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**RH RESOURCES**

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**Week in Review**

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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.

**ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Medina County dominated winners of the 2018 Take Action Video Contest announced by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Thursday, taking home two of the top three prizes and one honorable mention. Open annually to Ohio high schools, the 2018 contest asked students to create a 60-second video on one of the following telemarketing topics: National Do-Not-Call Registry, illegal robocalls, and technology to stop unwanted calls. Top winners included Melissa Farthing of the Medina County Career Center for her video, "Just Hang Up: Robocall PSA," which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/y3vyukbh>; Rebecca Haywood of Medina County's Wadsworth High School for her video, "Homework Call," which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/y6mch7rm>; and Gracie Bennett of Notre Dame Academy in Toledo, Lucas County for her video, "Keep Your Time and Information Safe - Register Today!" which can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/yxvgx3uy>.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost says his office is launching a new program to help survivors of human trafficking eliminate a visible reminder of their victimization: tattoos and similar markings that once served to "brand" them as the property of pimps, drug dealers or gangs. Yost announced

the program at the 10th Annual Human Trafficking Awareness Day at the Ohio Statehouse. He said grants covering the cost of transforming trafficking tattoos with new designs are being named in honor of late trafficking survivor Jennifer Kempton.

## **AUDITOR OF STATE**

Ohio law should treat thieves the same if they steal from a business or a township office, Auditor Keith Faber and Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville) said Wednesday at a press conference to tout legislation to boost theft-in-office penalties. Wilson, a career banker before joining the Senate, said he was surprised to learn that people in positions of public trust would get a lesser punishment for stealing large sums from the taxpayers than for stealing them from a major corporation.

## **FY18-19 BUDGET**

Income tax collections rebounded in February after two laggard months, though the state has some catching up to do to meet targets for the year in that category, according to preliminary figures from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). Sales taxes dipped, particularly in the auto sales tax category, but OBM says February is generally a slow month of the year for car sales and the drop might have been compounded by bad weather. Income tax receipts of \$222.5 million were \$6.3 million or 2.9 percent above estimates. Receipts for the fiscal year to-date lag projections by 2 percent or \$115 million, totaling \$5.6 billion versus the \$5.72 billion expected. OBM Director Kimberly Murnieks told *Hannah News* that they're encouraged by the upswing in income tax collections.

## **FY20-21 BUDGET**

State funding for child and family services would nearly double, and state support for county children's services agencies would grow by half, under Gov. Mike DeWine's budget proposal for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). DeWine previewed that part of his executive budget package Thursday at a meeting of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). His plan promises \$74 million more, increasing the current \$77 million to \$151 million. Included in that is an increase from \$60 million to \$90 million in the state child protective allocation, the flexible, direct funding source for county children's services agencies. He said the new funding should help address the problems of overwhelming caseloads and caseworker burnout amid a surge in demand for services driven in large part by the opioid epidemic.

## **BUSINESS/CORPORATE**

The Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) will be holding an "Ohio Business Matchmaker" event on Tuesday, April 23 at Wright State University's Nutter Center in Dayton. The event facilitates agencies and prime contractors awarding billions of dollars in work to meet with Ohio small businesses.

Wednesday's closure of the General Motors plant in Lordstown will result in an economic output loss of over \$3 billion, according to a study conducted by Cleveland State University's Center for Economic Development. The university released the findings Thursday, indicating the elimination of over 1,600 jobs at the plant and a total of 3,000 jobs in the regional economy will result in the loss of \$270 million in labor income, \$600 million in value-add to the economy and \$12 million in local and state income tax, all included in that \$3 billion amount. Accounting for the previous closure of the

third and second shifts at the Lordstown facility, over 7,700 jobs and more than \$8 billion in total economic activity were lost.

## **CENSUS**

The nonprofit Center for Community Solutions (CCS) recently released its Community Fact Sheets for 2019, detailing a variety of statistics for Ohio localities, including figures pertaining to economic success, health, education, housing and receipt of public benefits. Fact sheets are available for Ohio legislative districts, Ohio federal congressional districts, Ohio counties and large cities in Ohio. All fact sheets are available to download at <http://tinyurl.com/y6p54sdw>.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

The General Assembly on Wednesday unveiled its long-awaited response to the failed drug penalty overhaul of State Issue 1 and the raft of proposed sentencing reforms crowding the Statehouse since. The Senate Judiciary Committee replaced SB3's (Eklund) placeholder language with a substitute bill that affirms Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's carrot-and-stick policy of prioritized drug treatment and intensive court supervision while adopting the competing misdemeanor sentencing model proposed by others. Committee Chairman Sen. John Eklund (R-Chardon), who served on the two-year-old Criminal Justice Recodification Committee undergirding much of SB3, said the bill would expand charges for drug trafficking while lowering charges for small-time possession.

Statewide conservative organizations and others gathered Wednesday to push for Ohio to join other states in modernizing bail practices, with Ohio Conservatives for Bail Reform (OCBR) Executive Director Michael Hartley releasing 11 priorities as part of a "long-term effort" they will begin immediately. Joining Hartley as leaders of the new OCBR coalition's leadership council are Buckeye Institute Legal Fellow Daniel Dew, Americans for Prosperity-Ohio Legislative Liaison Jeff Dillon, former Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction Director Gary Mohr, Ruth McNeil of Citizens for Community Values (CCV) and Columbus Chamber of Commerce Vice President of Government Relations Holly Gross.

The Governor's Task Force on Arrest Warrants convened for the first time Thursday to the news Ohio is faced with more than 200,000 outstanding warrants in its Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) -- including over 25,000 for serious, violent crimes -- though no one really knows the state total. Speakers reinforced Ohio's fundamental problem with law enforcement reporting highlighted last week by the bail reform task force: home rule does not allow easily accessed, statewide data on criminal justice.

## **DISABILITIES**

Gov. Mike DeWine made an unscheduled appearance Tuesday to address a packed atrium crowd attending the Developmental Disabilities Awareness and Advocacy Day event at the Statehouse. The governor said he'd be addressing people with disabilities in his "State of the State" speech later that day, and said his goal is to help everyone to be to live up to their potential.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted also spoke at the Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day, talking about the potential for technology to empower more people to enter the workforce. That trend will be important for the state's economy because of projections showing the population entering the workforce soon could lag that aging out, he said.

Treasurer Robert Sprague also spoke at Developmental Disabilities Awareness Day, highlighting the benefits of STABLE accounts, which enable people with disabilities to save and invest money tax-free without jeopardizing their eligibility for means-tested assistance programs. Ohio was the first state to authorize the accounts, administered by the treasurer's office, following passage of the federal Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act in 2014.

## **ECONOMY**

Policy group One Ohio Now released its third annual "State of Ohio" report Monday, arguing that Ohio has fallen behind in key areas like health care, education and the economy and that the state needs to make further investments to ensure a stable future for the state. "With this report, we step back from the day-to-day and look at the big picture of Ohio and ask basic questions. How are my kids' schools? How much will it cost to send them to college? Do I have enough money to put food on the table? We have a chance to address these questions and ask 'Where are we going as a state and how do we get there?'" said Nick Bates, policy director for One Ohio Now.

## **EDUCATION**

Auditor of State Keith Faber released three audits of charter schools -- two in Toledo and one in the Dayton area -- which called for the return of a total of a little over \$2.1 million. Two of the findings were based on inaccurate attendance reporting while the third related to an ethics violation based on improper hiring. The largest finding was against Phoenix Academy in Lucas County which owes the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) roughly \$2.1 million for inaccurate attendance reporting.

With a new budget on the way and debates simmering around graduation, school funding and state report cards, the Fordham Institute published Monday a list of 25 policy ideas to address the question of how to boost achievement and prepare students for life after high school. "Fulfilling the Readiness Promise: 25 education policy ideas for Ohio" organizes its recommendations around five major goals: maintain high expectations for all students; empower families; support great educators; create transparent and equitable funding systems; and ensure seamless transitions from high school to college and/or career.

Talisa Dixon, Columbus City Schools new superintendent, officially began her new job Monday after having been selected as the district's 21st superintendent last September.

Business groups are skeptical of a key element in the State Board of Education's proposed graduation overhaul and want a new system in place faster. The board's Graduation Requirements and High School Redesign Task Force met Monday night to review the graduation proposal ahead of the upcoming board meeting, as the group works toward an April 1 deadline to send more details about its plan to lawmakers. The proposal, first endorsed by the board late last year, would supplement existing graduation pathways with a new option through which students would demonstrate their knowledge in five areas: English; math; well-rounded content; technology; and leadership, reasoning and social-emotional learning. Students could meet the requirement in a given area through the usual state tests, or by other means such as taking a relevant College Credit Plus course or completing a demonstration project, for example.

New bipartisan legislation introduced Wednesday would require schools serving middle and high school students to provide free training programs to students and educators on how to identify and handle situations where a student may intend to hurt others or themselves, as well as provide

reporting methods for such situations. HB123's co-sponsors, Reps. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) and Glenn Holmes (D-McDonald), provided an overview of their legislation at the Statehouse Wednesday, alongside representatives of the Sandy Hook Promise program and North Ridgeville Academic Center Principal Lee Armbruster. Manning said it's vital that violence programs in schools reach out to students as well as adult staff and educators.

## **ELECTIONS 2020**

Coming off the heels of his "Dignity of Work" tour of the country, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) announced Thursday he would not be seeking the Democratic nomination for president in 2020. Over the past two months, the third-term senator has been testing his labor-first messages with groups in primary battleground states like Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina.

## **FEDERAL**

President Donald Trump's recent comments absolving North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un from responsibility in Otto Warmbier's death have drawn condemnation from Ohio elected officials and Warmbier's grieving parents, who live in Southwest Ohio.

Federal legislators also weighed in on Wednesday's Lordstown news: U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) said "For the first time in nearly 100 years, GM will not have an assembly plant in Ohio, so this is a sad day for our state. For decades, workers in the Mahoning Valley made a commitment to GM, dedicating their lives to this company, and turning Lordstown into an award-winning plant. GM's decision to shut down production at the plant not only impacts the workers at Lordstown and their families, but thousands of others in the Mahoning Valley who work for suppliers and other businesses that support the plant. I remain incredibly frustrated and disappointed with GM's decision, but I'm not giving up on this plant and these workers. ... I will continue to press GM executives to recommit to Lordstown, do the right thing by these workers who have given so much to this company, and bring new production to this plant." U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown marked the day by reintroducing his American Cars, American Jobs Act, which would give customers discounts on cars made in America and change tax policy on overseas profits.

## **GAMING/GAMBLING**

Total revenue generated by Ohio's four casinos increased by more than \$2 million in February 2019 over February 2018, according to data from the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC). Casinos made nearly \$70 million in February 2019, compared to \$67.6 million in February 2018.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

The Senate passed three bills on Wednesday without much discussion, including an emergency measure Sen. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) said would fix an error in gun bill 132-HB228 (Johnson) before the law goes into effect later this month. The chamber voted 23-9 to send HB86 (Plummer) to Gov. Mike DeWine with an emergency clause. Roegner explained that the bill is identical to SB53 (Roegner), which the Senate passed last week.

In other action, the Senate unanimously passed SB5 (Kunze-Dolan), which increases penalties for the crime of promoting prostitution, and SB21 (Dolan), which allows a corporation to become a "benefit corporation."

Also, during Wednesday's session, the Senate honored former Sen. Randy Gardner for his 33 years of service in the Ohio General Assembly. Gardner is now chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

The House marked the final day of production at General Motors' Lordstown plant by passing a resolution urging the automaker to keep the facility running and assign a new vehicle to be assembled there. Wednesday's unanimous vote on HCR6 (Holmes) followed more bad news for Ohio from the manufacturing company. General Motors notified the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services on Monday of its plans for layoffs at a processing center in West Chester, affecting 101 employees.

In other business, the House also voted unanimously for HR48 to re-elect Brad Young as clerk for another 60 days, the same duration set for his original election this session in HR1. This new 60-day term commences Saturday, March 9.

The Ohio Senate announced Tuesday that it is "elevating" two of its four Senate Finance Committee subcommittees to full standing committee status. Senate spokesman John Fortney told *Hannah News* that this was done because of the committee workload. The two new standing committees are the General Government and Agency Review Committee chaired by Sen. Kirk Schuring (R-Caton) and the Higher Education Committee, chaired by Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard).

The House Federalism Committee's Wednesday hearing focused on federalism. Only one witness appeared, 10th Amendment Center National Communications Director Michael Maharrey, and he offered his views and answered a range of committee questions. Maharrey said his organization's focus is on political decentralization, both in terms of education and activism at the state and federal levels regarding "overreach" by the federal government. He was appearing before the committee to discuss steps they could take as a state legislature, offering the committee a lengthy history of issues surrounding the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment and the "anti-commandeering" principle.

In other legislative action, the House Commerce and Labor Committee reported out HB79 (Oelslager), the Industrial Commission Budget; the House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB32 (Stein) dealing with the ceremonial procedure for retiring an Ohio flag; and the Senate Judiciary Committee reported out SB5 (Kunze-Dolan) which amends the penalties for promoting prostitution.

## **GOVERNOR**

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday signed two new executive orders addressing ethics policy of his office and the governing of the expenditure of public funds for offshore services. Executive Order 2019-11D states that employees of the executive branch and members of its boards and commissions must adhere to high ethical standards in government embodied in Ohio's ethics laws while Executive Order 2019-12D states that no state cabinet agency, board or commission shall enter into any contract which uses funds within its control to purchase services which will be provided outside the U.S.

Judicial appointments made during the week include the following:

- **Gina Russo** of Columbus will serve as a judge on the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, General Division. Russo will assume office on March 18, 2019 and must run in the November 2020

election to retain the seat for the remainder of the unexpired term ending Jan. 5, 2023. Russo is replacing Judge Laurel Beatty Blunt, who was elected to the Tenth District Court of Appeals.

- **Alfonso J. "Jess" Gonzalez** of Maumee will serve as a judge on the Lucas County Court of Common Pleas. Gonzalez will assume office on March 18, 2019, and must run in the November 2020 election to retain the seat for the remainder of the unexpired term ending Jan. 3, 2023. Gonzalez is replacing Judge Gene A. Zmuda, who was elected to the Sixth District Court of Appeals.

- **JP Morgan** of Canfield will serve as a judge on the Mahoning County Court. Morgan will assume office on March 11, 2019, and must run in the November 2020 election to retain the seat for the remainder of the unexpired term ending Dec. 31, 2022. Morgan is replacing Judge David A. D'Apolito, who was elected to the Seventh District Court of Appeals.

## **INSURANCE**

Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) Director Jillian Froment announced that the department helped Ohioans save or recover almost \$42 million in 2018. In 2018, the department handled nearly 6,000 insurance-related complaints from consumers. Mirroring national complaint trends, the top complaint reasons in Ohio were for claim denial and claim delay while the coverage types most complained about were health insurance and automobile insurance.

## **JUDICIAL**

Amendments to the Rules of Practice adopted by the Ohio Supreme Court that make electronic versions of court filings "the official record in the case," and that spell out requirements for a judge's disqualification from a case became effective Friday, March 1.

The Supreme Court of Ohio returned to a dispute Wednesday that dates to the Taft administration and pits the state against its largest cities over residency requirements for local government contractors. Attorney General Dave Yost will pick up where former attorney general and now-Gov. Mike DeWine left off, claiming the Court already resolved the home-rule question 10 years ago in *Lima v. Ohio*. Not so, say Cleveland, Columbus and Akron along with the Ohio Municipal League and a coalition of legal scholars outside Ohio, who say the contractor law does not exercise police powers, does not address public employees and controls only 20 percent of a project's workforce and is therefore not a general residency requirement.

## **LOBBYISTS**

Steptoe & Johnson PLLC announced the addition of Joe Stevens to the firm's government relations and lobbying team in its Columbus office. Previously, Stevens headed up his own firm Stevens Consulting Group.

## **MARIJUANA/HEMP**

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy on Friday awarded the state's ninth dispensary certificate of operation. Ohio Cannabis Company, located at 23024 County Rd. 621 Ste. 1 in Coshocton, can now sell medical marijuana products. Ohio consumers have spent more than \$1.5 million on medical

marijuana since the opening day of dispensary sales, according to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). Total sales from Jan. 16 through March 3 were \$1,520,381, MMCP said. Dispensaries sold 201 pounds of cannabis over that time period.

Law enforcement raids of businesses selling hemp-derived cannabidiol (CBD) products are a "huge mistake," Sen. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) said during Tuesday's meeting of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on SB57 (Hill-S. Huffman), which would clarify that hemp and hemp-derived products can be produced and sold in Ohio. The federal Farm Bill of 2018 removed hemp from scheduling under federal abuse control laws which some maintain automatically legalized CBD products.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Ohioans should be careful when starting outdoor fires this spring. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Ohio law says outdoor debris burning is prohibited from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. during March, April and May due to the abundance of dry grass, weeds and leaves on the ground. Winds can make a seemingly safe fire burn more intensely and escape control, as well.

More than 100,000 rainbow trout will be stocked in 66 Ohio public lakes this spring, according ODNR. The first rainbow trout release was scheduled for Friday, March 8 at Adams Lake in Adams County with rainbow trout releases taking place across Ohio from through Sunday, May 19 as long as areas are ice-free and accessible to anglers.

## **NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

JobsOhio's new president and chief investment officer (CIO) J.P. Nauseef formally stepped into the role Monday, March 4 after being named in February. The organization had also released its 2018 annual report and 2019 strategic plan. In 2018, the organization worked on 266 total projects, down from 284 in 2016 and 272 in 2017, but there were 27,071 new jobs created, up considerably from 20,603 in 2016 and 22,788 in 2017. Capital investment remained at 2017's \$9.6 billion, though 2016 saw \$4.6 billion, and payroll for new jobs rose to \$1.3 billion, from \$994 million in 2016 and \$1.1 billion in 2017.

## **PEOPLE**

Nonprofit organization School Choice Ohio announced Monday that former Sen. Kevin Bacon will lead the group as its new president and CEO. Bacon recently left the Senate due to term limits after serving eight years as a senator and four years as a representative in Franklin County. He chaired the Senate Judiciary Committee in his last term and currently works as an attorney of counsel with the law firm Isaac Wiles.

Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) will receive the Muriel Bertsch Award from the Ohio Association of Senior Centers for her work to secure funding for a new senior center in Wood County, her office announced Monday. Gavarone worked with the Wood County Committee on Aging to secure \$1.6 million in the 2018 capital budget for the construction of the new Wood County Senior Center.



Nonprofit think tank Policy Matters Ohio (PMO) announced Monday the addition of Will Petrik to its research team. Petrik previously worked as state director for health and human services nonprofit Advocates for Ohio's Future and outreach coordinator for the Juvenile Justice Coalition. At PMO he will work as a budget researcher.

## **POLLS/STUDIES**

Two Paths America, a group started in 2017 by allies of former Gov. John Kasich, released the results of a national survey it commissioned that finds voters believe political divisions and racial divisions are the most serious problems facing the nation. The group, run by 2016 Kasich presidential campaign advisers John Weaver and Chris Schrimpf, said the poll was conducted in both 2017 and 2018 and included focus groups across the nation. The report was rolled out at an event in Washington, D.C. According to Two Paths America, 40 percent of voters identify political divisions as the most serious problem facing the nation, while 28 percent ranked racial divisions.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

If you've ever felt that Ohio drivers are particularly bad, there's now empirical data to back up that claim, thanks to a new study from insurance information aggregator QuoteWizard that determined Ohio drivers are the eighth-worst in the nation. By looking at more than two million points of "incident data" collected from insurance companies, plus Federal Highway Administration traffic fatality data, the study ranked states based on the number of accidents, speeding tickets, DUIs, citations and traffic fatalities to determine which states' drivers are the best and which are the worst. Among its neighbors, Ohio was a major outlier, with Pennsylvania ranking 38th-worst, West Virginia ranking 43rd-worst, Kentucky ranking 41st-worst, Indiana ranking 32nd-worst and Michigan ranking 50th-worst.

## **SECRETARY OF STATE**

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose Friday announced 12,129 new entities filed to do business in Ohio in January, an increase of 2,054 when compared to the same month in 2018. It was an increase of 3,335 from the previous month. LaRose said the numbers indicate a strong start to 2019, building off yet another record setting year for business filings in 2018.

## **STATE GOVERNMENT**

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) had one witness Monday regarding an Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC) rule filing that was withdrawn at the witness' request after discussion. OCRC Chief Legal Counsel Stephanie Demers answered questions from Rep. Kristin Boggs (D-Columbus) about the rule filing's potential effects on pregnancy leave protections.

W. Fletch Zimpher, a veteran of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC), will become the new president of the Controlling Board later this month. His first board meeting will be Monday, March 25.

## **'STATE OF THE STATE'**

Gov. Mike DeWine brought the "State of the State" back to the Ohio House Chambers on Tuesday, telling Ohio lawmakers that he, along with the General Assembly, is poised to lead a new Ohio

renaissance by facing the problems that have been put off for far too long and tackling the state's challenges head-on.

DeWine gave a preview of his executive budget during the 45-minute speech, addressing topics ranging from transportation funding to children's initiatives and water quality.

Gov. Mike DeWine's first "State of the State" address was "inspiring," House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) said Tuesday. "He talked about our role as government from someone's birth to someone's death, trying to take care of the most vulnerable Ohioans," Householder told reporters outside the House Chamber following DeWine's speech to lawmakers. He was joined by Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) who also praised the governor's speech. "We appreciate his long-term view of the issues, and particularly focusing on some of the key investments that we can and we should be making to protect the most vulnerable among us and try to improve our efforts on infant mortality, focus on early childhood education, protect and preserve Lake Erie and our other waterways and build off what is already a tremendous parks system that we have throughout the state," Obhof said.

Democratic legislative leaders said Tuesday they hope to be able to work with Gov. Mike DeWine and heard some promising ideas in his first "State of the State" speech, but aren't satisfied with words alone. "I will say that the governor struck the right tone. He had a wonderful message that was hopeful. But we need results," said House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) said. "I've waited a long time to hear a speech like this at the 'State of the State,'" said Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights).

## **TECHNOLOGY**

Attorney General Dave Yost joined the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Thursday in announcing a nationwide takedown of tech support scammers who try to trick consumers into buying costly computer services and repairs with fake help desk calls and pop-up alerts.

With support from the National Association of Attorneys General's (NAAG) Consumer Protection Committee and Tech Scam Working Group, Ohio has collaborated with DOJ, FTC and attorneys general from 19 other states and the District of Columbia for more than a year in the investigation of tech fraudsters who claim consumers' computers are beset with viruses or other problems requiring unnecessary repairs, service plans, software, anti-virus protection or other products and services.

## **TOBACCO/SMOKING**

Though Ohio received high marks for its efforts towards smoke-free air, the American Lung Association writes in its "State of Tobacco Control 2019" report that the state could make improvements to tobacco policy in the areas of prevention and cessation funding, tobacco tax increases and increasing the minimum age someone can buy tobacco to 21.

## **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Ohio House Thursday sent HB62 (Oelslager) on to the Ohio Senate after it dropped the phase-in time of a proposed gas tax increase from three years down to two years, acquiescing to a request by the DeWine administration. Under the amendment adopted on the House floor on a bipartisan vote,

the total increase in the gas tax will stay at 10.7 cents per gallon, but it will be increased by 7 cents in the first year and 3.7 cents in the second year. The change does not affect the 20 cents per gallon diesel gas tax increase, which will still be phased in over three years. The bill still adds \$872 million/year for transportation projects when fully phased in -- but short of the \$1.2 billion Gov. Mike DeWine sought. The bill passed the House 71-27. It now officially goes to the Senate, which has been holding informal hearings on the proposal up till now.

The substitute version of the transportation budget had been accepted by the House Finance Committee Tuesday night and reported out Wednesday night on a bipartisan vote of 30-3. The sub bill, besides reducing the overall amount raised from the tax increase, also removed the indexing of the tax. The House bill also splits the tax between the state and local governments 55/45. Hybrid and electric vehicle owners who consumer less or no gasoline would cover their share of infrastructure costs through a state registration increase to \$100 and \$200, respectively. Municipalities and townships can levy an additional \$5 registration fee on all vehicles. Also, the bill eliminates the need for front license plates. The bill also includes \$100 million/year for public transit. The transportation budget's substitute language also creates the Ohio's Road to the Future Committee to report back to the Legislature on infrastructure needs before the next transportation budget in 2021.

Earlier, House Democrats on Friday had announced their transportation budget priorities, including lowering a proposed increase in the gas tax, phasing in the increases, putting more funds toward local public transit and directing more resources to local communities -- all of which were accomplished in the House-passed version of HB62 (Oelslager).

Gov. Mike DeWine Wednesday reiterated that an 18-cent-a-gallon increase in the gas tax is the bare minimum his administration believes is needed to keep Ohio's roads in working order, and that anything less could hurt public safety. DeWine was asked by reporters about the House Finance Committee's proposing a reduction in the gas tax hike that his administration had included in its transportation budget, as well as legislators' plan to phase it in over three years. "This is a process, we always knew this would be a process. We're going to continue to work through it," he said.

Other states and the federal government have been facing their own issues in trying pay for the upkeep of roads and bridges, the Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Workforce Development Committee was told Wednesday as it continues to hold informal hearings on HB62 (Oelslager), the transportation budget, in anticipation of receiving the bill from the House by the end of this week. Jim Tymon, the executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), which represents the heads of the various state departments of transportation, testified Wednesday as an interested party to give the committee a national perspective of the issue. He said the demands on the nation's transportation network are increasing every year, and not enough is being invested to offset these additional demands. While he said the value provided by the nation's transportation network is well worth the contributions that are being asked from the system's users, he said those in the transportation industry need to do a better job making the value proposition for transportation investment by more clearly communicating both the cost and benefits related to the use of the transportation system. In the Thursday hearing, the committee heard interested party testimony from Joe Cannon of the Ohio Auto Dealers Association (OADA), Art Arnold of the Ohio Railroad Association (ORA) and Akshai Singh of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU).

Calling Thursday's informal hearing "the calm before the storm," Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee Chairman Sen. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon) said formal hearings on

transportation budget bill HB62 (Oelslager) will be held on March 11-14. The Monday, March 11 meeting is scheduled to start at 1:30 p.m., with the other meetings beginning at 9 a.m. The testimony schedule is currently the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) on March 11; Development Services Agency (DSA), Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission and the Public Works Commission on March 12; and public testimony will be accepted on all four days. The deadline for amendments to the substitute bill is Thursday, March 14 at 4 p.m.

As lawmakers debate raising the gasoline tax by as much as 18 cents per gallon as part of discussions on the transportation budget, HB62 (Oelslager), a white paper recently released by a public policy firm suggests that the time to explore a vehicle miles traveled tax has arrived. Scioto Analysis, a public policy analysis firm based in Columbus, released the white paper outlining how states can incorporate vehicle miles traveled fees into regulatory frameworks they adopt for autonomous vehicles. The paper points out that a gasoline tax had been the better method for getting consumers to pay for their use of roads and highways because it approximates the miles traveled by a vehicle and because a vehicle miles traveled tax is more difficult to implement. But the paper said that advantage is not so pronounced now.

## **TREASURER OF STATE**

The Agriculture Linked Deposit Program (Ag-LINK) will now ensure a minimum 1 percent discount for the borrower, Treasurer Robert Sprague announced Friday. There was no minimum discount rate before, Sprague spokesperson Brittany Halpin told *Hannah News*.

Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague announced Friday the purchase of \$10 million in five-year fixed rate Israel bonds. "We're proud to continue Ohio's tradition of investing in Israel bonds," said Sprague. "They have proven to be a solid financial investment for Ohio's taxpayers thanks to their strong interest rates." The bonds will reach maturity in 2024 and pay a 3.5 percent yield. Sprague's office said Israel has maintained a perfect record of interest and principal payments since Israel Bonds were established in 1951.

## **UTILITIES**

The three people who made the final round of consideration for a Public Utilities Commission of Ohio seat that went to incoming commission Chairman Sam Randazzo are among 14 applicants for a new vacancy on the panel. First District Appeals Judge Dennis Deters, former lawmaker and Ohio Consumers' Counsel Governing Board head Gene Krebs and Assistant Consumers' Counsel Bryce McKenney formally applied for the seat just vacated by PUCO Chairman Asim Haque, as they had for the seat of Commissioner Tom Johnson, who didn't seek reappointment.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) last week accepted the results of Duke Energy Ohio's wholesale auction that will determine its default retail generation rates from June 2019 through May 2022. The PUCO also approved results from this week's wholesale auction for American Electric Power (AEP) of Ohio, which set default generation rates through May 2020. At the March 5 auction, six suppliers won bids for a one-year product at an average clearing price of \$46.63 per megawatt hour (MWh) for AEP's service period June 2019 to May 2020.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) issued ratepayer guidance Monday in observance of National Consumer Protection Week which runs through Saturday, March 9. The commission is encouraging consumers to become informed and avoid common utility scams.

**LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:**

**SENATE:**

**PASSED BY SENATE**

HB86 DANGEROUS ORDNANCE CORRECTION (Rep. Phil Plummer) To correct a drafting error in the definition of "dangerous ordnance" that resulted from Am. Sub. H.B. 228 of the 132nd General Assembly and to declare an emergency.  
Emergency Clause 23-9, Bill Vote 23-9

**HOUSE:**

**PASSED BY HOUSE**

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 71-27, Bill Amended on Floor

**ADOPTED BY HOUSE**

HCR6 LORDSTOWN GM PLANT (Rep. Glenn Holmes) To encourage General Motors to keep its Lordstown Complex open by allocating a new vehicle for production there.  
Vote 97-0

HR48 ELECTION OF HOUSE CLERK (Rep. James Butler, Jr.) Relative to the election of the Clerk of the House of Representatives.  
Vote 96-0