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Week in Review
Monday, January 25, 2016

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 Governor's Cabinet Opiate Action Team (GCOAT) announced the adoption of new opioid prescribing guidelines for the outpatient management of patients with acute pain, aiming to reduce the number of individuals abusing or misusing prescription drugs.

Attorney General Mike DeWine declared an official state of "emergency" in Ohio's drug epidemic, bringing together a thousand law enforcement officers, first responders, probation officers, treatment providers and other professionals from across Ohio to the state capital to address the "silent death" of heroin, opioid and other drug overdose.

AGING

Three state agencies have released action steps they can take to help the state's nursing homes be better prepared to deal with the aftermath of natural disasters or catastrophic accidents.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission (OPOTC) will now require drug screening of all applicants to law enforcement training academies and will soon consider other disqualifiers including psychological exams. The Attorney General's Advisory Group on Law Enforcement Training recommended those measures and other requirements of police cadets, including truth verification screening, more criminal disqualifiers, and a physical fitness test. The mandatory drug screen will become effective at all basic training academies on July 1, 2016.

The Ohio Attorney General's Office is providing business owners and landlords new resources for understanding state regulations in the marketplace. The attorney general's "Fair Employment Guide for Business Owners" offers best practices for interviewing potential applicants, crafting an anti-harassment policy, addressing discrimination or harassment complaints, and responding to requests for accommodation due to disability or religion.

BALLOT ISSUES

Backers of a proposed initiated statute that would limit what Ohio pays for pharmaceutical drugs have followed up their state lawsuit against the secretary of state with a second lawsuit filed in federal court. Ohioans for Fair Drug Prices, which is pushing the proposed Ohio Drug Price Relief Act, filed a suit against Secretary of State Jon Husted in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio, asking for a temporary restraining order after Husted sent the proposal back to county boards of elections for further examination in response to questions raised by opponents of the measure.

BUDGET

The capital reappropriations bill could move out of committee as early as this week after the Senate began hearings last Wednesday, Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Scott Oelslager (R-Canton) told committee members. Testifying on the bill were sponsor Sen. Bill Coley (R-West Chester) and Kurt Kauffman, the interim assistant director of the Office of Budget and Management (OBM).

EDUCATION

The State Board of Education is seeking opinions from educators and the public about what qualities they'd like to see in the next state superintendent. The board hopes to hire a new superintendent this spring, following the retirement of Superintendent Richard Ross at the end of 2015. Lonny Rivera, who was one of Ross' associate superintendents, is serving as interim superintendent during the search. The survey is available at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XM7JHYQ>.

ELECTIONS 2016

House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) officially gave his backing to Gov. John Kasich for president, days after the Ohio Republican Party and U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) threw their support to the governor. With his endorsement, Rosenberger will now serve as an Ohio co-chair of the campaign, along with Senate President Keith Faber (R-Celina), and Ohio's non-judicial statewide officeholders, except for Treasurer Josh Mandel, who endorsed U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL).

ELECTIONS 2018

Treasurer Josh Mandel took a step toward a 2018 rematch with U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) when he filed paperwork with the Federal Elections Commission to reactivate his campaign committee.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The House Insurance Committee adopted a substitute version of unemployment benefits reform measure HB 394 (Sears), incorporating amendments outlined the previous week with a handful of additional changes relating to employees terminated for violating employer handbook policies. Reiterating earlier reactions to the amendments, labor groups opposed to the bill said they were unassuaged.

ENVIRONMENT

The state announced that a Trumbull County judge has ordered the newly abandoned Warren Steel Holdings plant to maintain operation of its wastewater treatment plant and secure hazardous waste and chemicals at the site. County common pleas Judge Andrew Logan granted the temporary restraining order sought by Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) Director Craig Butler. The move seeks to prevent industrial wastewater from overflowing into the Mahoning River and to secure the facility in keeping with state environmental laws.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Sen. Chris Widener (R-Springfield) said last Thursday he was retiring from public service effective at the end of the month. Sen. Widener's move follows his announcement in December that he would not run for the House as some Statehouse observers anticipated. The lawmaker, who previously served in the lower chamber before his election to the Senate in 2008, is said to be eyeing an opportunity in the private sector.

Following the announcement, Senate President Keith Faber (R-Celina) issued a statement noting, "We will decide in the coming days on how to proceed with the vacancy Chris's retirement creates both in his district and in Senate leadership, but I look forward to working with him in that transition."

GOVERNOR

The governor made the following appointments during the week:

- Wallace B. Burden of Chillicothe (Ross County) to the Materials Management Advisory Council for a term beginning Jan. 15, 2016 and ending July 1, 2017.
- Kevin Crist of Athens (Athens County), Jennifer Klein of Columbus (Franklin County) and Timothy A. Flock of Marion (Marion County) reappointed to the State Emergency Response Commission for terms beginning Jan. 15, 2016 and ending Jan. 13, 2018.
- John G. Reiner of Dublin (Delaware County) to the State Board of Landscape Architect Examiners for a term beginning Jan. 15, 2016 and ending Nov. 9, 2020.
- Dorothy L. Jones of Lima (Allen County) reappointed to the Ohio Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Commission for a term beginning Jan. 15, 2016 and ending Dec. 30, 2018.
- Terrence L. Holman of Greenville (Darke County) to the Dangerous and Restricted Animals Advisory Board for a term beginning Jan. 20, 2016 and ending Jan. 15, 2019.
- John F. Martin of Copley (Summit County) reappointed to the Ohio Higher Educational Facility Commission for a term beginning Jan. 21, 2016 and ending Jan. 1, 2024.

MARIJUANA

Less than a week after the House announced a task force that will study the use of medical marijuana in Ohio, two senators on opposite ends of the issue announced a listening tour around the state to hear from Ohioans about whether the state should move forward with medical marijuana. Sens. Dave Burke (R-Marysville) and Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) said they see their efforts as complementary to what the House is doing.

TAXATION

Both the Ohio Department of Taxation and the federal Internal Revenue Service (IRS) began accepting 2015 income tax returns Tuesday, Jan. 19.

The Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) told the 2020 Tax Policy Study Commission last week that the tax reforms of 2005 have been an overall success and a good start for future changes to Ohio tax policy. Those changes should include rejecting the shift of revenues from one sector to pay for tax relief in another, said OMA.

UTILITIES

Applicants for Commissioner Asim Haque's seat on the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) include a number of repeat candidates, including one dating back to Govs. Bob Taft and Ted Strickland. The incumbent Haque, a Columbus resident, is looking to return to PUCO when his seat expires in March, though most of his seven challengers are no strangers to the process.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

SENATE:

PASSED BY SENATE

HB17 EMERGENCY CIVIL IMMUNITY (Rep. Louis Blessing III, Rep. Al Landis) To provide civil immunity for architects, contractors, engineers, surveyors, and tradespersons providing volunteer services during a declared emergency.

Vote 31-1

HB98 CHILDHOOD APRAXIA OF SPEECH AWARENESS DAY (Rep. Tim Brown) To designate the fourteenth day of May as "Childhood Apraxia of Speech Awareness Day."

Vote 33-0

HB121 SERVICE DOG AWARENESS WEEK (Rep. Michael Stinziano, Rep. Margaret Ann Ruhl) To designate the last week of July as "Service Dog Awareness Week."

Vote 33-0

SB239 DAY DESIGNATION (Sen. Jim Hughes) To enact section 5.46 of the Revised Code to designate August 7 as Ohio Purple Heart Day.

Amended on the Floor, Vote 33-0