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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**

According to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), the rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths in Ohio decreased by 22.7 percent in 2018, the first time deaths fell from one year to the next since 2009. According to ODH, 3,764 Ohioans died from unintentional drug overdoses in 2018, down from 4,854 in 2017, and the lowest number of deaths since 2015, when 3,050 Ohioans died from unintentional overdoses.

### **AGRICULTURE**

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelandia announced Wednesday that \$30 million in H2Ohio funding will be available for Ohio farmers in more than a dozen counties beginning in February. The funds will be awarded as part of DeWine's H2Ohio plan to reduce agricultural phosphorus runoff and prevent algal blooms in Lake Erie.

The application period for the Agriculture Linked Deposit Program (Ag-LINK) is now open, Treasurer of State Robert Sprague announced on Monday. The application period will remain open until Friday, March 20, according to the treasurer's office.

## **ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced a multi-state settlement with PayPal Charitable Giving Fund (PPGF) Wednesday that requires its fundraising platform to inform contributors they are donating directly to PPGF and not to their selected charities, which currently receive nothing if not "enrolled" in the fund.

Effective Tuesday, Jan. 14, the PayPal fundraising site will "make unavoidable and prominent disclosures that the donors are making donations to PPGF and not to the charity they select," and will "not use language implying that potential donors are directly making a donation to their chosen charity," according to PPGF's assurance of voluntary compliance (AVC).

## **CHILDREN/FAMILIES**

Youth homelessness is often "out of sight, out of mind" when it comes to the general public's view, Gov. Mike DeWine told reporters Tuesday, and a holistic approach is needed to help address the specific factors involved. DeWine was joined by U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Columbus) and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson, who announced nearly \$2.2 billion in nationwide funding. The funding, through HUD's continuum of care (CoC) program, will support over 6,500 local programs in all 50 states. Ohio is ranked fourth for most funding, at \$106.8 million to 284 programs.

## **CIVIL RIGHTS**

"I remind my team we have to deal with the day-to-day of governing but also keep an eye to the future. And an eye to the future must always include acceptance of diversity and knowing that we are one people." Such was the closing statement of Gov. Mike DeWine during his speech at the 35th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Celebration held Thursday at Trinity Episcopal Church in Columbus.

## **CORRECTIONS**

Saying a "rosy portrayal" of Ohio's youth prisons given to the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) does not match up with a recent U.S. Department of Justice survey finding a high percentage of youth reporting sexual abuse, Senate Democrats asked the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) to provide more information on violent incidents in youth facilities over the past six months. The letter signed by all members of the caucus to DYS Director Ryan Gies raises concerns about the safety of juvenile inmates at DYS facilities.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Annette Chambers-Smith, director of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC), finalized Gov. Mike DeWine's overhaul of the Ohio Parole Board Thursday with the appointment of former Bureau Chief Alicia Handwerk of DRC's Community Sanctions Bureau as chairwoman, and also naming Joe Brumfield of Clark/Madison County Mental Health Services and former victim

advocate Lance Pressley of the Summit County Prosecutor's Office to the board. The new appointments are effective Tuesday, Jan. 21.

## EDUCATION

As part of legislative deliberations addressing the rapid growth of schools where students are eligible for EdChoice scholarships, Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) is hoping to win support for his proposal to largely convert the state voucher system to one based on income rather than school performance. Huffman, identified by Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) recently as a leader of Senate discussions on the topic, told *Hannah News* Tuesday that while he agrees current criteria are putting some schools on the EdChoice list that don't belong, he won't support "jerking the rug out" from families who stand to gain voucher eligibility under those criteria.

A House priority bill on college credit transfers that could pick up those changes to the EdChoice program had a relatively quiet Senate committee hearing Thursday, as lawmakers in both chambers weigh how to address the issue before the voucher application window opens Feb. 1. Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard), chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee, said she knows HB9 (Jones-Sweeney) is the type of bill that could serve as a vehicle, since it's already passed one chamber and had multiple committee hearings in another, but has not been told specifically that will happen or seen any amendments to that effect. She said she wants to give the bill's underlying purpose due consideration as well because it's considered a priority by House leadership.

Ohio's 2020 Teacher of the Year, Norwood Middle School teacher Leila Kubesch, is one of four finalists for the National Teacher of Year competition. Kubesch, who teaches Spanish and English to students who speak other languages, joins a finalist group that includes Chris Dier, a world history and AP human geography teacher at Chalmette High School in Louisiana; Tabatha Rosproy, an early childhood teacher in Winfield, KS; and Linda Rost, a science teacher at Baker High School in Montana

Plain Local School District must send a petition from residents wanting to switch to a neighboring school system to the Stark County Board of Elections, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled Thursday. Residents of the village of Hills and Dales want their addresses moved to nearby Jackson Local Schools under a new territory transfer law enacted in the state budget bill, HB166 (Oelslager). The new territory transfer law has generated major consternation among local school officials and the State Board of Education.

The State Board of Education voted Tuesday to officially "receive" a report of recommendations from an advisory group it formed on dropout prevention and recovery (DOPR) schools, in contrast to draft motions circulated ahead of the meeting to "support" or "accept" the report. Members had voiced concerns that the latter two descriptions would imply the board's endorsement of recommendations they hadn't spent time digesting or debating. The workgroup had met again Friday to respond to a memo from Superintendent Paolo DeMaria on the report that they found critical of their work. The full board also heard presentations from workgroup members and DeMaria on the subject Monday. During Tuesday's debate, Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) urged the board not to spend too much time "wordsmithing" the issue, as the Legislature has already queued up its own DOPR study and "will not spend a lot of time on the words in this document."

The State Board of Education's Executive Committee recommended Monday a FY21 schedule that would mostly stick with its custom of meeting the second Monday and Tuesday of the month,

dropping proposals to move some dates because of a holiday and a major conference. The full meeting FY21 meeting schedule recommended by the committee, with all dates being a Monday and Tuesday, is as follows:

August 2020 - No meeting

Sept. 21-22, 2020

Oct. 12-13, 2020

Nov. 9-10, 2020

Dec. 14-15, 2020

Jan. 11-12, 2021

Feb. 8-9, 2021

March 8-9, 2021

April 12-13, 2021

May 10-11, 2021

June 14-15, 2021

July 12-13, 2021

## **ELECTIONS**

Rep. Bride Rose Sweeney (D-Cleveland) announced Monday that she introduced HB466 which would create automated voter registration in Ohio. The bill would automatically register to vote citizens who interact with the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) or attend high school in Ohio. Citizens will be registered to vote or have their name or address updated unless they decline the registration or update to their information.

## **ELECTIONS 2020**

The Ohio Republican Party's State Central Committee Friday voted to endorse candidates in primaries for Congress, Ohio House and Ohio Senate, including candidates in contested primaries despite opposition by some of the committee's members. Included in those endorsements were four current members of the Ohio House running for the Ohio Senate this year: Rep. George Lang (R-West Chester) in the 4th Senate District; Rep. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg) in the 6th Senate District; Rep. Mark Romanchuk (R-Mansfield) in the 22nd Senate District; and Rep. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin) in the 26th Senate District. In other endorsements, the central committee altered a list of suggested House endorsements in contested primaries that don't involve an incumbent that had been submitted by House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford). The committee refused to endorse in the open primary for the 66th House District seat currently held by term-limited Rep. Doug Green

(R-Mount Orab) and the 73rd House District seat currently held by the term-limited Rep. Rick Perales (R-Beavercreek). In the 65th House District, currently held by Rep. John Becker (R-Cincinnati), who is also term-limited, the central committee went against Householder's recommended endorsement of former U.S. Rep. Jean Schmidt and instead endorsed Joe Dills, a small business owner in the district. The committee also endorsed Gary Click in the 88th House District, where there had been no recommended candidate by Householder.

The Ohio Democratic Party's (ODP) Executive Committee endorsed incumbents in congressional, Ohio Senate and Ohio House races on Wednesday, but the committee will not be endorsing in contested primaries that don't involve incumbents. Of the four Democrats running for re-election to Ohio's congressional delegation, only U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Niles) is unopposed in the Tuesday, March 17 primary, while U.S. Reps. Marica Fudge (D-Warrensville Heights), Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) and Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus) all have challengers from within the party. Endorsements in the Ohio Senate and Ohio House races saw less discussion, with representatives of the caucuses encouraging support for their candidates. The two endorsed senators -- Vern Sykes (D-Akron) and Sean O'Brien (D-Cortland) -- are unopposed in the primary, though Sen. Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland), representing the Senate Democratic Caucus, noted that O'Brien's seat is going to be a big target for Republicans in this election.

Elections officials from across the nation said that the 2020 presidential election is no longer on the horizon. It's here. Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose participated on a panel with Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson at the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's 2020 Elections Summit held in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday. They outlined preparations that their states are undertaking to prepare for the election. LaRose said he expects this year's election to have a high turnout.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose, speaking at the Ohio Association of Elections Officials Winter Conference on Wednesday, said that he is confident all 88 counties will have completed a security upgrade checklist that he issued last year, but he indicated that he may have to step in and become more involved if any counties don't complete the task by his deadline of Friday, Jan. 31. LaRose praised elections officials for their work in implementing his directive within the seven months he gave them.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- Democrat Joe Biden's presidential campaign announced the endorsements of Ohio Reps. Allison Russo (D-Columbus), Kristin Boggs (D-Columbus), Randi Clites (D-Ravenna), Tavia Galonski (D-Akron), Michele Lepore-Hagan (D-Youngstown), Mary Lightbody (D-Westerville), Jessica Miranda (D-Cincinnati), Lisa Sobecki (D-Toledo) and Bride Rose Sweeney (D-Cleveland).

## **EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT**

The national unemployment rate remained at 3.5 percent in December as total nonfarm employment rose by 145,000, according to new employment figures released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on Friday. BLS said the number of unemployed persons was unchanged at 5.8 million in December but was down from December 2018 when the jobless rate was 3.9 percent and the number of unemployed persons was 6.3 million.

## **ENERGY**

PJM Interconnection's independent monitor told the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Governing Board Tuesday that FirstEnergy Solutions' (FES) nuclear plants could hemorrhage 10-20 percent of their revenue under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) December order expanding minimum capacity prices to subsidized generators, threatening Perry and Davis-Besse's future in the 13-state competitive market if they accept nuclear credits authorized by HB6 (Callender-Wilkin).

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is disputing federal regulators' finding that coal and nuclear subsidies in HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) along with other price supports in the PJM region distort the capacity market and force out more competitive technologies, including natural gas generation. The agency said Wednesday that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) recent order imposing minimum prices on subsidized electricity is replete with "errors," with the commission voting unanimously to file for rehearing in the FERC case.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Construction projects would face much less scrutiny from environmental regulators under a rule change proposed by the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). The proposal would update the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), signed into law by former President Richard Nixon in 1970. The law requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of proposed major federal actions. Environmentalists are criticizing the move, saying it would exacerbate climate change and cause harm to Americans' air, water and health. The administration and the fossil fuel industry argue the environmental permitting process needs to be updated to allow projects to move forward more quickly and at lower financial costs.

Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) Director Laurie Stevenson recognized Honda R&D Americas Inc. (HRA) with the agency's "platinum" level environmental stewardship award. The company earned the top award for its emphasis on waste reduction, community service and outreach, according to the Ohio EPA.

## **FEDERAL**

Sens. Matt Huffman (R-Lima), Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) and Michael Rulli (R-Salem) were present at President Donald Trump's signing of a "phase one" trade agreement between the U.S. and China Wednesday, according to their offices. Also in attendance was U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH). Trump said the agreement involves "structural changes" by China, which also committed to "massive purchases" of American manufacturing goods, agricultural products and energy products and services. The White House said the Chinese reforms will be in "areas of intellectual property, technology transfer, agriculture, financial services and currency and foreign exchange" and that the agreement includes a strong dispute resolution system. In return, the U.S. will significantly modify Section 301 tariffs.

During a call-in with reporters Wednesday, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) discussed his anti-human trafficking legislation and the upcoming impeachment trial. Brown's "Protect Act" aims to support victims of trafficking by amending current law to specify that the use of drugs to cause a person to engage in a commercial sex act or forced labor constitutes a form of coercion.

Additionally, it includes a provision to protect trafficking victims from prosecution as victims are often forced to commit crimes.

Thursday's U.S. Senate passage of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) was praised by Ohio Republican leaders including U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Senate President Larry Obhof and the Ohio Republican Party (ORP). The Ohio Corn & Wheat Growers Association (OCWGA) also praised the bipartisan vote, which followed House passage in December.

## **GAMING/GAMBLING**

Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) Executive Director Matthew Schuler told commissioners Wednesday that staff continue to review fantasy contest operator license applications, and he believes the first reports and recommendations could be brought forward at the next OCCC meeting scheduled for Wednesday, Feb. 19. OCCC Deputy Executive Director Rick Anthony also told commissioners the organization is in "good shape" financially, with tax revenue 2.7 percent over estimates for the first half of the fiscal year and expenses below estimates.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) and Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) Wednesday reminded Ohioans that all of the Ohio Senate's standing committees will now be streamed live on [www.OhioChannel.org](http://www.OhioChannel.org). The hearings will also be broadcast by the Ohio Channel on public broadcasting stations (PBS) around the state. House committees, too, will all be livestreamed.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) Thursday approved seven more individuals including the first six women elected to the General Assembly to be recognized as "Great Ohioans," but delayed action on putting a memorial to women's suffrage on Statehouse grounds until its next meeting scheduled for April. Thursday was the first meeting with House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) taking over the role of chair. Last year's chairman, Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina), was selected as vice chairman, while Senate Clerk Vince Keeran was named as secretary.

The House Health Committee reported out both HB365 (G. Manning) which revises the requirements for a chemical dependency counselor II license and HB341 (Ginter) which deals with the administration of drugs for addiction treatment.

## **GOVERNOR**

Gov. Mike DeWine told reporters Tuesday that he believes "a lot is going OK" regarding the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP), though he remains open to suggested changes and adjustments that may occur to better ensure the Legislature's will is carried out. DeWine addressed reporters following his signing of HB4 (Richardson-Robinson) and covered a range of topics including the MMCP, sports gambling and distracted driving.

Speaker of the House Larry Householder (R-Glenford) Friday invited Gov. Mike DeWine to the House chamber to deliver his "State of the State" address on Tuesday, March 31 at 12 p.m. before a joint session of the General Assembly. The annual speech, during which the governor outlines his policy priorities and goals before state lawmakers and other public officials, is a bit later than recent

State of the State addresses. DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney said the date was agreed upon by the governor's office and legislative leaders, based on both sides' calendars.

Bills signed by Gov. Mike DeWine this week include the following:

- **HB2 CREDENTIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CROSS J, LEPORE-HAGAN M)** To create the TechCred Program and the Individual Microcredential Assistance Program, to develop a grant program to support industry sector partnerships, and to make an appropriation.
- **HB4 WORKFORCE CREDENTIALS (RICHARDSON T, ROBINSON P)** Regarding the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and industry-recognized credentials and certificate programs.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Dennis M. Clough of Westlake (Cuyahoga County) and Todd L. Poole of Powell (Delaware County) reappointed to the State Fire Council for terms beginning Nov. 2, 2019 and ending Nov. 1, 2024.
- Amy Weiskittel of New Richmond (Clermont County) to the Environmental Education Council for a term beginning Jan. 10, 2020 and ending Oct. 1, 2021.
- Brian J. Buschur of Tipp City (Miami County) and Mark K. Papke of Parma Heights (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the Environmental Education Council for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2019 and ending Oct. 1, 2021.
- Mario Baker of Bowling Green (Wood County) to the Ohio Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Athletic Trainers Board for a term beginning Jan. 10, 2020 and ending Aug. 27, 2022.
- Chad J. Miller of Marengo (Morrow County) reappointed to the Ohio Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Athletic Trainers Board for a term beginning Aug. 28, 2019 and ending Aug. 27, 2022.
- Anthony R. Podojil of Painesville Twp. (Lake County) to the Ohio Retirement Study Council for a term beginning Jan. 10, 2020 and ending June 30, 2020.
- John F. Bayliss of Rushsylvania (Logan County), Kimberly S. McConville of Westerville (Franklin County) and Brian W. Winter of Plain City (Union County) reappointed to the Materials Management Advisory Council for terms beginning July 2, 2019 and ending July 1, 2022.
- John Daly of New Albany (Franklin County) and Robert J. Schmidt, Jr. of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Materials Management Advisory Council for terms beginning Jan. 14, 2020 and ending July 1, 2022.
- Ericka King-Betts of Cincinnati (Hamilton County), Varun Mahajan of Powell (Delaware County), Electra D. Paskett of Dublin (Franklin County) and Jennifer L. Savitski of Akron (Summit County), to the Commission on Minority Health for terms beginning Jan. 14, 2020 and ending Sept. 2, 2021.



- David C. Rinebolt of Columbus (Franklin County) and Brenda S. Shamblin of Amanda (Fairfield County) to the Public Benefits Advisory Board for terms beginning Jan. 14, 2020 and ending June 30, 2022.

- Prince Ellis of Cincinnati (Clermont County), Kefa M. Otiso of Bowling Green (Wood County) and Ademola O. Solaru of Cleveland Heights (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the New African Immigrants Commission for terms beginning Oct. 8, 2019 and ending Oct. 7, 2022.

- Mohamud Dallin of Columbus (Franklin County) to the New African Immigrants Commission for a term beginning Jan. 14, 2020 and ending Oct. 7, 2022.

- John C. Grecula of Dublin (Franklin County) to the Radiation Advisory Council for a term beginning Jan. 16, 2020 and ending Sept. 6, 2024.

- Michael S. Bisesi of Westerville (Delaware County) and Johannes "John" O. Olsen of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Radiation Advisory Council for terms beginning Sept. 7, 2019 and ending Sept. 6, 2024.

- Raymond "Butch" Losey of Cincinnati (Clermont County) and Susan J. Pohler of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Counselor, Social Worker and Marriage and Family Therapist Board for terms beginning Oct. 11, 2019 and ending Oct. 10, 2022.

## **GREAT LAKES**

Ohio State University's (OSU) Stone Laboratory is encouraging college undergraduates to apply for its 2020 Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) scholarship program. Applications are due by Monday, Feb. 3, according to the Ohio Sea Grant and Stone Lab. Students selected for the REU program receive a full scholarship, including lab fee, room, meals and in-state tuition for the two-credit research experience and a four-credit, six-week course at Stone Lab -- OSU's island campus on Lake Erie.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

The role of hospitals in community health efforts is increasing, according to a recent Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) report looking at the latest data from FY17. The net community benefit increased 28 percent, from \$5 billion to \$6.4 billion, while total uncompensated care increased 22 percent, from \$7.3 billion to \$8.9 billion. OHA also found that community benefit activities increased 33 percent, from \$3 billion to \$4 billion; Medicaid losses increased 17 percent from \$2.3 billion to \$2.7 billion; and charity care funding increased five percent, from \$458 million to \$482 million.

## **JUDICIAL**

The Ohio Supreme Court is accepting new applications for its access-to-justice grant fund supporting low-income, underserved and disadvantaged Ohioans. The Civil Justice Program provides direct legal assistance and increased access to assistance for Ohioans' civil legal needs, including housing, health care and economic security, among others.

## **MARIJUANA/HEMP**

While the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) has made progress during its first year of sales, there is still a lot of room for improvement, two lawmakers who have been heavily involved in the issue told *Hannah News* on Thursday. Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City) said the program undoubtedly had a "disappointing start," pointing to the various legal issues, delays and other problems that have plagued the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC), Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) and State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) as they have attempted to implement the program. Huffman was the main sponsor of medical marijuana legalization legislation 131-HB523.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture's (ODAg) hemp rules package cleared the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) on Thursday, keeping the new program on track for implementation in time for the spring planting season. The department's hemp rules address reporting, testing, cloning, seed production, inspection, cultivation, laboratory testing and enforcement. Gov. Mike DeWine signed hemp legalization bill SB57 (S. Huffman-Hill) in July 2019, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently approved Ohio's hemp production plan.

The Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) should ease advertising restrictions on cultivators, processors and dispensaries, Ohio Medical Cannabis Industry Association (OMCIA) Associate Director Thomas Rosenberger told *Hannah News*. "The current advertising rules are overly broad and restrictive," Rosenberger said in an interview. "One of the most notable challenges created by the rules is that communication between patients and industry is severely limited, leading to confusion and misinformation."

A survey released Friday by Interact for Health -- the Ohio Health Issues Poll (OHIP) 2019 -- analyzes Ohioans' knowledge of marijuana use and their perception of its harm. OHIP noted that marijuana is the most commonly used illicit substance in the U.S., and according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 44 million Americans ages 12 or older had used marijuana in 2018. The poll findings show that most Ohioans do not have a friend or family member that regularly uses marijuana (51.9%), but a still significant number (45.6%) answered that they do.

## **MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM**

In a year-end memo to Gov. Mike DeWine, Ohio Department of Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran said she inherited "a mess" of a program from the previous administration, detailing error-ridden IT systems that snarled eligibility determinations and led to substantial payment errors. In a press teleconference Tuesday, Corcoran said she did not want to assign blame but rather "clear the air," though the memo itself lists numerous problems as having been inadequately addressed by the prior administration of Gov. John Kasich. "If we were looking to appoint blame, and we're not, there are probably several stakeholders we'd be pointing fingers at, and they'd be pointing back at us," she said.

## **MILITARY AFFAIRS**

Gov. Mike DeWine Thursday authorized the Ohio Air National Guard to deploy personnel from an engineering squadron to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico following a series of powerful earthquakes that caused massive destruction and widespread power outages. The earthquakes began on Dec. 28, 2019, culminating in a 6.4 magnitude earthquake on Jan. 7 and multiple aftershocks. The governor of Puerto Rico declared a state of emergency later that day which remains in effect.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

White-tailed deer hunters completed the muzzleloader season with 10,615 deer taken, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife. The muzzleloader season ran from Saturday, Jan. 4 to Tuesday, Jan. 7, according to ODNR. The total is down from the 2019 season, during which 14,168 deer were harvested.

Ohio botanists found four plant species in 2019 that had not been seen in Ohio for decades and, in one case, more than a century, according to the ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP). The following four species had been presumed extirpated in Ohio, meaning a naturally occurring population had not been observed in more than 20 years: the black-stemmed spleenwort (*Asplenium resiliens*), last seen in Ohio in 1900, was found in Adams County in May; the American cuckoo-flower (*Cardamine pratensis* var. *palustris*), last seen in Ohio in the early 1990s, was found in Summit County in May; Vasey's pondweed (*Potamogeton vaseyi*), last seen in Ohio in 1935, was found in Lorain County in June; and the water marigold (*Bidens beckii*), last seen in Ohio in the 1930s, was found in Portage County in September.

The ODNR Division of Forestry has awarded \$46,058 to land management agencies under the Prescribed Fire Supplies, Tools, Education and Personal Protective Equipment (STEP) grant program. The funding will go toward 21 projects across the state.

## **NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

Ohio Excels, a non-partisan, nonprofit coalition of Ohio business leaders working to improve education policy and workforce solutions, named two new members of its board of directors Tuesday. They are Beverly Beery, owner and founder of Beery Insurance Services in Lima, and Roland Medrano, founder and managing director of Regal International, a Columbus-based management and consulting firm.

## **PENSIONS**

Trustees of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) voted Wednesday to scale back monthly subsidies given to retirees for health care costs and end the group plan for retirees who haven't reached Medicare age, requiring them to use their subsidies to buy coverage on the open market. Changes won't take effect until 2022. Under law, pension benefits are mandatory while retiree health care coverage is a discretionary benefit. OPERS leadership say they must focus on the health of the underlying pension fund, which has substantial unfunded liabilities, and thus has not been able to divert any contributions into the separate health care fund. The system does not expect to be able to send any money to the health care fund for at least 15 years, OPERS CEO Karen Carraher said Wednesday, but that fund has only about a decade's worth of funding left on the current trajectory.

## **PEOPLE**

Kerstin Sjoberg is the new executive director of Disability Rights Ohio (DRO), the organization announced Thursday. Sjoberg replaces Michael Kirkman, who is retiring after almost 40 years of advocacy for people with disabilities. Kirkman announced his retirement in November 2019.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

A culture change will likely be necessary for law enforcement agencies to successfully implement mental health and wellness initiatives, Columbus Division of Police Wellness Bureau Commander Rhonda Grizzell told the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board on Tuesday.

## **SECRETARY OF STATE**

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced Thursday that 130,621 new businesses filed in Ohio in 2019, setting a new annual record. According to LaRose, 9,071 new entities filed to do business in Ohio in December -- the best December on record -- and helped drive Ohio over the 130,000 new businesses threshold for the first time ever.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

Draft legislation establishing civil and criminal statutes regarding "deepfake" material is being developed, CyberOhio Advisory Board President Kirk Herath told board members Thursday, as current Ohio law has "a gap" when it comes to this new area. "Deepfakes" use technology to create videos and other material that falsely represent someone's voice or likeness, and they have been used in politically-related hoaxes, financial fraud and pornography.

## **TREASURER OF STATE**

Treasurer of State Robert Sprague Wednesday announced the establishment of the Ohio Treasurer's Compass Award program. The new monthly recognition program aims to recognize organizations, programs and individuals across Ohio who are working to advance financial literacy and empowerment. Ohio's eight independent chapters of Junior Achievement (JA) have been selected as the inaugural Compass Awards honorees.

## **UTILITIES**

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) seized on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's (PUCO) five-year rule review this week to propose Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) changes that would expand "refund" provisions already approved by the commission in certain rate cases to all add-on customer charges. Joined by public energy aggregators, OCC reminded PUCO that Ohioans have now surrendered \$1.2 billion in utility charges ruled "unlawful" by the Ohio Supreme Court since the state adopted its extensive system of billing riders or "tariffs" in 127-SB221. The Court stated as recently as last June that R.C. 4905.32 empowers the commission to subject all utility charges, including "any rate, rental [or] toll," to refund. The FirstEnergy decision spared consumers further payment of improper charges but allowed the company to keep \$442 million in collected tariffs that PUCO had not subjected to refund.

Sitting Commissioner Lawrence Friedeman is seeking another term on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), one of 10 applicants vying to be among those the PUCO Nominating Council forwards to Gov. Mike DeWine for consideration. Close of business Thursday, Jan. 9 was the deadline to apply for the new, five-year term that begins Saturday, April 11. The Nominating Council will meet Thursday, Jan. 23 to interview selected candidates and will send four names to DeWine. He'll then have 30 days to pick one or ask for a new slate of four; any appointment is subject to Senate confirmation.

A recent study out of Ohio State University (OSU) suggests that economic and conservation benefits associated with time-of-use electricity billing could be achieved at the expense of some of the most vulnerable citizens: people with disabilities and the elderly. Under a time-of-use system, energy prices are higher during high-demand "on-peak" times, a practice intended in part to create incentive for people to reduce their electricity use when it's more expensive, according to OSU's website.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

The Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) issued a reminder to Ohio employers that March 31 is the deadline to apply for safety grants in FY20. The next application period, for FY21 funding, is July 1. BWC offers \$20 million each year in grants regarding safety intervention; working with persons with developmental disabilities; firefighter exposure to environmental elements; school safety and security and workplace wellness. Grants are available to all Ohio state-fund, private and public taxing district employers to purchase equipment to eliminate or reduce workplace hazards.

## **WORKFORCE**

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday traveled to Bluffton for an event where he signed HB2 (Cross-Lepore-Hagan), legislation that codifies the TechCred and Industry Sector Partnerships programs and creates an Individual Microcredential Assistance Program. The event was held at Grob Systems in Bluffton. DeWine's office said the TechCred program is currently helping Ohioans learn new skills and helping employers build a stronger workforce with the skills needed in a technology-infused economy. The credentials take a year or less to complete and prepare current and future employees for the technology jobs Ohio employers need.

There is s an "undeniable necessity" for a strong relationship between business leaders and educators, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said Tuesday at Gov. Mike DeWine's signing of HB4 (Richardson-Robinson), which codified a requirement for the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT) to serve as a liaison in that area. Husted, who leads OWT, said the bill will help guide spending of the \$50 million appropriated in the FY20-21 budget to assist career centers and high schools in covering the costs of credential tests. OWT is required to help connect the business community with the departments of education and higher education regarding industry-recognized credentials and certificate programs, he said that will help provide relevant education & job training.

## **LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:**

### **SENATE:**

No legislative activity

### **HOUSE:**

No legislative activity