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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.

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association (BSSA) is working with the Rx Abuse Leadership Initiative (RALI) of Ohio to provide sheriffs' offices throughout the state with safe drug disposal kits and educational materials for upcoming county fairs, local festivals and other gatherings. RALI Ohio, an alliance of more than 25 organizations representing an array of Ohio communities affected by the opioid epidemic, has been working to promote prevention, treatment and recovery programs that work.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

As a legal challenge to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) enters the appeals process, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) told reporters on a conference call Wednesday that ending the health care law would negatively affect Ohioans. Brown characterized Northern

Texas District Judge Reed O'Connor's December decision to strike down the ACA as partisan, and he decried congressional Republican support for ending the law, saying that members of Congress, who have good taxpayer-funded health care, are trying to take it away from Americans. Among the negative consequences of repealing the law, Brown said, could include loss of coverage for the five million Ohioans with preexisting conditions; loss of health care subsidies for the approximately 200,000 Ohioans who purchased insurance on the marketplace; and loss of coverage for the state's Medicaid expansion population.

AGRICULTURE

The 2019 Current Agricultural Use Value (CAUV) numbers recently released by the Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT) show farmers are continuing to see tax decreases as a result of reforms made in 132-HB49 (R. Smith). The capitalization rate for 2019 is 8 percent, compared to 6.3 percent in 2016. The 8 percent capitalization is the same as 2018's, which compared to 6.6 percent in 2015. "A higher capitalization rate means lower land values," ODT Division of Tax Equalization Assistant Administrator Gloria Gardner said. The "all soils" average cropland CAUV value continued to drop in 2019, coming in at \$876. That compares to \$1,015 in 2018, \$1,153 in 2017, \$1,310 in 2016, \$1,388 in 2015 and \$1,668 in 2014.

Citing the extreme weather that has taken a "devastating toll" on parts of Ohio, Treasurer Robert Sprague announced Monday that his office has re-opened the application period for the Agriculture Linked Deposit Program (Ag-LINK). Through this round of applications, farm operators and agribusiness owners based in Ohio can receive a 2 percent interest rate reduction on loans up to \$150,000. The application period will remain open until Friday, Nov. 15.

Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelanda told reporters Wednesday that she was leading a "proactive" approach to ensure ride safety ahead of the Ohio State Fair's opening on Wednesday, July 24. That has led to extensive changes for the popular "SkyGlider" ride that carries passengers up to 40 feet in the air across a half mile loop and offering a view of the "totality" of the state fair area, Pelanda said.

With the first Ohio State Fair of his administration opening in less than two weeks, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Thursday that an "Expo 2050" task force will develop a vision of how the fairgrounds and surrounding facilities should evolve in the coming decades. "You always can look to the future," DeWine said, including how to grow and strengthen the state fair and best showcase the state through it. The task force will not delve into recommendations for county fairs, he added to *Hannah News*. The task force will be chaired by Ohio Developmental Services Agency Director Lydia Mihalik and former newspaper editor and representative, Mike Curtin.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A country band that was reportedly removed from the lineup at the Du Quoin State Fair in Illinois due to its name is being touted as a free concert headliner for the 2019 Ohio State Fair. Confederate Railroad is one of four "nationally-recognized" groups set to perform free live shows at the state fairgrounds, along with Joe Mullins and the Radio Ramblers, Parrots of the Caribbean and Casee Allen, according to a news release from the Ohio State Fair.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio has joined 23 other states in challenging a U.S. District Court decision denying Uniformed Service Members Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) protections for National Guard members deployed under the U.S. Code's Title 32 provisions addressing guard duties funded by the federal government but ordered by the governor of a state. Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost and other states' attorneys have filed an amicus brief with the U.S. 7th Circuit Court of Appeals that contests an Illinois district court's interpretation of USERRA's application to full-time National Guard duty. A Joliet, IL police officer participated as a full-time guard member in a counter-drug operation authorized under Title 32 but was denied employment benefits by the city. Yost points out that, although 7th Circuit does not include Ohio, its ruling will affect Ohio National Guardsmen working across the border in Indiana, which is within the court's jurisdiction.

Major arrests during Cleveland's Major League Baseball All-Star Game festivities reinforce the dubious connection between big-time sports and human trafficking. Attorney General Dave Yost announced a multi-jurisdictional crackdown on 49 men Thursday for offenses ranging from soliciting to attempted sexual conduct with a minor. Over half were seeking contact with individuals believed to be children. The attorney general's Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission (OOCIC) and the Cuyahoga County prosecutor's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force led the sting operation.

FY18-19 BUDGET

The state of Ohio ended FY19 on June 30 with tax revenues \$651.1 million over estimates, according to preliminary data released Friday by the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). FY19 tax revenue exceeded that of FY18 by over \$1 billion. A total of nearly \$23.5 billion was collected over the course of FY19 compared to \$22.4 billion in FY18. Total tax receipts finished June \$34.3 million or 1.6 percent over the estimate for the month established by OBM at the beginning of FY19 and exceeded June 2018 total tax receipts by \$22.8 million.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Ohio House Democratic Leader Emilia Strong Sykes (D-Akron) responded to a recent comment Gov. Mike DeWine made to the *Columbus Dispatch* saying that he has urged House and Senate leaders to deal with their differences over tax breaks for small businesses in a separate bill rather than in the budget in order to move passage of the measure along. Sykes said, "We have a constitutional obligation to pass a responsible, balanced budget, and rushing a bill through that guts critical tax fairness provisions without considering the fiscal impact on our state's bottom line is not only irresponsible, it's reckless."

Not surprisingly, NFIB Ohio, which has opposed the House-passed version that trimmed the small business deduction, issued a statement in support of the governor's proposal. Roger Geiger, NFIB Ohio vice president and executive director, said, "Small business owners across Ohio stand with Gov. DeWine's call to move forward in passing Ohio's operating budget without changing the business investor deduction. NFIB agrees it is time to adopt a budget with no new tax increases. As the economic engine that creates two of the three new jobs in Ohio, small business owners appreciate the strong stance of Gov. DeWine that raising taxes on small businesses in the state would be a mistake at this time."

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) and Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) met on Monday morning, July 8, while House Finance Committee Chairman Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton) and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) were scheduled to meet that afternoon to further discuss budget bill HB166 (Oelslager), Obhof told reporters Monday. "I would expect some variation of one or both of those meetings to happen every day until we have a resolution," Obhof said following the Senate's non-voting session. "I feel good about where we're at today."

Gov. Mike DeWine told reporters Thursday that he was confident a resolution would be reached regarding the state budget soon, stressing that both the House and Senate versions were "good budgets" and consistent with his goals regarding the addiction crisis, supporting young people and early childhood programs, water quality, Lake Erie and job training. "It's time to get a budget, and I'm happy that they're talking, they're working," DeWine said. He said he's been in regular contact with Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) and House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) but "the job of the governor is to weigh in early and to weigh in late" and they are in the middle of the process.

CENSUS

The 2020 Decennial Census questionnaire is being printed without a citizenship question, according to Trump administration officials from the U.S. Department of Commerce (USDOC) and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The U.S. Supreme Court blocked the

addition of the question to the 2020 Census last week, ruling that the Trump administration's explanation for including the question was "contrived" and "incongruent with what the record reveals about the agency's priorities and decision-making process." However, President Donald Trump created some confusion on Wednesday, July 3 by seemingly contradicting administration officials and tweeting, "The news reports about the USDOC dropping its quest to put the citizenship question on the census is incorrect, or to state it differently, fake! We are absolutely moving forward, as we must, because of the importance of the answer to this question." By Thursday, July 11, he had given up on the Census question, reportedly looking to other ways to get the information.

DISASTERS

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Wednesday that the state has asked FEMA -- the Federal Emergency Management Agency -- to open its Public Assistance program to five counties affected by the severe storms the last week of May. If FEMA approves the governor's request, local governments, state agencies and certain private, nonprofit organizations in Columbiana, Greene, Mahoning, Mercer and Montgomery counties would be eligible for federal funds for eligible storm-related response and recovery efforts, including debris removal, emergency protective measures, and damaged infrastructure.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

JobsOhio recently announced a \$30 million revitalization grant to support initial site preparation work for a proposed ethane cracker plant in Belmont County, spokesman Matt Englehart told *Hannah News*. Englehart said the preparation work -- to begin later in July -- is an "important and positive step" for the project, for which a final investment decision has yet to be made by PTT Global Chemical America (PTTGC America) and Daelim Industrial Company.

EDUCATION

The State Board of Education Monday welcomed its two newest governor-appointed members and held an abbreviated discussion on education issues in the Senate-approved version of the state budget while legislators in both chambers continue to work toward consensus. Reggie Wilkinson, former director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, and Stephen Dackin, superintendent of school and community partnerships at Columbus State Community College, were sworn into their positions by Judge Edmund Sargus Monday after being appointed by Gov. Mike DeWine in June.

Following Monday morning's committee meetings, Superintendent Paolo DeMaria updated the board on several issues, including SuccessBound, the Ohio Department of Education's grant-funded in-demand job promotion program; the superintendent's proposed goals for the upcoming school year; and the lingering education issues left on

the table in the biennial budget bill HB166 (Oelslager), which has not yet cleared the General Assembly despite a July 1 deadline and the start of a new fiscal year.

A Franklin County judge is allowing the attorney general's office to attach Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager's Columbus condo to the state's ongoing collections case against Lager. The order for attachment signed by Judge Kimberly Cocroft functions like a lien, meaning that Lager could not sell the property free and clear if the state wins a judgement against him. The property at 155 W. Main St. is in the Waterford condominium tower on the south end of downtown Columbus. Cocroft's order did not attach a second property in Senecaville mentioned in the initial motion for attachment.

At the suggestion of President Laura Kohler, the State Board of Education (SBOE) Tuesday delayed the vote on the resolution increasing the compensation of SBOE members to cover time spent preparing for the board's monthly meetings until the September meeting. The resolution was rereferred to the Executive Committee for revising in light of the day's discussion, with Kohler noting that there was no time urgency for addressing the issue. Under a ruling from the attorney general's office, any compensation increases would not apply to current SBOE members.

Reps. Bob Cupp (R-Lima) and John Patterson (D-Jefferson) called an informal briefing Wednesday to give more explanation and field questions on the details of their updated school funding plan, recently introduced as HB305 (Cupp-Patterson). The representatives also recently released revised district funding simulations based on the updated plan. The two acknowledged imperfections in their plan and repeatedly implored those identifying them to offer suggestions, not just critiques.

As lawmakers consider if and how to address the controversy over state oversight of struggling school districts in final budget negotiations, the Ohio Supreme Court has scheduled oral arguments in a lawsuit that questions the constitutionality of the law authorizing the academic distress commissions now in control of three school systems. Nearly four months after the last brief was filed, justices decided Tuesday to schedule *Youngstown City School District Board of Education et al v. State of Ohio* for arguments Wednesday, Oct. 23, when the Supreme Court will be holding one of its off-site argument sessions in Williams County.

The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) voted unanimously Thursday to approve a new round of school building and renovation projects for FY20, authorizing funding for work in nine districts. All nine have their local share of funding from voters secure, meaning the projects can go forward pending approval from the Controlling Board. Melanie Drerup, chief of planning for the commission, said the Classroom Facilities Assistance Program (CFAP) projects total nearly \$400 million in work, with an average state share of 47 percent and average project budget of \$44.1 million.

ELECTIONS

House Democrats from Cuyahoga County recently sent a letter to Secretary of State Frank LaRose seeking more information on the effect moving the presidential primary in 2020 will have around the state and particularly in Cuyahoga County. The nine Democrats noted that a provision added to HB166 (Oelslager), the biennial budget, will move the presidential primary from March 10 to March 17, which is St. Patrick's Day. In their letter, they said that day is a huge day of celebration in Cleveland and in their districts, and said they are concerned about the effect it will have on people's ability to vote that day.

ELECTIONS 2019

With the goal of increasing the number of elected women in Ohio political office, the Matriots PAC has endorsed 19 women running for local office in 11 communities in the Nov. 5 General Election. Among them are Holly Brinda, running for Elyria mayor, and Elizabeth Brown, daughter of U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), running for re-election to the Columbus City Council. Other endorsed candidates include three running for local school boards, and one each running for a local auditor slot and clerk of courts.

ELECTIONS 2020

Nikki Foster, a former Air Force pilot who has flown missions during five deployments to the Middle East, launched her campaign for the Democratic nomination for the 1st Congressional District on Monday. Foster, who previously lost a bid for the 54th Ohio House District in 2018, said she is running for Congress "to take on the special interests." She made the announcement at an event in her hometown in Mason, OH. The seat is currently held by U.S. Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Cincinnati), who is expected to run for re-election in 2020.

President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence have announced plans to host a "Keep America Great" rally on Thursday, Aug. 1 at 7 p.m. at U.S. Bank Arena in Cincinnati.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The nation added 224,000 jobs in June, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced Friday, but the unemployment rate and number of unemployed persons showed little change, remaining 3.7 percent and 6.0 million, respectively. BLS said the "little or no change" was also present among all major worker groups and the number of long-term unemployed, or those jobless for 27 weeks or more. Currently, that accounts for 1.4 million people and 23.7 percent of all the unemployed.

The Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) announced Monday that it was re-introducing the "Leading Indicators" report, which forecasts near-term employment levels for Ohio and its eight largest metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). The reports use a statistical model that employs U.S., state and regional level data to produce an annualized growth rate for the next six months. Since a new methodology was used for this report it is not comparable to the previous Leading Economic Index, ODJFS noted, and new reports will be available monthly.

ENERGY

Following Wednesday's closed-door meeting on clean-air subsidies in HB6 (Callender-Wilkin), Chairman Steve Wilson (R-Maineville) of the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee said the Legislature is still on track to consider further changes and pass a bill out of the upper chamber this month. He could not say, however, how the House would respond to a continuation of renewable energy mandates in the current Senate version or whether HB6 might end up in conference committee, further delaying nuclear subsidies for which FirstEnergy Solutions (FES) has set a revised deadline of July 17 to halt plant closings. Wilson told *Hannah News* that he has finished vetting more than four dozen proposed changes announced at a rare committee meeting on Saturday, June 29, when members accepted only two amendments. They have taken no formal action on the bill since.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) Tuesday approved two Columbus office buildings and three small Ohio businesses in Hamilton, Richland and Franklin counties for up to a total of \$5.2 million to install new equipment that will save energy, improve energy efficiency and preserve air quality.

FEDERAL

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Youngstown) announced that a grant of \$600,000 has been awarded to Eastgate Regional Council of Governments by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration. The grant, part of the EDA Chicago Regional Office's Partnership Planning program, will assist Eastgate with the hiring of a recovery coordinator to assist local stakeholders with identifying the region's assets, and developing and implementing a recovery strategy for Youngstown.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) told reporters Tuesday that he hoped Congress would pass the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) by the August recess, saying it would help support struggling farmers in Ohio as heavy rainfall has hurt crop planting. The bad weather most recently led Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague to re-open the application period for the Agriculture Linked Deposit Program Monday, saying heavy rains and floods have wreaked havoc on farms around Ohio.

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Youngstown) announced the 2019 Congressional App Challenge (CAC) for middle and high school students in Ohio's 13th Congressional District. The CAC accepts computer programs (or apps) written in any programming language, for any platform (desktop/PC, web, mobile, raspberry Pi, etc.). The competition is open to all students who meet the eligibility requirements, regardless of coding experience. Other Ohio Congress members hosting the challenge include U.S. Reps. Bill Johnson (R-Marietta), Bob Gibbs (R-Ashland), Warren Davidson (R-Troy), Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) and David Joyce (R-Twinsburg).

GAMING/GAMBLING

Statewide racino revenue from video lottery terminals (VLTs) ended FY19 at \$1.06 billion, according to the Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC). VLTs at the state's seven racinos made \$987.3 million in FY18. Statewide VLT revenue for June 2019 was \$91.1 million, up from \$87.4 million in June 2018. That number is down from May 2019, however, when VLTs made \$95.9 million. Revenue at Ohio's four casinos was also up year-over-year, making \$70.3 million in June 2019 compared to \$67.1 million in June 2018, according to the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC). The four casinos made \$73.5 million in May 2019.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board reports that American Electric Power (AEP) closed a portion of the State Street sidewalk for construction beginning Monday, July 8. The project will also involve closing one or more driving lanes on State Street.

House Minority Leader Emilia Strong Sykes (D-Akron) Monday announced the selection of Amber Epling as communications director for the House Democratic Caucus. She succeeds Jordan Plottner who left the caucus at the end of May.

Rep. Candice Keller (R-Middletown), a salaried executive director of Community Pregnancy Center, potentially violated Ohio ethics laws by co-sponsoring legislation that would provide a refundable tax credit for contributions to anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers like hers, according to the Butler County Democratic Party. Butler County Democratic Party Executive Committee Chairman Brian Hester officially filed a complaint earlier this week with the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee (JLEC), asking the agency to investigate Keller's involvement with HB297 (Ginter-Powell).

Reps. Dave Greenspan (R-Westlake) and Juanita Brent (D-Cleveland) recently introduced HB285 to permanently extend a program which has decreased the number of Ohioans with suspended driver's licenses. Former Rep. John Barnes, the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation and the Ohio State Bar Association have all offered public support for the bill.

GOVERNOR

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Martin J. Grunder of Bellbrook (Greene County) to the Wright State University Board of Trustees for a term beginning July 3, 2019 and ending June 30, 2024.
- Andrew J. Platt of Xenia (Greene County) to the Wright State University Board of Trustees for a term beginning July 3, 2019 and ending June 30, 2028.

GREAT LAKES

Western Lake Erie's "significant" harmful algal bloom (HAB) this summer will likely measure 7.5 out of 10 on the severity index, according to researchers from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Heidelberg University and Ohio State University (OSU), among other institutions. However, the bloom could end up measuring anywhere from 6 to 9 depending on a number of factors, NOAA scientist Richard Stumpf said during the agency's annual Lake Erie HAB forecast at OSU's Stone Laboratory on Gibraltar Island, which was streamed online. The largest bloom occurred in 2015, with a severity index of 10.5, and 2011 was close behind at 10. Last year's bloom had a severity index of 3.6, while 2017 was 8.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

The wage that renters need to make to afford a basic, two-bedroom apartment continues to rise this year, according to a new report on the gap between earnings and the cost of rent. The report, issued by the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) and the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), shows that only three of the most commonly held jobs in the state pay enough money for someone to afford a two-bedroom apartment: registered nurses, customer services representatives and office clerks. Ohio's housing wage of \$15.73 per hour is calculated by taking the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment which is \$818 and estimating that Ohioans are supposed to spend just 30 percent of their income on housing. Assuming a 40-hour work week and 52 weeks per year, this calculates to \$32,728 annually and \$15.73 per hour. Ohio's one-bedroom housing wage is \$12.34 per hour. The typical renter in Ohio earns \$13.92 per hour and 34 percent of Ohioans rent their homes.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court is weighing the extent to which townships may regulate surface mining through a comprehensive zoning plan containing general community standards that exceed R.C. 519.02's express limit on such regulations to "public health and safety." Surface mining of sand, gravel and other aggregates is a billion-dollar-plus industry that employs some 4,000 Ohioans in 80 counties and supports construction of interstate

highways, streets, bridges, parking lots, sidewalks, commercial and residential buildings, and other infrastructure projects statewide, as well as producing lime for agriculture. The Court heard arguments Tuesday in the three-year-old dispute between Harrison Township in Pickaway County and reputedly the state's largest surface mining company, Shelly Materials Inc.

Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor is set to appoint a special three-judge commission to review the alleged criminal conduct of Pike County Sheriff Charles Reader, provisionally suspended by the county common pleas court Wednesday following the Democrat's indictment on 15 felony counts. Ohio Auditor Keith Faber had asked the Pike County Common Pleas Court to block Reader from discharging his official duties pending the outcome of criminal charges including theft in office and tampering with records, among others.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Patients and families of individuals suffering from anxiety and autism will likely have to wait until September at the earliest for the State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) to vote on whether medical marijuana can be legally used to treat those conditions. "The SMBO's Medical Marijuana Expert Review Committee will be meeting in August, which means we could be looking at a full board vote in September," SMBO spokesperson Tessie Pollock told *Hannah News* on Monday. "The board members wanted additional information and to hear from additional experts."

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company is among the 15 recipients of the 2019 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest U.S. government honor to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Boating under the influence (BUI) of alcohol is illegal and "extremely dangerous," according to the Ohio Department of Nature Resources (ODNR). Alcohol is involved in about one in every four fatal boating-related accidents in the state, ODNR said. The department went on to report that its law enforcement officers and local partner agencies issued BUI violations over the holiday weekend. Law enforcement officers also contacted 1,700 boaters about safe and legal watercraft use from July 5-7 as part of Operation Dry Water, a nationwide initiative aimed at removing impaired boaters from public waterways.

More than \$437,000 in Coastal Management Assistance Grant (CMAG) funding has been approved for five projects in the Lake Erie region, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) announced Wednesday. The projects in Toledo, Eastlake, Ashtabula

County, Lorain and Bay Village are intended to improve coastal planning, public access and water quality, the department said.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) Monday reported 12 people died in 12 traffic crashes during the July Fourth reporting period, which began Wednesday, July 3 and ended Sunday, July 7. Impairment was determined to be a factor in at least three of those crashes. Troopers made 709 arrests for impaired driving and 507 for drug-related charges. The patrol responded to 809 crashes and made more than 55,000 traffic contacts in total, which included providing assistance to more than 4,500 motorists.

TECHNOLOGY

Microsoft announced Tuesday that it is partnering with Watch Communications, an Internet service provider (ISP) in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, to expand broadband access, especially in rural areas. The partnership is part of Microsoft's Airband Initiative, aimed at extending broadband access to three million people in rural America by July 2022. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has found that 21 million Americans lack broadband access, while Microsoft found that 162 million people do not use the Internet at broadband speeds, including 17 million people in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Ohio is now home to the "largest, most comprehensive contained testing site in North America for advanced vehicle technologies," Transportation Research Center (TRC) executives and DeWine administration leaders said Wednesday. Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks were among the state officials helping TRC and its partners cut the ribbon at the \$45 million SMARTCenter, located on TRC's approximately 4,500-acre property in East Liberty.

Local and regional leaders from the capital area responded Wednesday to a proposed rebranding of the existing Rickenbacker International Airport as the "North American International Freight Center" to capture Columbus and Ohio's unique geographic advantages in warehousing and distribution. The area south of the capital would not rest on its logistics reputation, however, but would diversify its industry mix with a new smart technology hub, microgrid and solar arrays, and a Rickenbacker Energy Consortium promoting renewable generation, energy efficiency and smart transportation to, from and within the hub.

UTILITIES

FirstEnergy says the Ohio Supreme Court erred last month in blocking roughly \$80 million in revenues left on its distribution modernization rider (DMR) because the 4-3

Court supposedly addressed only one side of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's (PUCO) order granting over a half billion dollars in unlawful customer charges, most of which FirstEnergy will keep. The company is asking justices to reconsider their position; meanwhile, PUCO has made remaining charges fully refundable should the Court stand firm. FirstEnergy claims the majority opinion only found the DMR does not meet statutory requirements for a utility "incentive" under R.C. 4928.143(B)(2)(h) and did not address "distribution" per se.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

No legislative activity to report.

HOUSE:

No legislative activity to report.