



GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC.

RH RESOURCES

17 SOUTH HIGH STREET – SUITE 245

COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215-3413

PHONE: 614-461-9335

FAX: 614-461-9336



Week in Review

March 22, 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.

AGRICULTURE

Speaking to the House Agriculture and Rural Development Committee Tuesday, Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelanda told members the department would be honing-in on amusement ride safety and water quality issues in 2019, among others.

Hank Williams Jr., Gabriel Iglesias, Toby Keith and REO Speedwagon are among the acts that will appear at the 2019 Ohio State Fair. The diverse line-up, announced this week, all will perform in the indoor WCOL Celeste Center at the Ohio State Fairgrounds. Tickets can be purchased online at www.ticketmaster.com/OhioStateFair. Concert tickets purchased before arriving at the fair include fair admission.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine joined representatives from Mercy Health and the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) Wednesday to announce a new partnership among the two organizations and

the state aimed at promoting the health and well-being of Ohio's student athletes and youth in general. Mercy and OHSAA are entering into a three-year partnership in which Mercy will be the primary health education provider for OHSAA's member schools and student athletes on topics like preventing and recovering from injury, recognizing and treating concussions and understanding health effects of actions such as hydration, stretching and nutrition.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Gov. Mike DeWine revealed the entirety of his 2020-21 executive budget on Friday, announcing a biennial spending plan that he said raises no new taxes and bases spending increases on anticipated revenue growth over the next two years. The biennial budget would increase General Revenue Fund (GRF) spending by \$1.18 billion for FY20 and \$1.62 billion in FY21. It calls for state-only GRF spending of nearly \$24.0 billion in FY20 and \$24.8 billion in FY21, while all funds spending will be \$74.295 billion in FY20 and \$76.01 billion in FY21. Another calculation for GRF expenditures is based upon state and federal Medicaid spending, which for FY20 totals \$33.7 billion and \$35.3 billion in FY21. "For too long we tinkered at the margins," DeWine said. "Now is the time to tackle our unfinished business." DeWine was joined by Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Office of Budget and Management Director Kimberly Murnieks in making the announcement. Husted said that as a former lawmaker, the budget hits the right notes because it is balanced and doesn't raise taxes.

A new fund totaling \$250M in FY20 and \$300M in FY21 to support wraparound services, mental health counseling and other needs of at-risk students in Ohio schools represents the bulk of new K-12 education spending in Gov. Mike DeWine's first executive budget proposal. DeWine said Friday the funding will help ensure struggling children are able to learn, and allow schools to redirect core funding they've dedicated to those purposes back to the classroom. School districts will be encouraged to partner with nonprofits, educational service centers, county mental health, addiction and job and family services agencies and others to provide the services. Schools won't get additional general aid, but will receive at least what they did the year prior, DeWine said.

Also in the proposed budget, charter schools that outperform nearby district schools on state tests and enroll a majority of students from low-income families could share in a new funding pool. The executive budget includes \$30 million in each fiscal year to support per-pupil payments for charters earning the designation "school of quality." According to DeWine's office, getting that designation requires meeting certain criteria such as scoring better than the local district on the state report card performance index two years in a row.

On Thursday, Superintendent Paolo DeMaria presented the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) budget proposal to the House Finance Committee, noting that all but a tiny sliver of the billions of dollars directed to K-12 education goes to local schools. Also during Thursday's meeting, Rep. Gary Scherer (R-Circleville), vice chairman of the committee, shared he's heard about an inconsistent ability to claim the small business income deduction in school districts that levy income taxes. Scherer said it relates to whether districts impose an all-income tax, or an earned income tax. He said after the hearing he's interested in creating consistency and speculated the problem might have arisen amid the evolution of the business deduction, which was modified and expanded over a few budget cycles.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) would all receive significant overall funding increases under Gov. DeWine's proposed FY20-21 operating budget. While a portion of the funding

hikes are due to each department's new H2Ohio line item, the DeWine administration is also proposing notable increases for state parks and preserves, oil and gas well plugging, soil and water conservation districts, meat inspections, amusement ride inspections, diesel air pollution mitigation efforts and marsh restoration.

The H2Ohio water quality initiative would get more than \$85 million in FY20, with ODNR's line item being \$46.2 million, ODAg's being \$30.3 million and Ohio EPA's being \$8.675 million. The H2Ohio line item is \$0 for all departments in FY21.

Gov. DeWine's executive budget proposal includes a host of new proposals in higher education and post-secondary education, aimed at preparing both current workers and younger students for a changing economy and job market. The budget proposal increases the General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriation for the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) by 3.5 percent to \$2.7 billion in FY20 and by 3.2 percent to \$2.8 billion in FY2021. All funding increases by 3.3 percent to \$2.7 billion in 2020 and 3.2 percent to \$2.8 billion in 2021. State share of instruction in public higher education institutions is also slated for a slight increase of 1.1 percent in FY20 to just under \$2 billion, and 1 percent in FY21 to just over \$2 billion.

On Thursday, Chancellor Randy Gardner described the administration's budget proposal as a "student-focused" package aimed at addressing costs of higher education and tackling workforce needs during testimony to the House Finance Committee. Gardner highlighted such cost-saving efforts as institution of a tuition guarantee program for all undergraduates at Ohio universities, expanded funding for the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) and Choose Ohio First scholarship, promotion of College Credit Plus and expansion of the pilot Community College Acceleration Project, which provides student services and supports to increase graduation rates.

Ohio's prisons and some of the state's court functions are set to get increases in the proposed FY20-21 biennial budget. The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) would see a 3.4 percent increase in FY20 under the plan, going from about \$1.77 billion in FY19 to \$1.84 billion in FY20, and a 3.7 percent increase to about \$1.91 billion in FY21, according to documents released by the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). DeWine also announced the budget includes an additional \$5 million in appropriations to create at least 30 more specialized courts over the biennium. He supports the specialty dockets because they give judges the flexibility to order defendants to treatment rather than sentencing them to jail.

Ohio's prison system needs to address overcrowding and increase staff if it wants to improve its recidivism rate and prepare more inmates for successful reentry to society, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) Director Annette Chambers-Smith said Thursday in budget testimony to the House Finance Committee. Chambers-Smith outlined initiatives in three areas to reach the goal: family engagement and empowerment; treatment for severe mental illness and avoiding restrictive housing; and community investment.

Advocacy and research groups said Monday that Gov. Mike DeWine's budget proposal sounds hopeful notes on important topics but lacks the resources to make big changes after more than a decade of tax cuts. Innovation Ohio convened a conference call Monday for critiques on the budget proposal from its staff as well as other groups including Policy Matters Ohio, Children's Defense Fund-Ohio and One Ohio Now. Participants said they were intrigued by some elements of the proposal but needed to see more details.

Over a half billion dollars separates the revenue estimates of the governor's Office of Budget and Management (OBM) and the Legislature's Legislative Service Commission (LSC) for the FY20-21 biennium with LSC's estimate coming in \$508.2 million below that of OBM. That difference would be significant any budget period but could be more consequential this go around given DeWine's assertion the proposed budget bases spending increases on anticipated revenue growth over the next two years. For example, \$500 million is over half of the \$900 million the administration is proposing to set aside for the H2Ohio Initiative or it is just slightly less than the total of \$550 million being proposed to support a variety of wrap around services in Ohio schools.

The House Finance Committee continued plumbing Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed FY20-21 budget, taking Wednesday morning to hear from the six human service department heads. Ohio Department of Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran led off, with her testimony raising questions about how Medicaid spending growth rates are calculated and about the oversight of managed care plans (MCPs) and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs). The directors provided some additional information about the various DeWine human service initiatives, pointing to which departments have the prime responsibility for each.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Hundreds of people converged Wednesday on Capitol Square to advocate for trauma and addiction programs and sentencing reform to address the needs of survivors of crime. Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice called a press conference to highlight priorities and hear from survivors, as well as lawmakers interested in advancing their cause. Policies the group is advocating for include expanding access for victim compensation and services for family members of survivors; elimination of barriers that deny victim services based on past convictions; consistent, stable funding for trauma recovery centers for crime survivors started by Gov. Mike DeWine during his time as attorney general; and expanded addiction treatment options and reclassification (including retroactive application) of some drug crimes as misdemeanors, in reflection of the fact that many survivors struggle with addiction because of unaddressed trauma.

Shakyra Diaz and John Cutler of the Alliance for Safety and Justice told the House Criminal Justice Committee Thursday that while previous sentencing changes haven't had the predicted impact on the state's prison population, those reforms still have saved the state millions of dollars, recommending the state build on sentencing overhauls such as 129-HB86 (Blessing-Heard) and those included in 132-HB49 (R. Smith), the previous biennial budget.

DISASTERS

As part of a coordinated effort with the Ohio Committee for Severe Weather Awareness (OCSWA), Gov. Mike DeWine proclaimed March 17-23 Severe Weather Awareness Week and encouraged all Ohioans to learn what to do to protect themselves from spring and summer weather hazards, including home emergencies.

Gov. Mike DeWine Wednesday declared a state of emergency in 37 Ohio counties that suffered serious highway damage following severe weather that started in February. The emergency proclamation will allow the Ohio Department of Transportation and local governments to access federal emergency relief funds. The counties included in Wednesday's emergency proclamation include: Adams, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Butler, Carroll, Clermont, Clinton, Columbiana, Coshocton, Gallia, Greene, Guernsey, Hamilton, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson,

Jefferson, Knox, Lawrence, Licking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, Preble, Ross, Scioto, Tuscarawas, Vinton, Warren and Washington.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted addressed members of the JobsOhio Board Thursday, praising their work as "a unique tool" for the state, though saying they can continue to evolve and improve. There should be a "balance" on JobsOhio providing information transparently when possible to instill public confidence, DeWine said. He also said he would like to see "more coordination" between JobsOhio and TourismOhio while Husted said there should be a "great partnership" between JobsOhio and education institutions, including state colleges and universities, private higher education institutions and career centers, to market the talent available in Ohio. DeWine added higher education institutions should be part of how state officials "sell Ohio."

EDUCATION

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) will host a statewide series of town hall meetings for families of students with disabilities between now and April 17. Discussion topics will include developing recommendations to improve educational experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities in Ohio.

After shepherding a broad school deregulation measure through the previous General Assembly, Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) is returning in the new term with a follow up bill focused specifically on career-technical education. Presenting SB89 to the Senate Education Committee on Tuesday, Huffman said the legislation was drafted in the same way as his previous bill, 132-SB216 -- by convening superintendents and asking for their suggestions. Among the nearly two dozen proposed changes to law are the following:

- Prohibiting data reporting changes within 30 days of the end of a reporting period, and requiring the state to pick a pilot career center to test new reporting requirements.
- Barring the state from challenging or overruling collective funding agreements between schools that share students, such as one between a traditional district and a career center.
- Eliminating WebXam requirements for career-technical education programs that also required passage of a credentialing exam.
- Giving joint vocational school districts other options to make up for missed hours as a result of calamity days declared by students' home districts.

Dissatisfied with the operation of academic distress commissions (ADCs) in the state and under the threat of even more being formed, a number of legislators have introduced bills that would alternately place a moratorium on their creation or abolish them. Reps. Kent Smith (D-Euclid) and Steve Hambley (R-Brunswick) testified on their HB127 in the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee to set a moratorium on ADCs, and Reps. Joe Miller (D-Amherst) and Don Jones (R-Freeport) said they're introducing a bill to abolish the three commissions now operating in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland.

ENERGY

The Ohio Oil and Gas Association (OOGA) presented before the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee Tuesday, where Executive Vice President Matthew Hammond detailed the recent growth seen in oil and gas production and the lingering challenges the state and country face with energy infrastructure. Hammond emphasized the major growth that Ohio has seen just in the past year, when oil production increased by 20 percent and natural gas production increased by 34 percent between 2017 and 2018 alone.

The House Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy Generation continued its schedule of informal presentations Tuesday with members hearing from Project General Manager Peter Rigney of the natural gas-fired Oregon Clean Energy Center and Executive Vice President Jolene Thompson of American Municipal Power (AMP), which operates four hydro-electric plants on the Ohio River.

ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) removed the "beneficial use impairment" (BUI) designation from the Cuyahoga River, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) announced Monday. "Confirming research showing continued improvements to local water quality, USEPA has agreed with Ohio EPA's recommendation that restrictions on fish consumption in the Cuyahoga River -- from Gorge Dam to Lake Erie -- can be eased," Ohio EPA said.

FEDERAL

Both of Ohio's U.S. senators voted in favor of overturning President Donald Trump's emergency declaration on the border when it recently passed the Senate. Trump vetoed the measure on Friday, and it does not appear that there are sufficient votes to overturn the veto. While U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) had been an early opponent to the declaration, U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) added his opposition in a floor speech, saying that he agrees there is a crisis at the Southern border and supports Trump's border security plan, but raised concerns that the declaration sets a bad precedent counter to the U.S. Constitution. He also expressed concerns that the needed funds would be tied up in the courts and would take funds away from important military construction projects, including a number of important projects in Ohio.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) announced Wednesday that he has joined with U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) and U.S. Reps. Katherine Clark (D-MA) and Don Young (R-AK) to reintroduce the Higher Education Access and Success for Homeless and Foster Youth Act, which he said would help homeless and foster students get the support they need to access and succeed in higher education.

U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH) Friday announced they have introduced the "Pension Accountability Act" that they said will help protect Ohioans from having their pensions cut with no say in the process. The senators said the bill will give workers and retirees a seat at the table when a looming multiemployer pension bankruptcy may require major pension cuts.

U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH) both praised President Donald Trump's signing of the Natural Resources Management Act, which the senators noted includes provisions permanently reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and protecting the Ohio and Erie Canalway National Heritage Area. Reauthorizing these funds will ensure LWCF can continue to support the acquisition and development of lands for state parks, national parks, national

forests and other public lands across the state and nation, according to Brown's office. The package also includes a measure that will give state and federal lands each at least 40 percent of expenditures from the fund and requires a specific allocation for projects that improve access to isolated or inaccessible recreation areas.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Ohio sports gamblers would be able to legally place bets on their phones from anywhere in the state under SB111 proposed by Sens. John Eklund (R-Chardon) and Sean O'Brien (D-Cortland). Under the bill, the state's four casinos and seven racinos would be allowed to send an application to the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) to conduct a sports wagering operation. Those entities could then contract with a "licensed management services provider" -- companies like FanDuel or DraftKings, for example -- to run their online sports betting pools. Sports gamblers could also place bets at more traditional sportsbooks inside the casinos and racinos. All sports gamblers would have to be at least 21 years old.

The Ohio Casino Control Commission unanimously approved a rules package for fantasy sports contests during its Wednesday meeting. William Cox, a staff attorney for the commission, said the basic framework of the rules comes from the same framework of the rules for casinos. He noted that the licenses are tiered based on the number of players a company has, something that he said was discussed when the 132-HB132 (McColley) was being considered by the Legislature.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Freshman legislator Rep. Sara Carruthers (R-Hamilton) told *Hannah News* that diving into the political sphere was a challenge. She said she feels Gov. Mike DeWine will help improve the impression that many Ohioans have of politicians. Carruthers also has a high opinion of President Donald Trump.

Ohio Speaker of the House Larry Householder (R-Glenford) Tuesday unveiled new cameras in Statehouse Hearing Room 017 that will allow Ohioans to stream the committee hearings in real time, as well as later on-demand via the Ohio Channel. Altogether, a total of nine hearing rooms will have cameras.

The Sunset Review Committee met Tuesday to begin its review of agencies, hearing from the County Sheriff's Standard Car Making and Uniform Commission; ABLE Account Program Advisory Board; Broadcast Educational Media Commission; Brain Injury Advisory Committee; and Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission and Criminal Sentencing Advisory Committee.

The Ohio House unanimously agreed to HB50 (Greenspan), which gives the same rights for inventions created by employees at county charter hospitals as those at other public research and medical facilities.

In Senate floor action Thursday, the upper chamber unanimously passed SB9 (M. Huffman). Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) said the legislation will require health insurance companies to be more transparent with small businesses.

Ohio Citizen Action Thursday asked House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) to remove Rep. Dick Stein (R-Norwalk) as the co-chairman of the House Subcommittee on Energy Generation

after he penned a newspaper column in the *Norwalk Reflector* questioning the value of wind energy. The group questioned Stein's impartiality.

The Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus (OLTC) held its first meeting of the 133rd General Assembly on Wednesday, OLTC Co-Chair Sen. Sean O'Brien (D-Cortland) announced. "Whether hiking, biking, horseback riding, kayaking or canoeing, chances are most Ohioans have spent time out on Ohio's incredible trails system," O'Brien said. "The benefits of trails are countless and, with this caucus, we hope to make them even better and preserve them for the enjoyment of future generations."

In other action, the House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB61 (Lanese-Liston) which exempts personal information of forensic mental health providers, etc. from the Public Records Law; the House Ways and Means Committee reported out HB18 (Vitale-Crawley) which exempts veterans' disability severance payments from the income tax; and the House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB59 (Wiggam) which designates April as "Ohio Native Plant Month."

GOVERNOR

Talking with the press Wednesday, Gov. Mike DeWine offered his thoughts on the progress of the transportation budget, remaining adamant that his originally proposed 18-cent increase in the state's motor fuel tax is necessary. Asked about the differing revenue projections between the Legislative Service Commission's estimate and the Office of Budget and Management's estimate in terms of the operating budget, DeWine said both estimates were based on strong models and historical data and should be considered trustworthy.

GREAT LAKES

The "Lake Erie Ecosystem" has filed a motion to intervene as a party in the lawsuit against the recently-passed Toledo Lake Erie Bill of Rights (LEBOR) law. The "ecosystem including living and non-living components in a surface and underground watershed" is joined by Toledoans for Safe Water (TSW) in the motion to intervene in the case, *Drew Farm Partnership v. City of Toledo*. Farmers challenged the charter amendment in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio shortly after Toledo residents voted to enact LEBOR last month.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

A new coalition of health and consumer advocates, labor unions and health care providers announced its formation Thursday, arguing that everyone deserves to be able to afford the medication they need. The Coalition for Fair Drug Prices consists of 12 organizations: Families USA, the AFL-CIO, the Medicare Rights Center, Community Catalyst, the National Partnership for Women and Families, Doctors for America, the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut, SEIU, Public Citizen, the Center for American Progress, the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative and Health Access California.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission (OCSC) gave SB3's (Eklund) drug sentencing overhaul a mixed review Thursday as members split over a proposal to hold charges in "abeyance" while

offenders seek treatment but voiced overwhelming support for the misdemeanor sentencing scheme opposed by Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor, Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA) and Ohio Judicial Conference. OCSC took a series of votes on various provisions of SB3, though a majority of roll calls were informal as the commission lost its quorum to legislative hearings scheduled Thursday for lawmakers and agency chiefs.

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor urged the state's 44,000 lawyers to fill out a survey about their pro bono work for Ohioans who can't afford legal services. The deadline for completing the short survey Friday, April 5. It can be found online at <https://www.sc.ohio.gov/AttySvcs/survey/>.

Summit County Common Pleas Judge Mary Margaret Rowlands is one of 20 worldwide selected to speak at the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women at United Nations headquarters in New York City with colleagues from Argentina, Israel, Canada, Mexico and the Philippines as part of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ).

LIBRARIES

Technology-based workforce training can provide "real-world fundamentals" to help address larger societal issues such as economic disparities and job opportunities, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said Monday during a "Grow with Google" event at the Columbus Metropolitan Library's main branch. Grow with Google community engagement leader Erica Swanson said the "economic opportunity initiative" will be meeting with community leaders, small businesses, job seekers, students and youth to share tools and resources Google offers and to provide training on how to use them.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Ohio consumers have spent nearly \$2.2 million on medical marijuana since the opening day of sales, according to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). Total sales were \$2,173,990 from Jan. 16 through March 17, MMCP said in a news release. Dispensaries sold 288 pounds of marijuana over that time period.

A new cannabis educational facility is set to open in Columbus, the Cleveland School of Cannabis (CSC) has announced. The new branch will be located at 3700 Corporate Dr. in Columbus, CSC said. Ohio State Board of Career Colleges and Schools Executive Director John Ware told *Hannah News* that CSC's Columbus facility is not yet approved for in-person instruction, but can be used as a recruitment office for its online courses.

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) has awarded three more dispensary certificates of operation, the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) announced Thursday. The following dispensaries can now legally operate in Ohio: Terrasana Labs at 656 Grandview Ave. in Columbus; Terrasana Labs at 1800 E. State St. in Fremont; and Terrasana Labs at 10500 Antenucci Rd. in Garfield Heights.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Ohio received permission Friday from the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) to require enrollees in Medicaid expansion to spend 20 hours per week working, looking for employment, getting training or pursuing other approved "community engagement" activity. Ohio's

proposal for a Section 1115 demonstration waiver, required under language in the current state budget, is effective through February 2024, according to a letter from Seema Verma, CMS administrator. The waiver includes exemptions for those 50 or older, parent caretakers, people with chronic conditions and people meeting work requirements in other federal assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The state has power to approve "limited good cause exceptions" for reasons such as illness or family emergencies. According to ODM, 58 percent of people in the expansion population are currently employed a broad coalition of health and human services groups criticized the federal government's approval of work requirements for Ohioans enrolled in Medicaid expansion, saying the decision will reduce health care access.

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF), which represents hundreds of advocacy organizations, said it was disappointed in the CMS decision and urged "thorough and inclusive" rulemaking on the requirements and increased aid for counties to implement them.

MENTAL HEALTH

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) Monday named Merissa McKinstry as deputy director of hospital services. In her new role, McKinstry will oversee administrative operations for Ohio's six, state-run regional psychiatric hospitals.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

The Ohio Department of Education recently welcomed more than 250 students from several dozen high schools around the state to celebrate their commitments to serve in the U.S. military. High school seniors and juniors who are entering service academies or have committed to serve as active duty, Reserve or National Guard members took part in the Armed Forces Career Commitment Ceremony at the Columbus Center of Science and Industry (COSI).

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ten new state wildlife officers from the 29th Wildlife Officer Pre-Service Training Academy have been sworn in, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

Small numbers of dead fish may be common in ponds and small lakes this spring, according to ODNR. Winter die-offs of fish that result from long periods of heavy ice and snow cover on small waters are referred to as "winterkills." These fish kills may occur in some Ohio waters as ice and snow from the past few months give way to spring, ODNR said.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation recently released its 2018 annual report that reported Ohio's legal aids helped 118,657 Ohioans last year. The group said legal aids helped 4,402 veterans, 15,877 seniors and 8,904 survivors of domestic violence in 2018. Ohio's legal aids solve legal challenges to help improve the financial security, health, and safety of low-income Ohioans.

POLITICS

The Ohio Democratic Party announced Tuesday that U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) will be the keynote speaker at the party's annual Legacy Dinner. The dinner will be held on Friday, May 17. The time and location will be announced at a later date.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Col. Richard S. Fambro officially became the superintendent of the Ohio State Highway Patrol during a ceremony at the patrol's training academy on Monday, while Marla K. Gaskill was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, becoming the first woman to hold the position in patrol history. Fambro also represents a first, being the first African American to hold the position of superintendent. He succeeds former superintendent, Col. Paul A. Pride, who had led the patrol since August 2013.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose Thursday announced 10,084 new entities filed to do business in Ohio in February, an increase of 450 when compared to the same month in 2018. January's numbers showed a strong start to 2019, and February kept that trend going, LaRose's office said. So far this year, business filings are running 12.7 percent ahead of last year's record-breaking pace.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The proposed transportation budget, HB62 (Oelslager), cleared the Ohio Senate this week and is likely headed to a conference committee once the House takes up the changes the upper chamber made to the bill over the course of the week, beginning with a sub bill on Tuesday and concluding with floor amendments on Thursday. The Senate version passed 24-6 on Thursday, notably with Sen. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon), chair of the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee which handled the bill, voting no on the bill. Others voting against the measure included Sens. Matt Huffman (R-Lima), Tina Maharath (D-Columbus), Michael Rulli (R-Salem), Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) and Vernon Sykes (D-Akron). Those not present for the vote were Sens. Lou Terhar (R-Cincinnati), Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) and Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland).

Changes made in the Senate over the course of a sub bill, omnibus amendment and floor amendments include the following:

- Takes the proposed gas and diesel tax hike to 6 cents/gallon -- less than a third of what Gov. Mike DeWine proposed. It would be effective July 1, 2019.
- Funds public transportation at \$55 million per year, up from the \$46.5 million accepted by the Senate committee but much lower than the \$100 million per year passed by the House. In addition the Senate funds it out of the General Revenue Fund (GRF) while the House's proposal uses federal flex funds.
- Removes the 150-mile restriction on heavy hauling permits.
- Restores force account limits to current law.
- Requires \$500,000 be spent on repairs to the Kenny Road dock on North Bass Island in Ottawa County.

- Increases the Ohio Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from 10 percent to 30 percent of an individual's federal tax credit. It also removes the 50 percent EITC credit cap for taxpayers with an income higher than \$20,000 a year. McColley told reporters the EITC is still non-refundable.
- Sets the effective date for the new electric and hybrid vehicle registration fees to Jan. 1, 2020. Additionally, new language specifies that revenue from these fees must be used for roads and bridges.
- Reinserts provisions allowing municipalities and townships to levy an additional \$5 registration fee.
- Reinstates the requirement that vehicles have two license plates.
- Removes the House-included provision that would have transferred \$5 million per year from the oil and gas well fund to local governments whose infrastructure has been negatively affected by drillers.
- Removes provisions seeking to regulate low-speed scooters.
- Removes provisions related to traffic cameras.

Speaker of the House Larry Householder (R-Glenford), responding to committee changes, said he sees most of the House policy initiatives that the Senate removed from the bill as a negotiating tactic for conference committee, noting some items such as banning people holding on to cars driving on the road while riding skateboards, which should not be controversial, were removed.

The Ohio Turnpike Commission Monday appointed member Michael Peterson as the secretary-treasurer of the panel during its meeting. Peterson, of Massillon and an appointee of former Gov. John Kasich, also serves as director of Global Investigations and Security Services for Goodyear.

UTILITIES

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) was joined this week by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a raft of federal authorities opposing the proposed bankruptcy of FirstEnergy Solutions (FES), which faces hearings next week on its proposed reorganization into a new company separate from FirstEnergy's corporate leadership. The Ohio Attorney General's Office, OCC, ODNR, Ohio EPA, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the U.S. bankruptcy trustee all filed briefs against the FES plan.

Chairman-designee Sam Randazzo of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) said Tuesday he is looking to bring "predictability" to an agency beset by frequent leadership changes and political considerations in recent years. Randazzo spoke openly to the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Governing Board about ratemaking concerns he said would be harder to discuss after assuming office, saying he's prepared for the hard work on energy matters which the Legislature may be slower to embrace.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Attorney General Dave Yost said Monday a legal storm is brewing across state government over pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) overcharges shown so far to have cost the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) nearly \$16 million in inflated payments to industry giant OptumRx. Yost says OptumRx, formerly SXC Health Solutions, has dragged its feet in mediating Ohio's claims and now owes the state another \$15 million-plus in punitive damages, along with legal fees and any additional relief ordered by the Franklin County Common Pleas Court. He warned in February that Ohio was coming after the PBM but said Monday that OptumRx had waited until the last minute to respond to the state deadline.

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) announced Thursday that it would provide \$139,088 to the Montgomery County Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board as part of a previously announced program to help employers hire and retain workers recovering from drug addiction.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

PASSED BY SENATE

- HB62 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET (Rep. Scott Oelslager) To make appropriations for programs related to transportation and public safety for the biennium beginning July 1, 2019, and ending June 30, 2021, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of those programs.
Vote 24-6, Bill Amended on Floor
- SB9 HEALTH PLAN CLAIM INFORMATION (Sen. Matt Huffman) To require health plan issuers to release certain claim information to group plan policyholders.
Vote 31-0

HOUSE: No legislative activity to report.