voted Tuesday to send an updated version of its graduation proposal to lawmakers, after hearing requests from educators to slow implementation and do more to scale back testing, and from business interests to address the potential for inconsistency in schools' application of the proposal. The board voted 14-1 to send the updated graduation proposal to lawmakers, meeting an April 1 deadline to submit recommendations set last year in 132-HB491 (Edwards), the vehicle used to enact a short-term graduation fix for the classes of 2019 and 2020. The proposal echoes recommendations made by the board late last year, but adds details of how the Ohio Department of Education will support school districts in implementation and describes feedback from the business community.

Meanwhile, the State Board of Education has a vacancy following the resignation David Brinegar, a manufacturing executive with Fulton Industries whom Gov. John Kasich had appointed shortly before leaving office. Brinegar resigned last week in a letter to Gov. Mike DeWine.

Leaders of the Ohio business community Monday announced the creation of Ohio Excels, a new non-partisan coalition of business leaders committed to ensuring that all Ohio students have access to excellent early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary education experiences. Members of the board of directors include Joseph Roman, Ohio Excels chairman and president and CEO of the Greater Cleveland Partnership; Theodore Adams vice president, company affairs, for LBrands; Alex Fischer, president and CEO of Columbus Partnership; Gary Z. Lindgren, president, Cincinnati Business Committee; Mary Beth Martin, executive director, The Farmer Family Foundation; Randell McShepard, vice president of public affairs and chief talent officer, RPM International Inc.; Daniel S. Peters, president, Lovett & Ruth Peters Foundation; Pat Tiberi, president and CEO of the Ohio Business Roundtable; and Margie Wright McGowan, sr. vice president for human resources, diversity and inclusion, Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.

Multiple witnesses from school districts across the state testified to the State Board of Education Tuesday, urging further changes to proposed rules regard preschool children eligible for special education. The proposed rules, up for five-year review, would make a variety of changes, some of which may lead to increased costs for schools districts and do a disservice to children with disabilities and their families, the local officials argued.

Auditor of State Keith Faber recently placed Niles City School District in a state of fiscal emergency after the school district failed to comply with its state approved financial recovery plan. On June 14, 2018, the auditor's office placed the district under fiscal watch, requiring the school district to develop a plan to restore its finances. Failure to comply has resulted in the auditor's placing the school district in a state of fiscal emergency.

The Joint Educational Oversight Committee (JEOC) held its first meeting of the session at the Riffe Center Thursday, where Chairman Bob Cupp (R-Lima) invited members, old and new, to offer suggestions as to the direction of the body. Cupp said he'd like to conduct the committee in a "facts-first" manner, seeking data to inform decisions. Vice Chair Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) said one of the underlying issues facing districts is the efficacy of the state report card, which she said disadvantaged poorer districts.

The Ohio History Connection will open a new exhibit all about sports on Saturday, March 16, when "Ohio -- Champion of Sports" begins its 19-month run at the state history museum.

ELECTIONS

Rep. David Leland (D-Columbus) appeared Wednesday before the House Federalism Committee to offer sponsor testimony on HB70, his bill to have Ohio join the "National Popular Vote Interstate Compact" of states agreeing to pledge their entire Electoral College delegation to the winner of the national popular vote rather than their specific state's vote. The use of the popular vote would only occur once states adding up to 270 electoral votes have joined the compact, Leland said, which would trigger the change without altering the U.S. Constitution. This iteration of the proposal is Leland's third such bill, as he co-sponsored 132-HB25 and 131-HB626 with former Rep. Dan Ramos.

ELECTIONS 2019

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Wednesday issued a new directive to enable voters who had their registrations cancelled under the supplemental process to be able to cast a ballot in the upcoming May 7 primary. The directive is the latest in a string issued by LaRose and his predecessor, former Secretary of State and now Lt. Gov. Jon Husted as part of the *Ohio A. Philip Randolph Institute et al. v. Husted* case challenging the way Ohio removes inactive voters from the rolls.

ENERGY

Backers of wind generation told House members Tuesday that Ohio's "effective moratorium" on new wind farms will force it to become a net importer of renewable energy as providers vie for wind energy credits to meet state portfolio standards. They were followed by a representative for a major generation company who said coal remains a key part of its all-of-the above strategy in 12 states, including Ohio.

ENVIRONMENT

The federal Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) is contributing to the destruction of monarch butterfly habitats, draining western aquifers and accelerating climate change, among other environmental problems, according to research from several universities and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). The new research, prepared by the University of California-Davis (UC Davis), Kansas State University (KSU) and University of Wisconsin (UW), provides "the most detailed and comprehensive assessment to date of the direct connection between U.S. biofuels policy and specific economic and field-level environmental changes following passage of the RFS 10 years ago," according to NWF.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) has cited Sunny Farms Landfill for failing to meet its first key deadline to reduce odors under orders the company signed on Jan. 31, 2019. The orders require Sunny Farms to take several definitive actions to reduce odors coming from the landfill, with deadlines for each action, according to Ohio EPA.

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) is seeking suggestions from the public on proposed funding priorities for the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF) for July 2019 through June 2020. A public meeting will be held Wednesday, March 27 to discuss the annual agenda, answer questions and accept public comments. OEEF provides grants for environmental education projects that encourage careers in environmental science and environmental engineering; improve air quality by reducing emissions; improve water quality by managing storm water and reducing nutrient loading into streams and lakes that can result in harmful algal blooms (HABs); and encourage habitat restoration to improve biodiversity and improve air and water quality.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Ohio Senate announced that 11 individuals have applied to fill the upcoming vacancy in the 20th Senate District. The current seat holder, Sen. Brian Hill (R-Zanesville), announced in February that he is resigning at the end of March to take a position as the CEO with the Guernsey-Muskingum Electric Cooperative. Hill was just appointed to the seat in December, succeeding now U.S. Rep. Troy Balderson (R-Zanesville).

Besides the heartbeat bill, SB23 (Roegner), the Senate also passed the following bills on Wednesday: SR41 (M. Huffman-Obhof) to urge Congress to enact a "Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act; SB10 (Wilson) which expands penalties for theft in office; and SB22 (Uecker) which reduces the minimum number of precinct election officials required when electronic poll books are used.

In a very short session that lasted just over eight minutes, the House passed a resolution that gives the House speaker and Senate president power to designate members or groups of members to prepare arguments for and against constitutional amendments appearing on the ballot. Rep. Jim Butler (R-Dayton) said HCR7 (Householder) is a resolution that they pass every session. The resolution passed unanimously.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) is sponsoring an exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing between now and July 31, 2019. That July 1969 landing saw Ohioan Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walk on the moon for the first time. The exhibit, in partnership with the Auglaize County Historical Society, the Armstrong Air and Space Museum and the Ohio History Connection, honors Armstrong, who has been named a "Great Ohioan." The exhibit, which is free, can be found in the Map Room.

In order for the state to stop hemorrhaging residents, Ohio must implement smarter policies to support workers, strengthen families, bolster communities and hold government accountable to taxpayers, House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) said Thursday. "Every year, more and more people leave the state in search of opportunity instead of staying here to obtain a brighter future. More people leave Ohio for a job than almost any other state in the country, and there's a reason," Sykes said during a Statehouse press conference, joined by other House Democrats to unveil their "Ohio Promise" legislative agenda.

In other action, the House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB50 (Greenspan) addressing intellectual property rights of charter county hospitals and their employees regarding discoveries, inventions or patents; the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out license plate and naming bills HB35 (Kick) and HB82 (Hoops) and HB107 (Brown-Lipps).

GOVERNOR

Two former Ohio governors have shown they aren't sitting on the sidelines on public policy debates, penning op-eds that call for new examinations of the death penalty and the environment. Former Gov. Bob Taft, now a distinguished research associate at the University of Dayton, raised concerns about Ohio's use of the death penalty in a column for the *Columbus Dispatch* that appeared on Sunday. Taft said he supports Gov. Mike DeWine's decision to delay three executions as the state searches for a new execution protocol but said it is time for the Ohio General Assembly to address other concerns dealing with executions. Meanwhile, former Gov. John Kasich wrote a column for *USA Today* on the environment, calling for climate solutions from free-market moderates.

Freshman legislator Rep. Jessica Miranda (D-Cincinnati) told *Hannah News* that a number of people have influenced her both as an elected official and small business owner, not the least of whom was her grandfather, a Korean War veteran, former prisoner of war and "proud member" of the United Auto Workers Local 863 in Cincinnati.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Richard A. Myser of St. Clairsville (Belmont County) to the Financial Planning and Supervision Commission of the village of Bridgeport for a term beginning March 13, 2019 and continuing at the pleasure of the governor.
- Mark E. Masters of Lucas (Richland County) reappointed to the North Central State College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Jan. 17, 2019 and ending Jan. 16, 2022.
- Gerald J. Bensman of Minster (Shelby County), Marvella Fletcher of Greenville (Darke County), and Elizabeth Gutmann, of Piqua (Miami County) reappointed to the Edison State Community College Board of Trustees for terms beginning Jan. 18, 2019 and ending Jan. 17, 2025.
- Bryan C. Black of Canal Winchester (Fairfield County), and Cy L. Prettyman of New Bloomington (Marion County) reappointed to the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board for terms beginning Jan. 16, 2019 and ending Jan. 15, 2022.
- Richard J. "Rick" Platt of Newark (Licking County) to the JobsOhio Board of Directors for a term beginning March 13, 2019 and ending July 5, 2019.
- Judy Wolford of Ashville (Pickaway County) to the Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission for a term beginning March 13, 2019 and ending Sept. 3, 2020.
- Brian M. Perera of Upper Arlington (Franklin County), and Erik F. Yassenoff, of Upper Arlington (Franklin County) to the Sunset Review Commission for terms beginning March 13, 2019 and ending Dec. 31, 2020.
- Michelle L. Reynolds of Canal Winchester (Franklin County) to the Ohio Commission on Fatherhood for a term beginning March 13, 2019 and continuing at the pleasure of the governor.
- Timothy G. Anderson of Athens (Athens County), Paul B. Graham of Worthington (Franklin County), and Stacey L. Hoffman of Cleveland Heights (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board for terms beginning Jan. 15, 2019 and ending Jan. 14, 2022.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

On Tuesday, Rea Hederman, executive director of the Economic Research Center and the vice president of policy at The Buckeye Institute, told the House Health Committee, "Ohio can leverage free-market solutions to improve health for all Ohioans without breaking the bank." Hederman cited a 2018 federal government report, "Choice and Competition in Health Care," which states, "Many government laws, regulations, guidance, requirements and policies, at both the federal and state level, have reduced incentives for price- and non-price competition, increased barriers to entry, promoted and allowed excessive consolidation and resulted in health care markets that lack the benefits of vigorous competition. Increasing competition and innovation in the health care sector will reduce costs and increase quality of care -- improving the lives of Americans."

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) approved a rules package banning the controversial plant kratom, which some claim safely benefits health and others argue causes health problems and death. The rules will now be filed with the Common Sense Initiative (CSI). According to OBP, kratom

contains the main active alkaloids mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine and has a long history of use in Southeast Asia as an opium substitute.

JUDICIAL

Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Michael Holbrook recently denied a motion by seven public school districts to enter litigation involving the Educational Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) and pursue claims against Third Wave Communications, Midwest Communications & Media and Grant Street Consultants.

Suspended or former jurists from Cuyahoga, Summit and Lucas counties account for the lion's share of \$39,500 in state restitution Tuesday to 19 victims of attorney theft. The Board of Commissioners of the Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection cited eight former or suspended attorneys for financial misappropriation along with one lawyer who died before completing agreed services.

The Ohio Supreme Court announced the launch Tuesday of online training sessions for individuals interested in becoming court interpreters or improving their interpreting skills for legal proceedings. Funded by the State Justice Institute, training modules aim to prepare individuals who seek credentialing as court interpreters. Each online training session includes a lesson plan and a video presentation. The self-paced and language-neutral trainings are available at the Ohio Supreme Court's website.

LOBBYISTS

Long-time Cincinnati Bell lobbyist and more recently president of The Colwell Group, Christopher Colwell Sr., died at home on Friday, March 8, according to an obituary published in the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. He had been battling head and neck cancer. He was 59.

The Montrose Group LLC, a Columbus-based consulting firm, announced Wednesday the hiring of Tim Biggam as its director of government relations.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Significant deficiencies and material weakness, indeterminable fund balances and unreconciled journals and ledgers have prompted Auditor of State Keith Faber to place the village of Harrisburg (Franklin County) in a state of fiscal caution. The village's 2015-2016 audit found the village out of compliance with Ohio law. Auditors found the village's appropriations exceeding estimated resources and expenditures exceeding appropriations in multiple funds. Fund balances cannot be determined for 2017 and 2018 because the village is not reconciled. The village has not reconciled its account journals and ledgers with the bank. The last time the village reconciled was over two years ago.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Ohio patients will soon be able to purchase medical marijuana edibles and oils, among other products, now that the first processor has received its operating license from the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC). Grow Ohio LLC in Newtown Township (Muskingum County) can now manufacture products in the state. Under its administrative rules, DOC can award up to 40 processor licenses.

A total of 5,465 unique patients purchased medical marijuana from Ohio dispensaries through Feb. 28, according to the Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP). Dispensaries began selling medical marijuana on Jan. 16. There are currently nine dispensaries legally operating in the state.

Legislation that would legalize the production and sale of hemp and hemp-derived products attracted proponent testimony from a wide variety of interest groups during its hearing in the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Wednesday. In addition to obvious supporters such as hemp and cannabis groups, SB57 (S. Huffman-Hill) enjoys support from grocers, farmers, wholesalers, massage therapists, retailers and business groups such as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB).

NATURAL RESOURCES

Woolpert engineering firm and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recently received the 2018 Outstanding Special Purpose Bridge Award from the Association for Bridge Construction and Design (ABCD) for the Hemlock Pedestrian Bridge. The suspension bridge, located in Hocking Hills State Park, was modeled after a bridge featured in the movie "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom."

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recently treated more than 5,000 eastern hemlock trees in Hocking Hills State Park and Hocking State Forest across 1,400 acres to protect high-value hemlock forests from the damaging invasive insect, hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA). HWA is a small, aphid-like insect native to Asia that threatens the health and sustainability of hemlock in the eastern United States.

PENSIONS

Chairmanship of the Ohio Retirement Study Council passed from the House to the Senate this year, and so did Canton Republican Kirk Schuring, so he'll remain as head of the panel. Members re-elected the senator to the role and named Rep. Rick Carfagna (R-Westerville) as vice chairman Thursday at the initial meeting of the council for the 133rd General Assembly.

POLITICS

Members of the Ohio Oil and Gas Association (OOGA) and sponsors of Vice President Mike Pence's address to its annual gathering Friday repeated President Donald Trump's favorite refrain and praised the administration for supporting fossil fuel production in Ohio and the U.S.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Controlling Board approved all items on its agenda without objection on Monday. Items from the Ohio Adjutant General's Department (Item 18), Ohio Department of Commerce (Item 23) and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (Item 42) were deferred at the requests of the agencies.

Inspector General Randall Meyer Thursday issued a new report finding an employee in the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) had been doing work for a private business during days and times when she was also working for ODM. The investigation began from a complaint the Inspector General's Office received in October 2017 that alleged Brandi Potts, a financial analyst with ODM, had been working for a private business and misused state-issued equipment and email.

TAXATION

Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, who preceded Vice President Mike Pence at the annual meeting of the Ohio Oil and Gas Association (OOGA) Friday, reminded members and attendees of Trump's support for fossil fuel production and consumption. He went on to announce that "there will be no severance tax increase in our upcoming budget."

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Elderly Ohioans and other low-income customers of AT&T will lose their federal Lifeline discount for landline phone service on Tuesday, June 11, the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) announced Wednesday. The commission granted AT&T Ohio's request to pull out of the federal program, which currently accounts for most of the phone company's landline customers. Its Lifeline subscribers exceed 7,300 Ohioans, according to the latest federal data. "AT&T Ohio will continue to provide landline telephone service to all of its current customers; however, customers wishing to continue to receive discounts through the Lifeline program will need to find another telephone provider," PUCO said, directing Ohioans to a list of telecommunication providers offering Lifeline discounts at www.lifelinesupport.org.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

In his clearest statement on the transportation budget to date, Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said Monday that any hike in the state fuel tax would be "certainly not more" and "likely less" than the House-passed increase of 10.7 cents for gasoline and 20 cents for diesel. Speaking with reporters after nonvoting session, Obhof said a "significant number" of senators agree with him that HB62 (Oelslager) -- what he called the "biggest transportation budget ever" -- places too high of a tax hike on Ohioans, though he declined to give an alternative figure.

Sen. Rob McColley's (D-Napoleon) office said the substitute version of HB62 will tentatively be rolled out at a press conference on Monday, March 18 (time to be announced), with amendments to it due tentatively by 3 p.m. on Tuesday, March 19.

The Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee heard new testimony Monday on the transportation budget HB62 (Oelslager) from Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks, who previously testified before the committee on Feb. 26. Marchbanks made a renewed push for Gov. Mike DeWine's full 18-cent motor fuel tax increase, as he said the House's reductions (see showed he had not done his "due diligence" in explaining why the full amount was needed. The revenue shortfall is not a new issue, he said, noting concerns were raised about the lack of a longer-term infrastructure funding plan in the previous transportation budget and that the General Assembly had created three study committees researching future transportation funding means. ODOT recommended an 18-cent increase, he said, because "the state has avoided making the difficult decision to find a long-term solution to our transportation revenue shortfall for more than a decade."

UTILITIES

The PUCO Nominating Council Thursday sent the names of William Schuck, Eugene Krebs, Bryce McKenney and Dennis Deters on to the governor, who will fill the vacant seat on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

PASSED BY SENATE

SB10 THEFT IN OFFICE PENALTIES (Sen. Steve Wilson) To expand the penalties for theft in office based on the amount stolen and to include as restitution audit costs of the entity that suffered the loss.

Vote 32-0

SB22 REDUCE MINIMUM PRECINCT ELECTION OFFICIALS (Sen. Joe Uecker) To reduce the minimum number of precinct election officials in a multi-precinct polling location in which electronic pollbooks are used.

Vote 32-0

SB23 PROHIBIT ABORTION-DETECTABLE HEARTBEAT (Sen. Kristina Roegner) To generally prohibit an abortion of an unborn human individual with a detectable heartbeat and to create the Joint Legislative Committee on Adoption Promotion and Support.

Vote 19-13

ADOPTED BY SENATE

SR41 URGE CONGRESS-ENACT BORN-ALIVE ABORTION SURVIVORS PROTECTION ACT (Sen. Matt Huffman, Sen. Larry Obhof) To urge the Congress of the United States, as expeditiously as possible, to enact a Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act.

Vote 32-0

HOUSE:

ADOPTED BY HOUSE

HCR7 BALLOT ISSUE COMMENTS (Rep. Larry Householder) To delegate to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives authority to designate groups of members to prepare arguments for and against amendments to the Ohio Constitution proposed by the General Assembly, a person or persons to prepare an argument for any law, section, or item submitted to the electors by referendum petition, and a person or persons to prepare an argument against any constitutional amendment proposed by initiative petition

Vote 92-0