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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

A total of 155 new and refinanced loans totaling \$18.3 million were made possible through a recent special Agriculture Linked Deposit Program (Ag-LINK) application period, Treasurer Robert Sprague announced Wednesday. Although the application period originally ended on March 14, Sprague opened a new period over the summer after extreme weather negatively affected parts of Ohio. That special application period closed on Nov. 15.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Attorney General Dave Yost Tuesday said he has awarded more than \$345,000 in grants to more than 60 local police departments around the state over the last three months to purchase body armor vests for their officers. Yost released updated maps and statistics reflecting these latest awards in the Ohio Law Enforcement Body Armor Program.

BALLOT ISSUES

Attorney General Dave Yost rejected the petition summary language from a group that submitted a proposed "Nursing Facility Patients' Bill of Rights" constitutional amendment to his office. The amendment would add section 12a to Article XV of the Ohio Constitution to require certain staff-to-patient ratios in nursing facilities and require certain minimum daily amounts of direct care to nursing facility patients, according to the summary submitted to the attorney general. The summary failed to inform potential signers of the factual findings included in the amendment language, Yost said in explaining his decision.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Tax revenues are 1 percent ahead of expectations this fiscal year, with collections of about \$2 billion for November essentially meeting targets, as a jump in sales taxes offset a dip in income taxes. According to preliminary information from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM), collections for November were behind expectations by less than \$2 million or one-tenth percent. For the fiscal year so far, collections of \$9.78 billion are \$95 million or 1 percent ahead of expectations.

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Saying an "all-electric future" is on the horizon for the automobile industry, GM CEO Mary Barra announced plans for the company to return to the Lordstown area Thursday through a joint venture with South Korean company LG Chem Ltd. The two will jointly own a company that will operate a new assembly plant for electric vehicle battery cells. Between GM and LG Chem, \$2.3 billion will be invested in the plant and a groundbreaking is expected in mid-2020. More than 1,100 jobs are expected to be created, though Barra said workers at the shuttered GM plant in Lordstown have already been offered jobs elsewhere and that hiring decisions will be made by the new company's leadership.

CENSUS

New data from the U.S. Census Bureau on housing trends indicate that there are 191,000 children nationwide living with two same-sex parents. A growing number of same-sex parents is one trend on the changing landscape of American families among others, including an increased number of unmarried partner households, a later median age of first marriages and more adults living alone.

DISABILITIES

Gov. Mike DeWine underlined the event theme of "customer experience" and talked about the necessity of enabling all Ohioans to reach their potential Wednesday in remarks to the Ohio Association of County Boards Serving People with Developmental Disabilities (OACB) annual conference. The governor, who joined Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) Director Jeff Davis for the sit-down discussion on stage, returned to a theme he's emphasized recently in speeches to university leaders and area agencies on aging, saying helping everyone achieve a fulfilling livelihood is not just important to individual happiness but also an economic imperative for the state. With a relatively flat population, declining birth rates and little influx from immigration, Ohio needs to make sure it maximizes the potential of all its residents, he said.

EDUCATION

A bill, SB121 (Sykes-Kunze), directing the State Board of Education (SBOE) to adopt health education standards received a spirited hearing at Tuesday's meeting of the Senate Education Committee, with proponents saying the standards would offer needed guidance to educators and opponents calling the bill unnecessary and voicing concerns about the standards stepping into the bounds of the family. According to an informational presentation provided by Adrienne Fischer, policy associate with the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), Ohio is the only state that has not adopted some sort of health standards.

The Ohio Supreme Court accepted Toledo City Schools' appeal of a court ruling on the standard for determining when school personnel can be held liable in bullying cases. The case emanates from the experience of A.R., a student enrolled early in kindergarten at four years old in Toledo's DeVeaux Elementary School. A.R.'s parents' initial lawsuit in Lucas County Common Pleas Court alleged another student, S., teased and bullied A.R. over months, eventually striking A.R. with a sharpened pencil. The lawsuit charges reckless and neglectful conduct in responding to the bullying by teacher Amanda Lute, assistant principal Cynthia Skaff and principal Ralph Schade.

The Rural Schools and Community Trust recently released a 50-state report of rural education co-authored by several Ohio University (OU) faculty members. The report, "Why Rural Matters 2018-19: The Time Is Now," ranks states on their overall highest needs in rural education and many individual measures of progress, according to OU. Nearly one in five U.S. students attend rural schools (about 9.3 million students), and about half of rural students live in 10 states including Ohio, Indiana, North Carolina, Georgia, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Alabama and Texas, which has the largest population of rural students (694,000), according to the report.

At its final meeting, the Report Card Study Committee received testimony detailing a comprehensive overhaul of the state's school district report cards from members of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) Urban Network Report Card Work Group. Network representatives Ross May and Chad Henderly presented to the committee of legislators and school administrators a report card framework they said would align with 10 "strategies" from the Ohio Department of Education's Strategic Plan for Education. They said this would shift the report card to rely less on standardized tests, to encourage districts to communicate additional data to the state and to allow for easier comparisons among similar districts.

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) Professional Qualifications and Development Workgroup of the EMIS Advisory Council met Wednesday to discuss challenges facing EMIS coordinators and potential changes to OAC 3301-14-01, which is currently up for review. The group focused on "main challenges" including a lack of resources, support, training, understanding, and collaboration for EMIS coordinators. Attendees widely agreed that part of what makes problem solving difficult is the wide variation across school districts, with some having much more resources than others.

While school officials across the state recognize the physical harm that can be caused by tornadoes, they think storm shelters should continue to be optional because extreme wind is only one of a multitude of health and safety issues educators and students face, according to a draft report from the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC).

A group of educators, child and health advocates gathered Thursday to consider a potential framework to guide state efforts to promote education of the "whole child," a key theme of the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) strategic plan. The Whole Child Advisory Group was formed to assist with implementation of the strategic plan's seventh strategy, "Work together with parents, caregivers and community partners to help schools meet the needs of the whole child."

The Northeast Ohio village of Hills and Dales asked the Ohio Supreme Court this week to order Plain Local Schools to comply with a new law on school district territory transfers, under which Hills and Dales seeks to join the nearby Jackson Local Schools. Justices quickly agreed with the village's request to expedite the case.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Wednesday said his office has identified 77 individuals who cast a ballot in an Ohio election and 277 individuals who registered to vote in Ohio who appear to be legally present non-citizens. The names of the individuals identified by LaRose's office were referred to Attorney General Dave Yost for investigation and potential prosecution.

ELECTIONS 2020

The Ohio Democratic Party (ODP) announced that it will host 16 congressional district caucuses across the state on Tuesday, Jan. 7, 2020, to elect 89 district-level delegates and eight alternates to represent Ohio at the 2020 Democratic National Convention in Milwaukee, WI.

Former Rep. Dan Troy said he will be running for the Democratic nomination for the 60th House District in 2020, a seat now held by the term-limited Rep. John Rogers (D-Mentor-on-the-Lake). Troy served in the Ohio House in the 1980s and 1990s and won a primary for the seat in 2012 before he decided to continue serving as Lake County commissioner.

The Ohio Republican Party (Ohio GOP) said it will hold its 2020 Campaign Management College on Saturday, Jan. 25, 2020. The day-long program will feature nationally-recognized speakers, accomplished political consultants and top Republican operatives. The seminar will give attendees the chance to learn more about running a successful campaign for office.

The Ohio House Democratic Campaign Committee said Wednesday that Aryeh Alex has joined the caucus as executive director. Alex, a seasoned union organizer, nonprofit advocate and campaign veteran, is looking to help the caucus maintain and pick up seats across Ohio in 2020, the caucus said.

Former Ohio Sen. Joe Schiavoni (D-Boardman) has filed paperwork to run for Mahoning County Court judge in 2020, according to WFMJ.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- Planned Parenthood Action Fund and Planned Parenthood Federal PAC endorsed U.S. Reps. Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus), Marcia Fudge (D-Warrensville Heights), and Tim Ryan (D-Niles) for re-election.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The national proportion of civilian noninstitutional population ages 16 and over who worked during 2018 was 64.4 percent, according to data released Tuesday by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), while the number of those experiencing some unemployment was 13.2 million, a decrease of 1.3 million. Key points from the data included that the proportion of workers who were employed full-time, year-round was 70.4 percent, an increase of 0.9 percent over 2017. Around 2.2 million individuals looked for a job but were not employed at all in 2018, down from 2.4 million in 2017.

ENERGY

The enactment of legislation allowing a township referendum vote on wind farms would be the "nail in the coffin" for the wind industry in the state, according to Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) Action Fund Energy Policy Vice President Miranda Leppla. Joined by a number of other opponents who packed the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing room, Leppla said lawmakers should not single out wind energy and force those companies to overcome burdens not faced by other industry competitors, as HB401 (Reineke) proposes.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) and Ohio Department of Health (ODH) on Monday released a plan to analyze the prevalence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) -- substances dubbed "forever chemicals" -- in the state's drinking water.

For its first infrastructure project under the H2Ohio initiative, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) has awarded the village of Pomeroy \$500,000 to extend sewer lines to about 80 homes along State Route 833 that currently have failing home sewage treatment systems.

The latest research from the Tara Oceans Consortium, including work by an Ohio State University professor, aims to reliably predict how tiny ocean organisms called plankton will respond to warming ocean water. Plankton are responsible for doing most of the work of absorbing half the human-generated carbon in the atmosphere and producing half of the oxygen people breathe, according the researchers. The consortium, a three-year global study of the effects of climate change on the world's oceans that involves hundreds of scientists from nearly 30 countries, found that water temperature significantly influences plankton.

FEDERAL

Speaking to reporters Tuesday, U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) continued his push for passage of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), saying he thinks it will receive a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives once a vote is held. Portman said he was discouraged by the lack of movement, saying the agreement would help Ohio farmers, manufacturers and the auto industry. He added that it addresses issues Democrats have raised for years regarding NAFTA, including labor and environmental standards, and will help level the playing field for the United States.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Sunset Review Committee heard from the following agencies at its Tuesday meeting: Dentist Loan Repayment Program Advisory Board; Medically Handicapped Children's Medical Advisory Council; Infant Hearing Screening Subcommittee; Maternity and Newborn Advisory Council; Radiation Advisory Council; and Unemployment Compensation Review Commission.

The House and Senate named remaining members to conference committees on HB2 (Cross-Lepore-Hagan) and HB276 (Ghanbari) Wednesday, following previous appointments in November. The HB276 Conference Committee now includes Sens. Rob McColley (R-Napoleon), Terry Johnson (R-McDermott) and Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood), joining Reps. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville), Haraz Ghanbari (R-Perrysburg), and Michael Sheehy (D-Oregon).

Both chambers named HB2 Conference Committee members Wednesday, including Sens. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls), Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and Vernon Sykes (D-Akron) and Reps. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton), Jon Cross (R-Kenton), and Lisa Sobecki (D-Toledo).

In other action, the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee reported out HB12 (D. Manning-West), which creates the Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group; the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee reported out SB195 (Schaffer), which addresses winery licensure; and HB168 (Arndt), which addresses an affirmative defense for hazardous substances under certain circumstances; and the Senate Judiciary Committee reported out HCR10 (Wiggam-Plummer), which proposes the federal government designate certain drug cartels "foreign terrorist organizations."

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine said Tuesday his newly announced Expedited Pardon Project will not only streamline but likely multiply the net number of pardons approved by his administration, though candidates will be subject to the same "strict criteria" at the Ohio Parole Board and governor's office. He said the goal is to help "worthy Ohioans" with an established record as contributing members of society to move beyond their criminal past. On Monday, in a separate but related move, DeWine issues his first pardon of

James Earl Young, 60, who had been arrested for drug trafficking when he was 30 in 1989. He eventually served eight years of a 12- to 40-year sentence and another year on transitional control. The Ohio Parole Board voted 5-0 for Young's clemency, and DeWine concurred in November.

Gov. Mike DeWine urged lawmakers Wednesday not to pass legislation overriding local governments' attempts to ban plastic bags, a day after local government and environmental advocates testified against such a bill in the Senate. "I think this would be a mistake. I think the state government should allow local communities to do what they think is best in regard to this area. They can work that out in their local community. I think we should allow them to do that. I think it would be a mistake for the General Assembly to override them," he said.

DeWine was also asked about changes being considered for state report cards. He said he doesn't have strong feelings about keeping the current A-F system but emphasized the importance of clarity.

GREAT LAKES

Because more than 85 percent of the phosphorous entering Lake Erie comes from agricultural sources, a high number of farmers in the Maumee River Watershed would need to adopt several best management practices for the state to meet its goal to reduce phosphorous by 40 percent by 2025, according to new research funded by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE). Several research teams, led by Ohio State University (OSU), recently concluded a three-year study evaluating the ability of agricultural management practices to reduce phosphorus-caused harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Researchers from Heidelberg University, University of Toledo, University of Michigan and LimnoTech also contributed to the study.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Sens. Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) and Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus) testified on three of what Antonio said was a series of five bills and resolutions addressing various aspects of diabetes treatment and education before the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee Tuesday. The legislation included SB230, SR406 and SCR7.

At its Thursday meeting, the Commission on Infant Mortality heard testimony regarding racial disparities in birth outcomes, mothers' mental health during pregnancy and potential technology solutions to enhance maternal health during pregnancy.

INSURANCE

A new report from actuarial firm Milliman Inc., commissioned by mental health advocacy nonprofit Bowman Family Foundation, found using claims data that insurers nationwide are offering greater coverage for physical health services than addiction and mental health services. The authors say the trend is disturbing at a time when "deaths of despair," including opioid-related deaths and suicide, have spiked so high that average life expectancy has declined two years in a row. The last time life expectancy decreased in two consecutive years was in 1919, when the nation battled the influenza epidemic, according to the report.

JUDICIAL

The Supreme Court of Ohio declared the high-dollar dispute over HB6's (Callender-Wilkin) constitutional tax protections not a "justiciable controversy" Wednesday, even as the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals set a filing schedule in Ohioans Against Corporate Bailouts' (OACB) federal action to extend the signature-gathering period for a referendum on nuclear and solar energy subsidies. The Supreme Court said FirstEnergy Solutions' (FES) claim to "new exigencies" in the continued operation of its nuclear plants were "moot" following the expiration of OACB's statutory 90 days to circulate its anti-HB6 petition.

One of the state's largest oil and gas producers suffered a defeat in its bid to retain a drilling lease for which the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) showed no production for a quarter century. Ohio-based Artex Oil Co. must now convince the Guernsey County Common Pleas Court that 86 acres owned by Barry and Rosa Browne have been in continuous production since 1975 after a divided Ohio Supreme Court found their claim against the oil company is protected by a 21-year statute of limitations. The 1970s lease grants lessees control of the mineral rights for an initial one-year term and a subsequent term for as "long thereafter as oil and gas, or either of them, is produced

by lessee from said land." Artex, Arloma Corp. and James Huck LLC acquired the lease interest through various assignments, cross-assignments and stipulations and commenced production from one well in 1999 through at least 2014.

LIQUOR/ALCOHOL

Large state liquor agency stores should be allowed to offer on-premises consumption of high-proof liquor, Weiland's Market owner Jennifer Williams told the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on Wednesday. During proponent testimony on alcoholic ice cream bill HB401 (Ingram), Williams said the legislation should be amended to allow 10,000 square-foot liquor agency stores, such as hers, to offer cocktails to customers during regular business hours.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) has awarded a provisional medical marijuana dispensary license to Pure Ohio Wellness, located at 920 U.S. Route 42 West in London. Madison County Common Pleas Judge Eamon Costello recently ruled that a legal provision requiring 15 percent of all dispensary licenses to be awarded to economically-disadvantaged group (EDG) applicants was unconstitutional, requiring OBP to once again consider Pure Ohio Wellness' application.

MENTAL HEALTH

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) announced Wednesday the appointment of Andrea Bucci as chief executive officer of Heartland Behavioral Healthcare. As CEO, Bucci will oversee approximately 250 employees and be responsible for the well-being, care and treatment of 132 patients at the Massillon psychiatric hospital. In addition to overseeing day-to-day hospital operations, Bucci will also manage relations with the alcohol, drug addiction and mental health services (ADAMHS) boards in the 11-county catchment area served by the hospital.

NATURAL RESOURCES

While Ohio's week-long deer-gun season started on Monday, hunters who prefer to use a bow and arrow have already harvested almost 75,000 white-tailed deer, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife (DOW). Through Tuesday, Nov. 26, archery hunters checked 74,838 deer. The archery season started on Sept. 28 and lasts through Sunday, Feb. 2, 2020.

Dave Crow has been officially named chief of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Mineral Resources Management, ODNR Director Mary Mertz announced Monday. Crow had been serving as acting chief since September 2019, overseeing the department's efforts to provide for the safe and environmentally-sound development and restoration of mineral and fossil fuel extraction sites.

PEOPLE

The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) Tuesday announced that its executive director, Suzanne Dulaney, has resigned to take a position in the private sector. Her last day will be Friday, Jan. 10, 2020.

National Association for Gun Rights (NAGR) President Dudley Brown presented Rep. Ron Hood (R-Ashville) with the .50 Caliber Freedom Award for his commitment to protecting the right to keep and bear arms in Ohio.

The Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts (CORD), an organization representing Ohio's regional water and sewer districts, appointed Larry Long as membership director, who previously served as executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio for nearly 40 years.

Groundwork Ohio announced the appointment of Alexander Fisher as its newest policy associate.

The Ohio Pork Council (OPC) named Melissa Bell as interim executive-vice president, with her term beginning Dec. 16, 2019.

POLLS/STUDIES

The Ohio Legislative Black Caucus Foundation and the University of Akron's Bliss Institute announced that they will be working in partnership on what they said is a first-of-its-kind joint poll of black voters and non-voters in Ohio on a wide range of issues, including health care, jobs, education, gun safety and the environment. The two entities said the poll will be conducted among a random sample of 1,500 black adults in Ohio in early December, with results and analysis expected to be released in February 2020.

POVERTY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Wednesday finalized a rule making it more difficult for able-bodied adults age 18-49 without dependents to receive benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, a move decried by advocacy groups including the Ohio Association of Foodbanks and the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio State Highway Patrol is mourning the loss of Motor Carrier Enforcement Inspector (MCEI) Kimra Skelton following an on-duty traffic crash in Miami County on Wednesday, Nov. 27.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol reports that 15 people were killed on Ohio's roadways this Thanksgiving holiday. During the five-day reporting period, from Wednesday, Nov. 27, at 12 a.m. until Sunday, Dec. 1, at 11:59 p.m., 15 people were killed in 13 fatal crashes. In 2018, seven people were killed in seven fatal crashes.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Inspector General (IG) Randall Meyer's office recently issued a report finding that the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) failed to competitively bid an initial contract to an IT consultant and that DAS failed to follow applicable procurement policies and procedures and improperly issued payments. The IG's office launched the investigation in 2017 from a referral from the auditor's office with an attached anonymous complaint about the mismanagement of information technology projects by DAS.

The Controlling Board Monday approved most of its agenda, with four items held for questioning and one item deferred in the second-to-last meeting of the 2019 calendar year. Three of the items held were requests from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) related to a dam project, a land purchase and design services. All three ODNR requests were approved without objection. A request from the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission to release more than \$2 million for school construction projects was approved after it was held by Oelslager for brief questions seeking more details on the prequalified firms in the request. A request from the Public Defender Commission to release funds to provide legal representation to indigent persons in Trumbull County was deferred at the agency's request.

TAXATION

Rep. Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) said Thursday that he will be introducing legislation that would annually increase the amount of the state's homestead exemption to account for inflation.

UTILITIES

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) ordered Dominion Energy Ohio Wednesday to lower customer bills by three quarters of a billion dollars in the coming years, though the biggest share of its federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) true-up will not be fully credited to ratepayers until 2057. Commissioners unanimously adopted an agreement between the utility, Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) and PUCO staff to reconcile rates with TCJA's effective date of Jan. 1, 2018.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

No Legislative Activity

HOUSE:

No Legislative Activity