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**Week in Review**October 6, 2017

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.

**ABORTION**

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Friday released its 2016 Ohio Abortion Report, showing a continued decrease in the number of abortions. At 20,672 abortions for the year, this is the lowest level since 1976, when record-keeping first began. It is a decline from the 2015 total of 20,976.

**ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Gov. John Kasich recognized the 16th annual Ohio Rally for Recovery and National Recovery Month Friday in a resolution presented on the front steps of the Ohio Statehouse. Director Tracy Plouck of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) read the resolution to a large crowd of recovering Ohioans and advocates on the West Plaza.

The Ohio Supreme Court will administer a "first-of-its-kind," $1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance benefiting eight regional states in the battle against the opioid epidemic. The Regional Judicial Opioid Initiative (RJOI) formed one year ago to explore ways state leaders within a region devastated by opioid abuse could work more effectively and collaboratively across disciplines to confront this problem. The Ohio Supreme Court followed by applying for the $1 million grant on behalf of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia and Ohio itself.

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine is co-leading a 39-state effort that urges Congress to pass legislation making drug abuse treatment more available to Americans. Headed by DeWine and Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro and joined by the National Association of Attorneys General, the bipartisan coalition of state attorneys sent a letter to U.S. House majority and minority leaders Monday in support of HR2938, the "Road to Recovery Act."

**AGING**

As Ohio's older population grows at an unprecedented rate, the state will need to adopt policies that keep long-term care costs down, increase the use of technology in treatment and better support caregivers, according to a presentation to the House Aging and Long Term Care Committee Tuesday. Dr. Robert Applebaum from the Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami University presented his findings in a report entitled "Policy Does Matter," outlining the ways in which Ohio's senior population is changing and how and where they are being served.

**AGRICULTURE**

Gov. John Kasich has signed an emergency executive order (EO) allowing the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) to immediately adopt a proposed rule on inflatable amusement ride inspection fees.

**ATTORNEY GENERAL**

A Mahoning County man, Dominic Marchionda of Poland, and his businesses have been indicted on more than 100 charges, including alleged corrupt activity, theft and money laundering related to three development projects in Youngstown, Attorney General Mike DeWine and State Auditor Dave Yost announced Monday.

**AUDITOR OF STATE**

After nearly eight and a half years, the village of Portage in Wood County has reached financial stability State Auditor Dave Yost announced Monday.

**BALLOT ISSUES**

Matt Borges, Yes on Issue 2 senior campaign advisor, said the group is "very disappointed" in the recent decision by the Ohio Elections Commission, adding it could have far-reaching effects on campaign finance in Ohio. The Elections Commission dismissed two complaints out of three that Yes on Issue 2 had filed against its opponents, with the third sent to a full hearing set for Thursday, Nov. 2. Borges said they were pleased the third complaint was getting a full hearing.

Issue 2 is enlisting the help of one of Ohio's more colorful politicos in the marketing war with opponents of the "Drug Price Relief Act." Former U.S. Rep. Dennis Kucinich joined organizers of the ballot measure on Capitol Square Monday to unveil four new TV ads in support of Issue 2.

Secretary of State Jon Husted on Wednesday released educational videos on state Issues 1 and 2, which he said are designed to encourage voter awareness and participation in the upcoming election. Each video lasts about two to three minutes and gives an explanation of what would happen on each issue should it be passed or rejected by voters.

Attorneys for the Cleveland Clinic Foundation sent a letter this week asking supporters of Issue 2, the Drug Price Relief Act, to cease using images of its CEO, Toby Cosgrove, in campaign materials without his permission.  The campaign committee, Ohio Taxpayers for Lower Drug Prices, responded that it only reprinted comments Cosgrove made during a public forum on health care at the Cleveland City Club in May.

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) has created a resource page on Issue 2, the Drug Price Relief Act. The page can be found at www.healthpolicyohio.org/issue-2-drug-price-standards-initiative/.

**FY18-19 BUDGET**

Preliminary September revenue figures from the Office of Budget and Management show tax collections missed estimates for the month but remain in the black for the year to date. Specifically, the state saw a total of nearly $1.7 billion collected in September -- $6.2 million or 0.4 percent below the estimate for the month. However, through the first quarter of FY18, Ohio is running nearly $17.4 million or 0.3 percent over estimates with a total of $5.3 billion collected.

**CHILDREN/FAMILIES**

The 30th annual Domestic Violence Awareness Month began with a Tuesday event held by the Ohio Domestic Violence Network (ODVN), recognizing steps taken in the Statehouse and around Ohio as well as remembering those lost, including Judy Malinowksi.

Under new legislation from Sen. Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland), school bullies could face 60 days in jail and a $500 fine. SB196 (Williams-Brown) would create an "aggravated bullying" offense in the Ohio Revised Code, and would be charged as a third-degree misdemeanor.

**CORRECTIONS**

Ohio laws regarding strip searches need to be updated in light of a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision and the increase in heroin being smuggled into detention facilities, Sen. John Eklund (R-Chardon) said Tuesday. In sponsor testimony on SB138 before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Eklund said *Florence v. Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Burlington* held that officials can strip search any arrestee before admitting them to jail, even if there is no reason to suspect he or she is carrying contraband.

**DEATH PENALTY**

A Lake County man will come off Death Row for a new trial after a split Ohio Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that the county prosecutor had committed "plain error" by introducing five knives into evidence not used in the murder of Mentor-on-the-Lake bartender Anne McSween in the case *State v. Thomas.*

**DISABILITIES**

Disability Rights Ohio moved to a new location on Friday: 200 Civic Center Dr., Suite 300, Columbus, 43215.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Ohio Development Services Agency's (DSA) Export Assistance Office is now accepting applications for the International Marketing Access Grant for Exporters (IMAGE) program. Ohio has been awarded $700,000 by the U.S. Small Business Administration's (SBA) State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) to offset the high costs associated with international marketing initiatives.

**EDUCATION**

Beginning Friday, Sept. 29 — the day most language changes included in FY18-19 budget bill, HB49 (R. Smith), go into effect — eligible students can now apply year-round for Ohio's Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program. The program, administered by the Ohio Department of Education, is available for students in grades K-12 who have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) announced that 342 schools nationwide had been selected as "National Blue Ribbon Schools" for 2017. The recognition is based on a school's overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The following nine Ohio schools are included: East Garfield Elementary School, Steubenville City School District; Ledgeview Elementary School, Macedonia, Nordonia Hills City School District; Miamitown Elementary School, Southwest Local School District; Nolley Elementary School, Akron, Manchester Local School District; Orchard Hill Intermediate School, North Canton City Schools; Toll Gate Elementary School, Pickerington Local School District; Toll Gate Middle School, Pickerington Local School District; Waynesville Elementary School, Wayne Local School District; and Wyandot Elementary School, Dublin City School District.

A proposed Ohio Department of Education (ODE) rule on emergency management plans was pulled from Monday's Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) after concerns were raised by school administrators. JCARR Executive Director Larry Wolpert told *Hannah News* that ODE placed the rule in to-be-refiled status while it works out issues with the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA). The proposed rule would change several requirements for school emergency management plans, including addressing bullying and behavioral health issues.

To build on ongoing work to improve the language and literacy development of Ohio's children, the state was awarded a $35 million Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) announced Tuesday.

While personal finance site WalletHub said education jobs are among the lowest-paying occupations requiring a bachelor's degree, Ohio received high marks in a report released recently. The Buckeye State was ranked ninth out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and placed second among its neighbors. The report used "21 key indicators of teacher-friendliness" ranging from income growth potential to pupil-teacher ratio to teacher safety.

Ohio's largest school district is seeking community input on what characteristics they would like to see in the district's next superintendent. The Columbus City Schools Board of Education is providing an online survey to students, families, staff, teachers and service providers to gauge what they're looking for in the district's next leader.

**ELECTIONS 2018**

The Ohio Republican Party (ORP) State Central Committee unanimously voted to endorse the 2018 Ohio Supreme Court candidacies of Seventh District Court of Appeals Judge Mary DeGenaro and Fifth District Court of Appeals Judge Craig Baldwin. Ohio Supreme Court Justices Terrence O'Donnell and William O'Neill are not eligible to run again due to age limits.

Tom Zawistowski, executive director of the Portage County Tea Party, said Wednesday that he is considering running for the Republican nomination for the 16th Congressional District. The seat will be open in 2018 as current U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci (R-Wadsworth) runs for governor.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- #Rev18 PAC endorsed Josh Mandel for the U.S. Senate.

- The Ohio Fraternal Order of Police endorsed Issue 1, the crime victims' rights constitutional amendment.

- Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron) endorsed Betty Sutton for governor.

- The Montgomery County Republican Party endorsed Jon Husted for governor.

- The Lucas County Republican Party endorsed Mike DeWine for governor.

**ENERGY**

Ohio's debate over the future of nuclear and coal-fired electric generation is headed for national consideration as U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Rick Perry directs the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to initiate rulemaking for the preservation of "fuel-secure traditional baseload" including coal and nuclear. Perry issued an eight-page letter to the commission on Friday calling for an "all of the above" energy strategy that recognizes the inherent virtues of coal and nuclear generation, which he says have been undervalued by electric markets operated by PJM Interconnection and other regional transmission organizations and overseen by FERC.

The Buckeye State comes in at number 31 on a new energy efficiency scorecard from the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE). Ohio, tied at the 31st spot with North Carolina and Arkansas, fell two spots from last year's ACEEE State Energy Efficiency Scorecard. The state continues its slide since 2015, when it fell to 27.

It was the barest of quorums that heard ranging testimony before the House Public Utilities Committee Tuesday on the latest substitute bill for Ohio Valley Electric Corporation (OVEC) "rider" legislation HB239. Nearly half the committee was excused when Chairman Robert Cupp (R-Lima) took up the controversial bill, which would subsidize OVEC coal-fired plants as a "national generation resource."

The first meeting of House Speaker Cliff Rosenberger's (R-Clarksville) Energy Task Force ranged from collegial conversation about barriers to new utility investments to contentious discussion of the Legislature's policy against "retroactive ratemaking," or the refund of customer charges later declared unlawful. As task force chairman, Rep. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) set three topics for discussion: (1) constraints on new utility investments, (2) redeveloping coal-fired plants, and (3) the future of retroactive ratemaking, otherwise known as the Keko doctrine, named after the Ohio Supreme Court decision *Keko Industries, Inc. v. The Cincinnati & Suburban Bell Telephone Co.* (1957).

**FEDERAL**

U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH) recommended Friday that the White House appoint Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Administrator/CEO Sarah Morrison to one of two vacant seats on the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Ohio. They also recommended 4th District Appeals Court Judge Matt McFarland for the Southern District seat in Dayton, where Judge Thomas Rose has announced he will retire.

New legislation, the Local Food and Regional Market Supply (FARMS) Act, intended to help farmers sell products to consumers, create rural jobs and invest in local food economies was introduced by U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown on Wednesday.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) and Capitol Square Foundation are seeking nominations for the 2018 class of "Great Ohioans." The award commemorates Ohioans who have played a significant role in an event, or series of events, of lasting significance in world, American or Ohio history. Additional criteria include being born in Ohio or lived in Ohio for a minimum of five years. At least 25 years must have passed since the commemorated event, in which the nominee participated.

The first hike sponsored by the Ohio Legislative Trails Caucus (OLTC) took place this week over two days in Trumbull and Ashtabula counties, Sen. Sean O'Brien (D-Cortland) announced Tuesday. O'Brien, co-chairman of the caucus along with Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville), said the goal of the hike was to publicly promote Ohio's trails and the goals of the OLTC.

The House announced Monday that Rep. Al Landis (R-Dover) will replace Rep. Ryan Smith (R-Bidwell) on the Controlling Board. According to House Republican spokesman Brad Miller, Smith thought it was appropriate to step down from the Controlling Board "because of other engagements."

Despite objections raised by Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) regarding the appointment of Ohio Right to Life Executive Director Michael Gonidakis to the State Medical Board, the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee approved the appointment, sending it on to the full Senate.

Following a recent report from the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) concerning a theft from a vehicle parked in the Ohio Statehouse parking garage, the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) is urging garage patrons to secure their vehicles.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) said Thursday it has recently completed a lighting upgrade project that will not only save taxpayer dollars but will also add to the historic ambience of the Statehouse. The new bulbs, with both dimming and "warm" or "cool" light capabilities, will allow for historically appropriate lighting levels inside the Ohio Statehouse, CSRAB spokesman Luke Stedke explained to *Hannah News*.

**GOVERNOR**

Gov. John Kasich again appeared on national television Thursday calling for people of "good will" to work together rather than surrendering an issue to the extremes, this time on the issue of 'bump stocks' that allow certain semi-automatic rifles to be fired at a faster rate than originally manufactured. Kasich had made similar remarks on immigration and health care reform, and he brought up the health care issue as well in his appearance on CBS This Morning.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Theodore T. Bauer, DDS of Columbus (Franklin County) to the State Dental Board for a term beginning Sept. 29, 2017, and ending April 6, 2021.

- Jaime L. Darr, DDS of Massillon (Stark County) to the Dentist Loan Repayment Advisory Board for a term beginning Sept. 29, 2017, and ending Jan. 28, 2019.

- John R. Page of Lewis Center (Delaware County) to the Ohio Expositions Commission for a term beginning Sept. 29, 2017, and ending Dec. 1, 2020.

- Marcella Boyd Cox of East Cleveland (Cuyahoga County) to the Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2017, and ending June 30, 2019.

- Corrine Burger of Dublin (Delaware County) and R. Anthony Joseph of Bexley (Franklin County) to the Columbus State Community College Board of Trustees for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2017, and ending Aug. 31, 2023.

- Leonard A. Komoroski of Chagrin Falls (Cuyahoga County) to the Cleveland State University Board of Trustees for a term beginning October 3, 2017, and ending May 1, 2026.

- John P. Rademacher of Loveland (Clermont County) reappointed to the Ohio Architects Board for a term beginning Oct. 3, 2017, and ending Oct. 2, 2022.

- Pamela S. Steurer of Lewis Center (Delaware County) to the Ohio Commission on Service and Volunteerism for a term beginning Oct. 3, 2017, and ending April 21, 2020.

- Dennis Corcoran of Chillicothe (Ross County) to the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission for a term beginning Oct. 3, 2017, and ending June 30, 2018.

- Thomas F. Needles of Whitehall (Franklin County) reappointed to the Motor Vehicle Dealers Board for a term beginning Oct. 5, 2017 and ending Oct. 4, 2020.

**GUNS**

Sen. Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati) announced Thursday he would be introducing a bill to ban "bump stocks" in Ohio, though he told *Hannah New*s the question of whether the bill's ban would apply to prior purchases would be up to legal research and discussion.

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Ohio had the third highest number of children gaining insurance between 2015 and 2016, according to a recent report that analyzed U.S. census data. The report, prepared by the Center for Children and Families at Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute, found that Ohio's uninsured rate for children, 3.6 percent, was lower than the national average and that 20,000 children gained insurance. The only states with a higher numerical figure for newly insured children were California (34,000) and Florida (27,000).

Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) officials project the state will exhaust federal funds for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by the end of the year, as Congress did not renew the funding before it expired Saturday, Sept. 30. There is still time for a legislative fix, however, and U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D) and Rob Portman (R) praised recent committee passage of a bill toward that end.

**HIGHER EDUCATION**

The University of Cincinnati (UC) is one of eight universities and public health organizations that will be receiving a federal grant aimed at reducing housing-related health hazards, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced recently.

Sam and Caryn Covelli, whose company is the world's single largest franchisee of Panera Bread restaurants and employs more than 35,000 people, are donating $1 million to Youngstown State University (YSU), the university said Monday. YSU said in recognition of the gift, the athletics facilities across from Stambaugh Stadium on the west side of campus will be named the Covelli Sports Complex.

Kent State University's College of Business Administration has partnered with the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) on behalf of the Ohio Small Business Development Center to deliver the Certified Business Advisor (CBA) online certification program beginning fall 2017, the university said recently.

The University of Toledo (UT) and Ohio University (OU) Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding formally creating the Ohio Alliance for Innovation in Population Health, which they said will help lead to innovations that will address some of the major issues in the public health sector.

A new partnership with Apple will allow Ohio State University (OSU) to give all first-year students an iPad Pro starting in Fall 2018. This "student success initiative" is part of a "comprehensive, university-wide digital learning initiative that will support educational innovation for students and economic development opportunities for the community," OSU said in a news release. The tablets will be funded through the university's administrative efficiency program.

**INSURANCE**

Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine convened the Insurer Task Force on Opioid Reduction for the first time Wednesday, providing an opportunity for industry leaders in Ohio to discuss and develop strategies to further combat the opioid crisis. The Wednesday meeting included representatives from Medical Mutual, Molina Healthcare of Ohio, United Healthcare Community Plan of Ohio, Optum Behavioral Health Ohio, UnitedHealth Group, United Healthcare of Ohio, Paramount Health Care, Aetna, Anthem, Buckeye Health Plan, CareSource Ohio and the Ohio Association of Health Plans, as well as the Ohio Department of Medicaid.

**JUDICIAL**

The Supreme Court of Ohio will enter the national debate over sports-related head injuries, accepting an appeal from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and University of Notre Dame that contests a deceased player's tort claim linking repeated concussions and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

The Ohio Supreme Court is providing teachers new lesson plan resources to educate children about the judicial branch of government. New brochures available at the Supreme Court website provide an overview of its civic education programs and the role and responsibilities of Ohio's court system. The packet includes tools to teach students of all ages about the court system. From "comic books" to coloring books, they offer children a fun way of learning. Materials can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/y7d7cy43>, or by emailing the Court at CivicEd@sc.ohio.gov.

The Board of Commissioners of the Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection awarded $228,100 to 29 victims of attorney theft at its September meeting. Eight former or suspended Ohio attorneys were found to have misappropriated client funds, though claims also involved three attorneys who have since died.

**MARIJUANA**

The Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) released the names of 185 businesses applying to become licensed medical marijuana cultivators in the state. The cultivator licenses will likely be awarded in November.

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy has provided a webinar on the medical marijuana dispensary application process on the Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) website. The webinar can be viewed at <http://medicalmarijuana.ohio.gov/dispensaries>.

**MILITARY AFFAIRS**

The Ohio National Guard deployed soldiers from two different units to Puerto Rico to help hurricane victims, the Kasich administration has announced. The Columbus-based 285th Area Support Medical Company and the Newark-based 137th Signal Company departed on Tuesday. Thursday, the guard said it will send 30 more of its members as well.

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

Aspiring hunters now have the opportunity to take Ohio's revamped hunter education course, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). "A new course book and enhanced online learning options provide a more current and comprehensive curriculum for people of all ages," ODNR said. "The fully-illustrated booklet includes 11 chapters covering firearms safety, preparation, equipment, conservation and more."

More than 14,000 ring-necked pheasants will be released at 24 Ohio public hunting areas this fall, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). The ODNR Division of Wildlife will release pheasants on Friday, Oct. 20, and Friday, Oct. 27, prior to the small-game weekends for youth hunters. Children ages 17 and younger can hunt statewide for rabbit, pheasant and all other legal game in season during two designated weekends, Oct. 21-22 and Oct. 28-29.

Portions of Holmes and Wayne counties will retain their designation as a Disease Surveillance Area (DSA) 2015-01 as part of the state's ongoing surveillance efforts for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). The designation requires that additional rules be followed in the area, the department said.

**NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) announced that its nationwide G.I.R.L. 2017 convention will be taking place in Columbus at the Greater Columbus Convention Center from Friday through Sunday, Oct. 6-8. According to GSUSA, G.I.R.L. will be "the largest girl-led event in the world," bringing together more than 10,000 girls and women to explore career pathways, build confidence, learn new skills and make friends with like-minded girls.

Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) presented its Child Advocate of the Year to Attorney General Mike DeWine. The group also recognized Rep. Ryan Smith (R-Bidwell) and Sen. Jay Hottinger (R-Newark) as "Legislators of the Year" for their leadership in the General Assembly in appropriating new funding for children services to address challenges posed by the opioid epidemic.

**PEOPLE**

Greg Moody, director of the Governor's Office of Health Transformation, will receive the Center for Community Solutions (CCS) Award for Public Service in Honor of John A. Begala for his efforts to modernize Ohio's Medicaid program and to improve health care quality and outcomes in Ohio. The awards ceremony will take place in Cleveland on the morning of Friday, Oct. 20 during the center's annual Celebration of Human Services set for the Hilton Garden Inn in the Cleveland Downtown and Gateway Conference Center.

**POLITICS**

Gov. John Kasich will join former Vice President Joe Biden for a discussion on bridging the political divide, Kasich's former presidential campaign said. Kasich for America said the governor will join Biden at the University of Delaware for a moderated discussion on how to bridge the political and partisan divides that exist in Washington, D.C. today. The event will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 17 and will be streamed live at <https://sites.udel/edu/udlive> .

Many of the GOP's candidates for statewide office stopped by Friday's meeting of the Ohio Republican Party (ORP) State Central Committee to discuss why members should support their campaigns in 2018. In the governor's race, committee members heard from Secretary of State Jon Husted, U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci (R-Wadsworth) and Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor. Also making speeches were U.S. Senate candidate Treasurer Josh Mandel, auditor candidate Rep. Keith Faber (R-Celina) and treasurer candidate Rep. Robert Sprague (R-Findlay).

**POVERTY**

A new report from the Ohio United Way shows that as many as one quarter of Ohioans are working full time, but are nonetheless unable to afford food, transportation, health care, housing and other basic necessities. The United Way "ALICE" project aims to identify those individuals who are asset limited, income constrained and employed (ALICE). These individuals are working and have incomes above the federal poverty level, but fail to make enough to supply all the basic necessities for the average four-person family in Ohio.

**REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT**

The House Democratic Caucus Tuesday announced the appointment of Rep. Jack Cera (D-Bellaire) to the four-member, bipartisan panel of state legislators that will review and suggest reforms to the way Ohio draws districts for congressional seats. This follows the announcement of the formation of the group last month by House Speaker Clifford A. Rosenberger (R-Clarksville) and Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina). Rep. Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) and Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima) are the co-chairs. Last week, Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron) was named by the Senate Democratic Caucus.

**STATE GOVERNMENT**

The Ohio Department of Commerce announced Friday that the state's minimum wage will increase to $8.30 per hour for non-tipped employees, effective Jan. 1, 2018 -- up from the current level of $8.15/hour. The minimum wage for tipped employees goes to $4.15 per hour -- up from the current $4.08 level. The state's minimum wage will apply to employees of businesses with annual gross receipts of more than $305,000 per year, also an increase from the current threshold of $299,000 per year.

**TAXATION**

The Ohio 2020 Tax Policy Study Commission said Monday that testimony it had heard over the past year showed that a flat tax for Ohio could be potentially beneficial, but transition to such a tax would be challenging due to the amount of tax credits and tax expenditures currently available. Co-chairs of the commission, Sens. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) and Tim Schaffer (R-Lancaster), issued a 323-page report summarizing their findings over the past year, including reprinting the written testimony of the 43 individuals that testified at the 10 public hearings. Created under 131-HB64 (R. Smith), the commission has previously issued reports on the state's severance tax policy and the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit.

The recently-created joint legislative committee charged with reviewing tax expenditures will meet in the coming weeks, Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) told reporters Thursday. The Tax Expenditure Review Committee will be chaired by Sen. Scott Oelslager (R-Canton), Obhof said before a non-voting session. The committee, created by 131-HB9 (Boose), was appointed in July.

Ohio municipalities that exclude "pensions" from city income tax cannot require taxation of supplemental executive retirement plans (SERP), even though the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) treats SERPs as "nonqualified" deferred compensation not entitled to the tax benefits of 401Ks or other qualified plans, the Ohio Supreme Court states in a new ruling.

**TRANSPORTATION**

The House Transportation and Public Safety Committee on Wednesday began looking at what lawmakers should be doing as automated driving technology moves forward, with a panel telling the committee that the technology is already here and is moving incrementally toward the so-called "self-driving car." This was the first in a series of informational hearings on the topic of autonomous and connected vehicles. Chairman Doug Green (R-Mt. Orab) said that the committee will be holding monthly hearings on the topic over the next seven months and will focus on a different facet at each hearing. He said the hearings are solely fact finding in nature.

**UTILITIES**

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) approved 12 hazardous materials training grants totaling $221,485.91. According to the commission, the grants will fund training for local government subdivisions, educational institutions and state agencies on best practices for responding to incidents related to hazardous materials.

The American Petroleum Institute (API) turned its focus on Ohio Thursday in a new poll that shows an "overwhelming majority" of voters targeted by nuclear energy billing riders in HB178 (DeVitis) and SB128 (Eklund-LaRose) oppose the 16-year subsidy to FirstEnergy. Conducted Sept. 21-Oct. 1, 2017, the survey found 81 percent of voters in Summit, Lake and Ottawa counties, where the Davis-Besse and Perry nuclear plants operate, oppose new fees to "bail out" these facilities. Another 70 percent say electric prices should be shaped by a free market and not "special fees" for certain technologies.

The Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) on Thursday separately authorized the construction of natural gas-fired, combined cycle generation facilities in Guernsey and Trumbull counties. The two facilities will add 2,040 megawatts (MW) of generation capacity to the regional transmission grid.

**LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:**

*No legislative activity to report this week.*