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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.

AGRICULTURE

Ten more Ohio counties have received U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) secretarial disaster designations, according to Gov. Mike DeWine's office. The new designations bring the total to 54 Ohio counties where farmers can seek potential relief from the USDA due to rain, flooding or other weather conditions.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced Wednesday that while a review by his office found no signs of abuse, he would be requiring law enforcement agencies in the state to submit facial recognition search requests through the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) until they complete new training on the limitations of such technology. Yost emphasized that facial recognition does not generate a match in the way that DNA testing can, saying that it provides a starting point for a law enforcement investigation but should not constitute an investigation on its own or be used as the sole basis for a search warrant.

BALLOT ISSUES

The campaign to overturn energy subsidy bill HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) suffered a setback Monday when Attorney General Dave Yost rejected Ohioans Against Corporate Bailouts' (OACB) petition language for a proposed ballot referendum scheduled for fall 2020. Yost said the submission was not a "fair and truthful" summary of HB6 provisions, citing organizers' confusion over the Public Utility Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and Ohio Air Quality Development Authority's (OAQDA) roles in controlling consumer payments to the fund and setting subsequent billing credits to generation plants, among other "inaccuracies or omissions." The campaign group said it would revise the summary and submit a new one within days.

FY20-21 BUDGET

A recent analysis of both Ohio's transportation budget, HB62 (Oelslager), and its operational budget, HB166 (Oelslager), by Washington, D.C. nonprofit the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP) found that low- and middle-income earners will experience tax increases, while the highest earners will have their taxes cut. According to a release on the figures from nonprofit Policy Matters Ohio, ITEP "modeled the increases in fuel taxes and changes in the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in the transportation budget, along with the operating budget's cuts in rates and brackets of the state income tax, the suspension for one year of indexing income tax brackets and personal exemptions to inflation, and new requirements for online retailers to collect the sales tax."

Ohio's Office of Budget and Management (OBM) released the revenue figures for July 2019, which saw the state collect a total of \$1.7 billion in taxes. This was nearly \$29.5 million or 1.8 percent up over July 2018 revenues of nearly \$1.7 billion. The combined auto and non-auto sales tax accounted for nearly

\$956.4 million of that total, with the non-auto sales tax bringing in nearly \$811.2 million and the auto sales tax, \$145.2 million. OBM noted that the non-auto sales tax was up \$24.7 million or 3.1 percent over July 2018, while the auto sales tax came in just over \$11.0 million more than at this same time in 2018. This brings the combined sales taxes to nearly \$35.8 million or 3.9 percent higher than in 2018.

The August OBM Monthly Financial Report indicates that the state ended FY19 (on June 30, 2019) with an unencumbered cash balance of \$1.1 billion. Subtracting the \$168.8 million required by Ohio Revised Code Sec. 131.44 to be carried over to the next fiscal year, the state had \$977.5 million in what OBM termed the "actual surplus ending balance."

CENSUS

Gov. Mike DeWine named a wide spectrum of government officials, legislators, interest group leaders and community leaders to serve on the state's complete count committee leading up to the 2020 Census. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a complete count panel develops and implements a 2020 Census awareness campaign based on its members' knowledge of the local community.

EDUCATION

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) recently announced the grantees awarded federal funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program. The program creates or expands community learning centers that provide academic enrichment and youth development opportunities for students who attend predominantly high-poverty and low-performing schools. A total of 34 new award recipients were selected from more than 244 applications through a peer review process. Priority was given to programs that serve students in rural schools. In addition, 185 grantees received continuation funding based on prior year grant awards.

The accountability system for Drop-Out Recovery and Prevention (DRP) schools needs a thorough review, including a specific analysis of the effectiveness of the report card's measures, members of a State Board of Education (SBOE) workgroup said Monday. Lauren Monowar-Jones, director of the Legislature's Joint Education Oversight Committee (JEOC), joined the SBOE workgroup to discuss how best to approach reforming the assessment of these specific charter schools.

The Ohio Alliance for Arts Education (OAAE) announced Jarrod S. Hartzler of Wooster as the organization's new executive director. Hartzler has served as executive and artistic director of the Tuesday Musical Association in Akron since 2013, and will succeed Tim Katz, who has accepted a senior level position with the United States Peace Corps after five years of service as executive director.

The Ohio Academy of Science announced Tuesday the selection of 54 Ohio schools and 556 teachers as recipients of the Governor's Thomas Edison Awards for Excellence in STEM Education and Student Research for their accomplishments during the 2018-2019 school year. Each school will receive a special Governor's Award certificate, and each teacher will receive a complimentary membership to the Ohio Academy of Science.

The state's lawsuit against Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager looks likely to stretch at least through the first half of 2020, after the judge presiding in the case agreed with the parties that an earlier discovery deadline was unworkable. Judge Kimberly Cocroft of Franklin County Common Pleas Court approved an order earlier this month to stretch the discovery deadline from the end of August to the end of January 2020. Under Cocroft's amended case schedule, dispositive motions would be due March 16, 2020, with a status conference to follow on May 11. No new trial date has been set at this point.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) announced recently the availability of the Early Learning Standards Alignment Guide which was created in response to requests from providers of early care and education in Ohio. Specifically, the document presents a crosswalk between the Ohio Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDS) and Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF).

Thousands of Ohio school children are heading back to school now and in the coming days. For many of these students their day starts and ends by riding a school bus. The safety of the students riding to and from school and to school-sanctioned events is a top priority for the administration of Gov. Mike DeWine. From 2016 through 2018, 3,962 traffic crashes involved school buses in Ohio. During this time, four fatal crashes occurred killing four and injuring 1,268. None of those killed were on a school bus.

The Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) recently announced the nomination of Scott Huddle, president of the Mad River Local Schools Board of Education in Montgomery County, as the organization's president-elect. Huddle has been a member of the Mad River board since 1999, where he has served as vice president and president for multiple terms.

ELECTIONS

Saying they've found more than 4,000 discrepancies while reviewing voter information on Ohio's "Registration Reset" list, a group of voting rights advocates are calling on Secretary of State Frank LaRose to delay plans to cancel inactive voter registrations on Friday, Sept. 6. Pointing to the recent discrepancies found by the Ohio Secretary of State's Office during a financial audit, All Voting is Local Ohio State Director Mike Brickner said he and other advocates are worried that more voters could be potentially harmed by the state's process of removing inactive voters from the rolls. Brickner was joined at a Columbus press conference by League of Women Voters Executive Director Jen Miller, NAACP Ohio State Conference President Tom Roberts and Campus Vote Project Ohio State Coordinator Dylan Sellers.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced Thursday that his office will begin sending postcards later this month to unregistered voters instructing them on how to register. The mailing will be sent beginning Monday, Aug. 26 to 168,395 Ohioans who have been identified by LaRose's office as unregistered but eligible to vote. LaRose's office said the initiative is in coordination with the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a nonprofit organization that assists participating states in the effort to improve the accuracy of their voter rolls and increase access to voter registration. ERIC's members include 28 states and Washington, D.C.

ELECTIONS 2020

With the backing of the previous two occupants of the seat as well as Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina), former Medina County Commissioner Sharon Ray announced she will run for the 69th House District in 2020. The seat's current occupant, Rep. Steve Hambley (R-Brunswick), announced earlier that he would run for Medina County commissioner, his old position, rather than seek re-election.

Mahamud Jama, a small business owner, announced he is running for the 25th District for the Ohio House. The seat is currently held by Rep. Bernadine Kennedy Kent (D-Columbus), who is in her second term and is eligible to run again. Kent has been feuding with the House Democratic Caucus on a number of issues, including accusations by Kent that she was mistreated by caucus staff.

Zach Stepp, a Sheffield Village Democrat, announced Tuesday that he will run for the 55th House District. The seat is currently held by Rep. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville), who is expected to run for re-election. Stepp has a political science degree from the University of Chicago. He has managed a congressional campaign and works in federal government consulting.

Brunswick Mayor Ron Falconi said Monday that he will be running for the Republican nomination for the 22nd Senate District in 2020, a seat that will be open after term limits force Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) out of the chamber. Falconi made his announcement at a Medina County Republican Party event. In addition to his role as mayor, Falconi also is an attorney. Rep. Mark Romanchuk (R-Mansfield), who is also term-limited, announced last month that he is running for Obhof's seat.

Pickaway County Commissioner Brian Stewart announced this week that he will be running for the Republican nomination in the 78th House District in 2020. The seat is currently held by Rep. Ron Hood (R-Ashville), who is term-limited. Stewart is an Iraq War veteran and previously served as a councilman for the village of Ashville.

A member of the State Board of Education and an attorney who serves on the Geneva Schools Board of Education said they are running for the 99th House District seat currently held by Rep. John Patterson (D-Jefferson), who is term-limited. They include Sarah Fowler, who is a third-term state board member who now serves as the chairman of the Teaching, Leading and Learning Committee, and Richard Dana, who serves on the Geneva Schools board. Fowler is seeking the Republican nomination while Dana, the Democratic nomination.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- Justice Democrats endorsed Morgan Harper in the Ohio 3rd Congressional District Democratic primary.

- U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Warrensville Heights) endorsed U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) for president.

ENERGY

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is proposing new gas pipeline safety rules that would incorporate new federal guidelines, require utilities and other operators to develop plans for abandoning inactive services lines and assessing underground hazardous leaks, and increase industry forfeitures for noncompliance from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Draft changes under PUCO's five-year rule review do not appear to address concerns over pipeline setbacks from residences, schools and hospitals included in public comments on the proposed rules.

Rick Perry, for 15 years the governor of Texas and now the U.S. Secretary of Energy, contended Wednesday that every country should "embrace energy choice and diversity" because it will mean greater energy security, greater economic security and stronger national security. "There are those who, in the name of cleaner energy, oppose energy diversity. They want us to abandon our pro-innovation, all-the-above policies by banning every fuel besides renewables. And I find that to be, frankly, astonishing," Perry said. He was the keynote speaker on opening day of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in Austin, TX.

ENVIRONMENT

A new Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) program is focused on funding trash-free water projects, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Administrator Andrew Wheeler and USEPA Region 5 Administrator Cathy Stepp announced recently in Cleveland. USEPA said it plans to issue a request for applications (RFA) in October. Once the RFA is released, applicants will have approximately 45 days to respond. Approximately \$2 million in total funding will be available, with a maximum grant amount of \$500,000 per project. Up to 12 grants could be awarded, including two larger-scale projects and 10 smaller-scale projects.

Disease-causing air pollution remains high in pockets of America, particularly those where many low-income and African American people live, a disparity highlighted in research presented at the

annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York. The nation's air on the whole has become cleaner in the past 70 years, but those benefits are seen primarily in whiter, higher-income areas, said Kerry Ard, an associate professor of environmental sociology at Ohio State University.

ETHICS

The former White House Counsel under President Richard Nixon said Wednesday that he sees common links between the Watergate investigation that ultimately led to Nixon's resignation and the current report written by Robert Mueller. "We didn't learn from history," Dean told a Columbus Metropolitan Club forum Wednesday. "We just repeat it," albeit with some differences.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Wendy Zhan, a 24-year veteran of the Legislative Service Commission, will take over as director in September, succeeding Mark Flanders, who will retire. House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford), who chairs the commission, announced the transition Thursday.

Senate Republicans will take applications until 4 p.m. Friday, Aug. 23 for those interested in replacing Sen. Joe Uecker (R-Loveland), who will resign at the end of August to take a position with the Ohio Department of Transportation's Office of Jobs and Commerce.

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine has revealed new details regarding his September business development trip to Japan, the state's top international investor and the fifth-largest export market for Ohio products in 2018. The trip was previously discussed at a meeting of the Governor's Executive Workforce Board. DeWine will be joined by JobsOhio President and CIO J.P. Nauseef and Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) Director Lydia Mihalik.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

With another school year starting, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reminds parents that the number of providers with a star rating in the state's child care quality rating system continues to climb. "Step Up To Quality (SUTQ) recognizes child care programs that go beyond minimum standards to promote children's learning and development," ODJFS Director Kimberly Hall explained. "Hundreds of providers throughout Ohio have stepped up to provide quality care for children." By July 1, 2020, all Ohio child care programs that receive state funding must participate in Step Up To Quality. To date, more than 3,600 publicly funded providers across the state are rated with at least one star on the five-star scale.

IMMIGRATION

About 100 protesters -- banging drums, chanting slogans, carrying signs -- showed up at the entrance of the JW Marriott hotel in downtown Austin on the opening day of the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) conference. "Hey there ALEC, you can't hide, we can see your greedy side," the picketers chanted. "Not only do we support workers' rights, a healthy environment, and disability rights," said Sadie Hernandez, local organizer for United We Dream,

"but we are also here because ALEC has ties to private corporations that put our people in concentration camps and profit off those private detention camps."

INSURANCE

Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) Director Jillian Froment announced Monday the addition of three new members to the department's senior team. Mark Hamlin, policy advisor for emerging products, and Jennifer Demory, market analysis administrator, take newly created positions to assist in the agency's oversight duties of Ohio's rapidly modernizing insurance industry. Jessica Schuster is the department's new human resources director.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court approved a one-year law license suspension, with six months stayed and credit given for a previous suspension, for former Lorain County Common Pleas Judge James Burge, for violations of judicial conduct rules related to unprofessional comments and failure to disclose a business interest.

Ohio's Open Meetings Act (OMA) prohibits governmental bodies from using secret ballots or silent votes in official public business, the Ohio Supreme Court unanimously ruled Wednesday, despite previous objections by some on the Court to accept the appeal in the first place. In *MoreBratenahl v. Bratenahl*, the court ruled in favor of Patricia Meade, publisher of local newspaper MOREbratenahl, who argued that members of the Bratenahl Village Council violated the OMA when using a secret ballot to elect a member president pro tempore during a January 2015 meeting.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

A total of 53,082 patients are now registered under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP), according to the Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP). Of registered patients, 30,284 have legally purchased cannabis at a licensed dispensary. There are 3,432 military veteran patients, 2,042 indigent patients and 271 terminally-ill patients. There are 3,998 registered caregivers in the program.

Law enforcement agencies seeking to prosecute felony-level marijuana trafficking cases can now be reimbursed for costs associated with the testing necessary to ensure the substance contains more than 0.3 percent THC, Attorney General Dave Yost announced Tuesday. The Major Marijuana Trafficking Grant Program sets aside \$50,000 for law enforcement agencies to have large quantities of marijuana tested at private accredited laboratories that can quantify THC. The funding is a necessary "stopgap," Yost said, because the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) will not be able to conduct quantitative testing for several months. Under hemp legalization act SB57 (S. Huffman-Hill), cannabis containing not more than 0.3 percent THC is legal.

The State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) Medical Marijuana Expert Review Committee on Wednesday unanimously voted against adding anxiety disorder and autism spectrum disorder to the list of qualifying conditions for treatment under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP), changing its vote from just three months ago. The panel unanimously voted in favor of recommending the addition of those conditions during its May meeting. In June, the full SMBO delayed its consideration of those conditions after welcoming two new members, with SMBO President Michael Schottenstein saying they should have time to participate

Students at the Ohio State University (OSU) Moritz College of Law can now prepare for serving clients in the increasingly legal business of marijuana and hemp. Dickinson Wright attorney and OSU adjunct law professor Benton Bodamer teaches a course titled "Cannabiz: Exploring the Legalization of Marijuana" through the OSU law school's Drug Enforcement and Policy Center.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (NCSL)

People who drive for a living don't have to worry about autonomous vehicles making their jobs obsolete anytime soon, according to transportation policy experts on a National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) panel. Answering a question from Pennsylvania AFL-CIO Legislative Director Chad Trainer during NCSL's "Moving Forward with Autonomous Vehicles" discussion, Consumer Technology Association (CTA) Government Affairs Director Jamie Boon said some driving jobs will go away at some point, but not in the near future.

While voting machine technology is getting more advanced and states are expanding early voting, many voters still have difficulty casting a ballot, advocates said at an NCSL annual conference session. Advocates representing populations including those with disabilities, Native Americans, older voters, and overseas and military voters said that as lawmakers contemplate changes to voting systems or the purchase of new equipment, they should understand that voters have varying experiences and one size does not fit all.

Several states are vying to enact business-friendly legislation regarding the distributed ledger technology blockchain, according to a panel at NCSL Wednesday, even as limited action is taken at the federal level. Nevada Sen. Ben Kieckhefer said he began working with blockchain-related laws in 2016 while updating economic development laws away from tax incentives for big businesses to focus more on ecosystem development and attracting entrepreneurs and start-up companies that will grow in the state.

The latest in a series of primers on "front-end justice" from NCSL addresses young adults in the justice system. Released during the group's Legislative Summit in Nashville, it found that "young adults, age 18-24, represent less than 10 percent of the U.S. population, yet account for 23 percent of all arrests. Compared to the general population, young adults reoffend at a greater rate and are more than twice as likely to be the victim of a serious violent offense.

The United States is now 10 years into an economic expansion. Unemployment is low, currently at 3.7 percent and has been under 4 percent over the year. The last time the nation had this healthy a job market was about 50 years ago. But recently, the Federal Reserve issued its first interest rate cut since the recession. Brent Meyer, a policy advisor and economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, said the move can seem like we're living in the "Twilight Zone." Meyer gave attendees at the NCSL Legislative Summit an overview of the federal economic picture and was not as pessimistic over the future of the nation as others have been.

E-commerce, autonomous vehicles and the graying of America's population stand to undermine state revenues absent policies to adapt to the disruption they'll cause to existing taxation schemes, a University of Tennessee-Knoxville economist told an audience Thursday at the NCSL annual summit in Nashville. William Fox, director of the university's Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research, explained how marketplace shifts and behavioral changes inherent among retirees will rearrange economic activity in a way that many sales and income tax statutes aren't set up to capture.

Myriad concerns of educators, from safety to academic achievement to workforce readiness, all can benefit from embedding social and emotional learning (SEL) tools in schools, advocates of such instruction said during a session at the NCSL annual summit.

Great Lakes legislators and utility and water quality experts reviewed the gamut of water quality concerns Wednesday at an NCSL Legislative Summit session, discussing issues from failing septic tanks to agricultural runoff to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination. The panel included Michigan House Speaker Lee Chatfield, Wisconsin Rep. Todd Novak, Executive Director Julia Anastasio of the Association of Clean Water Administrators, and American Water Senior Scientist Lauren Weinrich.

As the nation splits more and more along partisan lines on the biggest issues, a panel at the NCSL annual meeting shows that the death penalty is not one of them. Wyoming Republican Rep. Jered Olsen said he started out his career in the Legislature as pro-capital punishment, but then he cosponsored a bill that he said opened his eyes. He learned how much states spend to carry out executions, and that for every 8.7 executions carried out in the U.S., one Death Row inmate is exonerated. He said with citizens already struggling to trust the government to carry out daily tasks like delivering the mail, he didn't know how they could trust the justice system with carrying out the ultimate punishment.

Two of the first states to legalize recreational marijuana said that while sales have added needed funds, it remains a very small revenue generator compared to the overall budget. Still, representatives of Colorado and Washington told a session at NCSL that expectations from the public about how much tax revenues it brings is high and many wonder why the states are still falling short in areas such as school funding, even though marijuana revenues are dedicated revenue streams.

States and communities need an economic development strategy for defense installations that treats the bases like other sizable businesses they would want to attract and retain, leaders in such efforts told the audience at a session during the NCSL annual summit last week. Local leaders around military installations started to realize amid the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process that ad hoc approaches wouldn't cut it, said Matt Borrion of the Association of Defense Communities.

While there are many factors that drive the cost of health care in the United States, the nation isn't necessarily an outlier in that, a panel at the NCSL annual meeting was told by an expert on the increasing price of health care in the United States

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Forestry will provide more than \$95,000 of wildfire personal protective equipment (PPE) and suppression tools to 24 rural fire departments, the department announced Wednesday. The funding goes to firefighters in Clermont, Brown, Ashtabula, Geauga, Trumbull, Portage, Mahoning, Stark, Fulton, Henry and Lucas counties, ODNR said.

PEOPLE

Philanthropy Ohio's Board of Trustees Tuesday announced the selection of Deborah Aubert Thomas as the organization's new president and CEO. Aubert Thomas assumed her new role on Thursday, Aug. 15. Connie Hawk, board chair, said, "Deborah has superbly served Philanthropy Ohio as its vice president for programs and learning since 2014, providing exceptional vision and oversight for the organization's educational programs and diversity, equity and inclusion work."

Ohio Citizens for the Arts announced that Bill Behrendt will move from Ohio Citizens for the Arts executive director position to the organization's legislative co-counsel alongside the group's Senior Legislative Counsel Bill Blair.

POLLS/STUDIES

"In Ohio, the state can suspend a person's driver's license for more than 30 reasons," states a new report urging the General Assembly to fully address collateral sanctions by making the recently ended license reinstatement pilot program permanent with the newly introduced HB285 (Greenspan-Brent). The Ohio Poverty Law Center (OPLC) held a Statehouse press conference Wednesday to highlight the success of the six-month Driver's License Reinstatement Fee Amnesty Initiative, which ran Jan. 31-July 31, 2019 under the pilot created by 132-HB336 (Barnes-Greenspan), and to call on lawmakers to expand the program to a larger percentage of the one million-plus Ohioans who lose their license each year.

STATE GOVERNMENT

After two of the more controversial rule proposals were pulled off the agenda by their respective agencies, all remaining items cleared the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) without testimony or questions. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) placed its rule prohibiting the restraint of children in the prone position in all situations in "to be refiled" (TBR) status. The committee had expected opponent testimony from children's services agencies in Trumbull County, which still use the "transitional hold" position. JCARR Executive Director Larry Wolpert announced late last week that the Ohio Board of Pharmacy's (OBP) placed its proposed rule classifying kratom as a Schedule I controlled substance into TBR status. Opposition testimony was also expected on that rule.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) assured the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) that crossings blocked by stopped or slow-moving trains is a "complex matter" straddling federal, state and local jurisdictions, and that the commission generally supports a new public reporting system proposed by FRA. At the same time, says PUCO, improved data alone "will not give state and local officials the tools ... needed to mitigate the health and safety risks created by obstructed railroad crossings." The commission filed comments on FRA's proposal to begin collecting data through a mobile app for citizens and a dedicated portal for law enforcement on the location, frequency and impact of highway-rail grade crossings afflicted by slow-moving or idling trains. Transportation professionals inside and outside Ohio could use the data to analyze the problem and propose solutions to blocked crossings.

UTILITIES

Ohio's Buckeye Rural Electric Cooperative received a \$19.7 million loan to build and improve 96 miles of line, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced. The upgrades will serve 600 new customers, USDA said. The organization will also invest \$327,000 in smart grid technologies to increase system efficiency and resilience.

The Ohio Development Services Agency issued a brief reminding Ohioans that the Home Energy Assistance Summer Crisis Program ends on Saturday, Aug. 31. Ohioans can apply online at energyhelp.ohio.gov or at their local Energy Assistance Provider. To qualify for the Summer Crisis Program, a household must have an annual income at or below 175 percent of the Federal Poverty Guideline or \$45,062.50 for a family of four. The household also must have a household member 60 years or older or provide physician documentation that cooling assistance is needed for a household member's health. Conditions can include lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or asthma.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

No legislative activity to report.

HOUSE:

No legislative activity to report.