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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.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Advocates who favor the Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare, urged Congress Friday to take steps to protect health care for Americans, including for those with pre-existing conditions and people who enrolled in Medicaid thanks to the ACA's expanded requirements. The groups, which include For Our Future, Protect Our Care Ohio, ProgressOhio, and the Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN) Ohio, said the biggest threat to health care is a federal lawsuit originating in Texas that saw a federal judge rule the ACA was unable to stand on its own after Congress eliminated the tax penalty for not having health insurance. But they said there are other threats to the law as well, including efforts by the Trump administration to weaken it.

FY20-21 BUDGET

Advocates for Ohio's Future (AOF) discussed its 2020-2021 state budget priorities on Monday, with coalition leaders calling for policies that would lead to "pathways to prosperity for all," "healthy children and families" and "quality communities." Speaking to reporters at a Statehouse news

conference, AOF Co-Chairs Steve Wagner and Tara Britton said their policy priorities align with the DeWine administration's goals, and said they're excited to work with Gov. Mike DeWine, House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) and Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina).

CENSUS

Achieving a comprehensive count of all individuals across Ohio in the upcoming 2020 U.S. Census will garner greater federal funding towards state benefit programs, according to census advocacy groups. If Ohio had missed an additional 1 percent of its population in the 2010 Census, it would have lost out on

\$139 million in federal funds across various programs, amounting to \$1,206 per person. In addition, an accurate census count ensures an accurate representative democracy because a state's congressional seats and district borders are determined based on the census.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund (OCTF), which works to prevent child abuse and neglect, has a new website with information and resources related to caring for children. For parents, the website has links to parenting classes, articles about pregnancy and safe sleep. For professionals, it has information about continuing education events, the effects of trauma on child development, the protective factors that can strengthen families and prevent abuse and other subjects. It can be found online at <https://octf.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/octf/>.

The study panel assigned to recommend home visitation policies for Gov. Mike DeWine's forthcoming budget this week reviewed Medicaid's efforts on visitation programs and also heard directly from a mother who benefited from home visiting. DeWine has repeatedly emphasized his administration's focus on the wellbeing of children, and he campaigned on a promise of tripling those served by Ohio's home visiting programs. The Advisory Committee on Home Visitation was formed to put that promise into action, in the process gathering data on current offerings and finding ways to make the system more efficient.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted Monday announced the approval of assistance for five projects set to create 836 new jobs and retain 939 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought to the board by JobsOhio and its regional partners. Collectively, the projects are expected to result in more than \$41 million in new payroll and spur more than \$216 million in investments across Ohio, the governor's office said.

ECONOMY

Recessions are generally caused by "a bunch of bad shocks hitting at the same time," Kent State University Assistant Professor Justin Barnette told attendees at a McDonald Hopkins business outlook event Thursday, and several potential shock factors are currently present. In addition to current uncertainty regarding the political climate, Barnette cited "rising interest rates, trade war, falling stock market, slowdown from trade partners (and) really bad weather" as factors he observed.

EDUCATION

A new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute calls on state lawmakers to increase charter school funding to parity with traditional school district funding, saying that such a change would increase viable school choice options, especially for economically disadvantaged populations. According to the report, "Shortchanging Ohio's Charter Students," overall funding disparities exist between districts and charters both statewide and in the "Big Eight" school districts (Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown). Among the Big Eight schools in fiscal years 2015 through 2017, district schools received \$14,648 per pupil in total revenue, while charter schools received \$10,556 per pupil. Statewide, district schools received \$11,622 per pupil, while charter schools received \$9,755 per pupil.

Students from Westerville's Heritage Middle School will travel to Washington D.C. during National Engineers Week, which takes place from Sunday-Saturday, Feb. 17-23, to compete in the national Future City Competition after winning the state region, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) announced. Sixth, seventh and eighth grade students throughout Ohio had recently participated in the State DiscoverE's Future City Competition. Heritage Middle School also won "Best Use of Ceramics" in the state competition.

Attorney General Dave Yost and Auditor Keith Faber are urging the Franklin County judge overseeing dissolution of the defunct Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) to reject the effort of several Ohio school districts to take control of efforts to recover public money. Meanwhile, the attorney that Judge Michael Holbrook appointed to supervise the school's affairs and assets is asking Holbrook for guidance on how to finalize financial paperwork for the closed online charter school.

While there haven't been any known instances of parents asking educators to allow their children to use medical marijuana at school, administrators have been reaching out for guidance on the issue, Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) senior policy consultant Kenna Haycox told *Hannah News*.

Attorneys discussed the case schedule Thursday for the state's lawsuit seeking to recoup millions of dollars from Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager and others linked to the school. Attorneys for defendants besides Lager himself pressed for faster resolution of issues related to them. The attorney general's office filed suit in Franklin County Common Pleas Court against Lager and others in August seeking to recover money paid for students whose enrollment could not be documented by the school. In addition, the state alleges Lager had an improper interest in contracts between ECOT and his other companies, Altair Learning Management and IQ Innovations.

ELECTIONS 2018

Jocelyn Smith, a woman who unsuccessfully challenged Rep. Rick Perales (R-Beavercreek) in the 2018 Republican primary while bringing to light racy exchanges the two made via text messages, pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor after she was charged with a felony count of extortion.

ELECTIONS 2020

Rep. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg) Wednesday held a press conference to announce that he is running for the Ohio Senate in 2020. The seat is currently held by Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering),

who is term limited. In addition to Antani's district, the Senate district also includes the districts of Reps. Jim Butler (R-Dayton) and Phil Plummer (R-Dayton).

Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) started his "Dignity of Work listening tour" in Cleveland Wednesday night and went to Iowa Thursday, but he told reporters he and his wife, columnist Connie Schultz, won't be making a decision on whether to run for president until March. If he does decide to run, though, Brown said he wouldn't make the announcement "anywhere else" but in Ohio. Regardless of whether he enters the race, he wants "dignity of work" to be at the center of every Democratic campaign in the nation, including the 2020 presidential race.

FEDERAL

Following the recent enactment of a continuing resolution to fund the federal government, Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) was fully operational again on Wednesday, Jan. 30.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) said Tuesday members of Congress at last appear to be coming around to the concepts behind his proposal to enact a new law to prevent future government shutdowns, including the five-week stretch that just concluded over the weekend. "I've introduced this legislation five times ... but I think finally there is a sense that we're tired of this, that we want to see something different," he said during a conference call with reporters.

With the federal government shutdown over, the First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton is preparing to reopen on Friday, Feb. 8, according to the National Park Service (NPS).

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Both houses of the General Assembly are in the midst of filling a vacant seat: the House, now-Sen. Brian Hill's (R-Zanesville) 97th House District seat, and the Senate, former-Sen. Randy Gardner's (R-Bowling Green) 2nd Senate District seat. On Friday, the Senate released the names of two applicants for Gardner's seat: Rep. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) and Barbara Lang, who currently serves as a Monclova Township trustee. Meanwhile, the House screening committee, led by Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville), has reportedly concluded its interviews with the following candidates for the House seat: Melissa Bell of Zanesville, current director of membership outreach with the Ohio Pork Council; John Bennett of Cambridge, member and past president of the Guernsey County Veterans Service Commission and previously Guernsey County Health Commissioner; Chandler Burris-Jones, a 22-year-old biological sciences student at Ohio University; James Gibson of Cambridge, currently pastor of Rix Mills Presbyterian Church in New Concord and Buffalo-Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Cumberland; Shawn Hoagland of Zanesville, general manager of Superior Auto in Mount Vernon and a substitute teacher for Muskingum County school districts; Adam Holmes of Nashport, CEO of Frueh Enterprises; Justin Hunter of Nashport, owner of Harvest Hill Farms; Jeanette Moll of Zanesville, a private practice attorney; and former magistrate in the Guernsey County Court of Common Pleas; Joshua Tilton of Zanesville, an EMS instructor with the city of Columbus Division of Fire; Brian Wear of Cambridge, currently a regional training director for the Ohio Child Welfare Training and Human Services Training programs in Guernsey County; and Scott Wilson of Dresden, a retired UPS employee and president of Teamsters Local 637 in Zanesville.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) will continue its tradition of celebrating Black History Month throughout February with a special art exhibit, music and free historical performances each Tuesday at noon.

Led by new president Joy DeMarco, members of the Controlling Board approved all items on the agenda following one hold by Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron).

The House Special Committee on Rules Wednesday unanimously moved proposed rules for the 133rd General Assembly after accepting amendments from Democrats that would lower the threshold for discharge petitions and increase the number of the minority caucus members who sit on committees.

Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron), recently chosen by her colleagues to succeed Rep. Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) as minority leader, introduced the amendments that were accepted unanimously by the committee. However, suggestions submitted by Common Cause Ohio and the League of Women Voters of Ohio ahead of the meeting were not included in the final draft of the rules.

GOVERNOR

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine reiterated his commitment to dealing with public health issues such as mental health conditions and addiction in an address to county behavioral health representatives at the Statehouse Tuesday before accepting comments and suggestions from the audience in an open forum.

State agencies and organizations will be adopting new protections and resources for employees who are victims of dating violence under an executive order signed by Gov. Mike DeWine Wednesday. The executive order, the ninth signed by DeWine, updates the state's domestic violence policy to include intimate partner violence between two individuals regardless of whether or not they are married or live together. The goal, DeWine explains, is to extend those existing employee protections enjoyed by married individuals to those who are dating or otherwise in relationships.

At an executive order signing at the Statehouse Wednesday, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine confirmed reports that he plans to hold his first "State of the State" address in the House Chambers of the Statehouse. "I thought the first year, at least, we should do it here. As you know by the swearing-in and inauguration, I'm a traditionalist in some sense," DeWine added.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The State Medical Board and Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) both acted Friday to curtail a former Mount Carmel Health System doctor's ability to practice, with the board citing an internal investigation that found at least 27 patients received doses of controlled substances, including fentanyl, that significantly exceeded the acceptable dose range and were at fatal levels. The board said cases occurred between February 2015 and November 2018.

JUDICIAL

The Bureau of Justice Assistance, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), recently announced that Ohio has been selected as one of five states to receive veteran treatment court

statewide strategic planning assistance. Ohio will receive \$200,000 to implement the plan. The money will be provided by the Center for Court Innovation.

Judge Timothy Horton will resign his seat on the 10th District Court of Appeals at the end of February, according to a filing in the disciplinary case brought against him. Gov. Mike DeWine, who will appoint Horton's replacement, confirmed receipt of Horton's resignation letter.

The Ohio Supreme Court has adopted amendments to its Rules of Practice that define an official record as the electronic version. The Court also adopted four new rules addressing the procedures for filing an affidavit of disqualification seeking to disqualify a judge. These changes are shown in Rule 21.01 to 21.04. The Court chose not to adopt a proposed amendment that would have shortened the length of stipulated extensions of time for filing certain documents.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Toledo voters had their first opportunity to vote on two proposed city charter amendments on Tuesday, Jan. 29, according to the Lucas County Board of Elections. That was the start of the in-person early voting period for the Northwest Ohio city's special election, which is officially set for Tuesday, Feb. 26, when voters will have the opportunity to add the "Lake Erie Bill of Rights" (LEBOR) and "Keep the Jail in Downtown Toledo" sections to the Toledo city charter.

The Franklin County Commissioners have announced that the county will be participating in a two-year pilot program to develop entrepreneurs and small businesses in underserved communities in Central Ohio. The program is part of a partnership among the commissioners, the Columbus Foundation, the Columbus Partnership, and Rev1 Ventures, and with the national nonprofit, Forward Cities.

MARIJUANA

Ohio's dispensaries sold \$333,592 worth of medical marijuana from opening day (Jan.16) through Jan. 27, according to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). Dispensaries sold 46 pounds of product over that time period, MMCP said in a news release.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Pete Novotny and Todd Haines are the assistant chiefs for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife, the department announced Wednesday. Together, Novotny and Haines bring more than 50 years of experience, ODNR Division of Wildlife Chief Kendra Wecker said.

The 35th annual Ohio Wildlife Diversity Conference hosted by ODNR will explore restoration work being done throughout the Buckeye State. "From slithering serpents attempting a comeback tour to towering trees wanting an encore, this conference is full of funky presentations." The keynote speaker is Dr. Chris Vandergoot from the U.S. Geological Survey. Vandergoot has been heavily involved in efforts to re-establish lake sturgeon in the Maumee River.

Prairies, pollinators, botanical discoveries, bogs and fens of the Great Lakes region are just some of the topics to be discussed on Friday, March 29, during the 15th Ohio Botanical Symposium. Sponsored by ODNR, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Nature Conservancy and Ohio

State University, the event will run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Villa Milano, 1630 Schrock Rd. in Columbus.

Following the Controlling Board's release of funding for the project, the state can begin working with an architecture and engineering firm to design a new lodge at Hocking Hills State Park, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has released the third edition of the Ohio Coastal Atlas, a 14-inch-by-10-inch document that illustrates and discusses many of the historical, cultural, physical and natural resources of Ohio's Lake Erie coastal region.

PEOPLE

Governmental Policy Group & RH Resources (GPG/RHR) announced several changes to the leadership and staffing of the lobbying firm on Thursday. Matthew Whitehead will be vice president; Kelly O'Reilly was promoted to senior director of government affairs; Andrew Huffman became director of legislative affairs; Aubrey Spencer will become operations manager; and Patrick Markovich was hired as policy and communications manager.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Director Matt Damschroder Monday announced that his agency has issued a revised statewide procurement policy, and has also notified a consulting firm, Stonyhurst Consulting, and three consultants that it intends to debar them from participating in any state contract based on an inspector general's report that suggested the firms colluded to steer state contracts to their companies.

The Ohio Inspector General (OIG) recently issued a report of investigation after being informed by the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) that Aristotle Mante, ODM health services policy specialist, might be working secondary jobs that he failed to report per ODM policy. In another case released last month, the OIG found a state employee to be performing outside employment on state time. This time it was Ohio Department of Education (ODE) employee Stacy Ludwig.

TAXATION

The Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT) began accepting 2018 state income tax returns on Monday, Jan. 28. By the deadline on Monday, April 15, more than 5.5 million Ohio taxpayers will have filed a return, the department explained. ODT says taxpayers will see some changes from last year, including the following:

- An inflation adjusted increase in the maximum deduction for contributions to a Medical Savings Account (MSA). The new maximum is now \$4,753, up 1.66 percent from last year.
- Increases to the tax-free contributions to an Ohio 529 plan or to a STABLE account to a maximum of \$4,000 per beneficiary.
- An inflation adjustment to the personal exemption and the tax brackets.

- A new deduction for income earned by out-of-state business owners and nonresident employees who conduct disaster work in Ohio during a disaster response period.

- Tax booklet instructions that are shorter and simpler to read and understand.

The 10th District Court of Appeals Tuesday upheld the state law on centralized filing of municipal net profit taxes, rejecting cities' assertion it violates their constitutional home rule powers.

Ohio municipal governments have recently faced delays and inaccurate amounts in distribution of municipal taxes through the Ohio Business Gateway, Ohio Municipal League (OML) Executive Director Kent Scarrett told *Hannah News* Wednesday, though he noted the work of state officials in addressing the issue.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday created another study committee, the Ohio Governor's Advisory Committee on Transportation Infrastructure, to study the current conditions of Ohio's roadways and recommend options for maintaining and improving the state's transportation infrastructure before he issues his executive budget in March. He said he is asking the committee to issue its recommendations in mid-February.

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission Monday approved a contract with a Nashville, TN company for a new customer service center system, which the commission called the first piece of a toll system modernization project that it had approved as part of a strategic plan last year.

People across the economic spectrum need to get out of their comfort zones and try using newer, more sustainable forms of transportation, SHARE CEO Ryan McManus said Wednesday during a Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) panel on transportation challenges. He was joined by Ricart Automotive Group President Rick Ricart and Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) Public Affairs Administrator Doug Arsenault. The conversation was moderated by Carrie Ghose, a reporter at *Columbus Business First*.

UTILITIES

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Nominating Council Friday announced it will interview nine of 23 applicants for the seat currently held by Commissioner Tom Johnson, including former Rep. Michael Ashford; Gene Krebs, a former state representative, Preble County commissioner and chairman of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel Governing Board; and David Daniels, a former legislator and director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture under Gov. John Kasich. Other finalists include Bryce McKenney, whose experience includes serving as PUCO administrative law judge, assistant consumers' counsel and

attorney for the Tennessee Valley Authority; Denis George, corporate manager for energy at Kroger Co.; Noah Dormady, an assistant professor at Ohio State University's Glenn College of Public Affairs; James Dunn, general counsel for Nationwide Energy Partners and a former PUCO staffer; Judge Dennis Deters of the 1st District Ohio Court of Appeals; and Samuel Randazzo, longtime attorney involved in Ohio energy matters and recently retired from the firm of McNees Wallace and Nurick. By Thursday, the nominees were whittled down to four names to be forwarded to the governor. They were Randazzo, Krebs, McKenney and Deters.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) accepted wholesale auction results for FirstEnergy and Columbia Gas of Ohio Wednesday and approved Houston-based CenterPoint Energy's \$6 billion purchase of Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio and its parent company, Vectren Corp.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Administrator/CEO nominee Stephanie McCloud attended her first Board of Directors meeting in that role Friday, though she made a point of noting her first job after law school was at BWC as well. Barb Ingram, chief fiscal and planning officer for BWC, offered a report on BWC's financial results through the end of December 2018, including a net position decrease of \$393 million, leaving the bureau with \$9.1 billion. Operating revenues totaled \$82 million during the month, with operating expenses totaling \$67 million, and the month saw a net investment income loss of \$408 million.

A total of 22 Ohio fire departments will share \$196,896 in grants from the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) under a program to protect firefighters from carcinogens and other harmful health hazards encountered by firefighters during their daily work activities. The fire departments are receiving the funding under BWC's Firefighter Exposure to Environmental Elements Grant Program, which helps departments purchase specialized washing machines, fire station exhaust systems and other safety gear designed to minimize exposure to toxic elements.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

No legislative activity to report.

HOUSE:

No legislative activity to report.