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**RH RESOURCES**

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**Week in Review**

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As a service to the clients and friends of Governmental Policy Group, Inc. and RH Resources we would like to extend the following weekly update of events happening around Capitol Square.

**ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Ohio is among four states chosen by the Trump administration Thursday to receive more than \$350 million in grant funding to confront the opioid crisis and to attempt to reduce overdose deaths by 40 percent in three years. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is supporting a consortium of academic, state and community partners in Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York and Ohio to create an opioid intervention "blueprint" for communities nationwide. Ohio State University (OSU) will lead research in 19 urban and rural counties with a total of \$65.9 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), joined by the DeWine administration; University of Cincinnati, Case Western Reserve University, Ohio University, University of Toledo and Wright State University; and community organizations. Thursday's initial installment totals \$13.2 million.

**AUDITOR OF STATE**

The Ohio Attorney General's Office announced a six-month prison sentence Thursday for the former operator of a Youngstown home health company convicted of Medicaid fraud and theft costing the

state \$63,180. Carla Clark, 54, of Boardman, repaid the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) by check at the sentencing hearing in Franklin County Court of Common Pleas after a jury found her guilty of two felony charges on Feb. 28. She also will serve three years' probation.

## **CENSUS**

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday issued Executive Order 2019-13D creating a 51-member Census 2020 Complete Count Commission to "develop recommendations and assist in the administration of the decennial census to facilitate the most complete and accurate census count in the year 2020, including implementing strategies to reach hard-to-count populations and hard-to enumerate areas." Members, to be appointed by the governor, will include a Democrat and Republican from both houses of the General Assembly as well as representatives of state and local government, business, academia, community and nonprofit organizations, ethnic and faith-based communities, elected and appointed officials and the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA).

## **CHILDREN/FAMILIES**

Key staff for Gov. Mike DeWine Monday presented to the Infant Mortality Commission on how the executive budget proposal supports the goal of keeping babies alive and addresses risk factors linked to infant deaths. Dan McCarthy, legislative affairs director for DeWine, and LeAnne Cornyn, director of children's initiatives, said the budget proposal, HB166 (Oelslager), is focused on the wellbeing of children in general, reflective of DeWine's personal commitment to those issues.

## **DISABILITIES**

Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague and Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Director Matthew Damschroder Monday announced a new collaboration that will make it easier for state of Ohio employees and their families to take advantage of STABLE accounts. Beginning immediately, qualified state of Ohio employees can now visit [www.myOhio.gov](http://www.myOhio.gov) to set up recurring direct-deposits from their paychecks into STABLE accounts. Ohio's STABLE program was launched in 2016 following passage of the federal Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. A STABLE account is a specialized savings and investment account for people with disabilities that allows them to save and invest money without losing eligibility for certain means-tested benefits, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

The Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council this week released a new book aimed at providing information on estate planning options for families and individuals with disabilities. "Planning for Bright Tomorrows: Estate and Future Planning for Ohioans with Disabilities and Those Who Love Them" provides an overview of how being named in a will or trust might interrupt benefits that individuals with disabilities rely upon. This updated version includes new information on Medicaid, trusts and the recently enacted STABLE account option.

## **EDUCATION**

Gov. Mike DeWine called the groundbreaking of a new Dublin City Schools elementary building "a day of hope" and said it is the wish of his administration for school children to find their passion in life. DeWine made brief comments at the rainy ceremony Friday morning. The event was held to celebrate the construction of Hopewell Elementary, one of two additional elementary schools the district is building to deal with a growing population.

April Knight, principal of Avondale Elementary in Columbus, has been elected to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Board of Directors, the group's executive director announced Wednesday. Knight will serve a three-year term as director of zone 3, representing principals in Maryland, Ohio, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and West Virginia.

The Joint Education Oversight Committee (JEOC) Thursday heard two presentations from education research firms on district report cards -- one focusing on quantitative data obtained from parents through an online survey, and another with qualitative feedback from parents who participated in focus groups.

A new opinion from Attorney General Dave Yost's office offers guidance to schools with policies allowing student release time for religious instruction, including when and how students, school staff and others can promote the instruction. The Wyandot County Prosecutor's Office requested a formal opinion on behalf of Upper Sandusky Exempted Village Schools for implementation of the district's release-time policy.

## **ELECTIONS 2020**

Fred Pausch, a lobbyist and former executive director of the County Engineers Association of Ohio, announced that he will seek the Republican nomination for the 21st Ohio House District in 2020, a seat currently held by Rep. Beth Liston (D-Dublin). Pausch is a managing partner at Bliss Lobbying and Consulting LLC based in Dublin and has previously worked on behalf of groups such as the Ohio School Boards Association and the Ohio Society of CPAs.

The American Conservative Union Foundation (ACUF) released its annual ranking of voting records of Congress this week, recognizing six Ohio Republican members of Congress for voting records scoring 80 percent or higher. They include U.S. Reps. Jim Jordan (R-Urbana) (100 percent), Warren Davidson (R-Troy) (100 percent), Steve Chabot (R-Cincinnati) (96 percent), Bob Latta (R-Bowling Green) (92 percent), Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Cincinnati) (92 percent); and Bob Gibbs (R-Lakeville) (80 percent). The group put the Democratic members of Ohio's delegation at the bottom for scoring below 10 percent.

Melissa Ackison, who finished third in a Republican primary for U.S. Senate in 2018, announced this week she is running for the Ohio Senate in 2020. Ackison, the co-owner and a managing partner of Ackison Surveying LLC, announced on Twitter that she is running for the District 26 seat. She said her campaign will focus on job creation, promoting small business, and strengthening the state's depleted vocational schools and skills training. The seat is currently held by Sen. Dave Burke (R-Marysville), who is term-limited. Rep. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin) also has announced a run for the seat, setting up a possible primary with Ackison.

## **ENERGY**

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford), joined by HB6 sponsors Reps. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) and Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro), told reporters he was finally ready to unveil the "mysterious energy bill we've been working on for quite a while." Under the bill, energy consumers would participate in the "Ohio Clean Air Program" (OCAP) instead of the state's currently-mandated renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. At sponsor testimony in the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday, Callender and Wilkin acknowledged the energy bill not only offers price supports for zero-carbon generators but also for "cleaner" versions of coal- and gas-

fired power plants -- an unknown quantity to be determined by the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA). Wilkin dubbed it an "economic incentive bill" that Callender said would reduce Ohio's carbon footprint and ratepayers' bills at the same time. Then on Wednesday in the Energy Generation Subcommittee, FirstEnergy Solutions (FES) Government Affairs Vice President Dave Griffing said the "Ohio Clean Air Program" (OCAP) as proposed in HB6 would allow the state's two nuclear plants to remain open while saving residential customers nearly \$2 per month on their utility bills.

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday refused to hear a challenge to nuclear energy subsidies that was filed by a trade association representing natural gas-fired power plants and other generation facilities. The Electric Power Supply Association (EPSA) contested price supports for nuclear plants in New York and Illinois, though the group points to a larger industry movement encompassing, to date, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio. EPSA says the trend could reduce demand for natural gas in states with nuclear plants.

Reps. Kent Smith (D-Euclid) and Casey Weinstein (D-Hudson) Wednesday announced legislation to create an electric vehicle infrastructure study committee that would set statewide electric vehicle infrastructure standards to encourage investment and economic growth. In announcing their joint sponsorship of HB202, they noted a report by the Clean Energy Trust and Environmental Entrepreneurs that suggests Ohio is well positioned to be a national leader in advanced energy job growth and economic development. The report said the state added almost 5,000 clean energy jobs in 2018 at a 4.6 percent job growth rate, even though the state overall experienced a 0.08 percent growth in total jobs.

## **FEDERAL**

A report by the Office of Congressional Ethics found that there is "substantial reason to believe" that former U.S. Rep. Jim Renacci (R-Wadsworth) allowed his congressional campaign staff to perform campaign work in official buildings and during official staff time, though he will not face sanctions because he is no longer in office. The report was the result of a complaint filed by the Ohio Democratic Party. The Board of the Office of Congressional Ethics voted to send the report on to the Committee on Ethics of the U.S. House of Representatives, but the committee did not act on it before Renacci left office after a failed U.S. Senate campaign.

## **GAMING/GAMBLING**

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) said Friday that it has intercepted over \$10 million in unpaid child support from jackpot winners at Ohio's casinos and racinos and Ohio Lottery prize winners since 2014.

Total revenue generated by Ohio's four casinos suffered a slight drop in March 2019 as compared to 2018, according to the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC). However, total revenue collected by video lottery terminals (VLT) at the state's seven racinos increased significantly, according to the Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC). The casinos grossed \$81.1 million in March 2019, down from \$81.7 million in March 2018.

The Ohio Casino Control Commission received an update on two different proposals addressing sports betting in the state of Ohio during the commission's monthly meeting Wednesday. HB194

(Greenspan-Kelly) would authorize the Ohio Lottery Commission to administer sports gambling in Ohio, while SB111 (Eklund-O'Brien) would give that authority to the Casino Control Commission.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) Friday announced that he is increasing the salary for legislative aides in the Ohio House. Householder also said the process of hiring a human resources professional for the Ohio House of Representatives has begun and will remain open until the position is filled. According to Householder, the starting legislative aide salary will go from \$35,000 to \$38,500, representing an increase of \$3,500 annually. As a result of the increase, he said all current legislative aides will receive an increase of \$3,500 to their current salary. Administrative aides, pages, constituent aides and other administrative positions also will receive an increase.

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) Thursday named Rep. Haraz Ghanbari (R-Perrysburg) to the House Insurance Committee, replacing Rep. Sarah LaTourette (R-Chesterland). The most recent member to join the House, Ghanbari also sits on the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs, Energy and Natural Resources and Higher Education committees.

Rep. Sedrick Denson's (D-Cincinnati) drug possession case was dismissed after he completed a drug education course required by the Franklin County Municipal Court. Denson had faced a possible felony charge after law enforcement found one Adderall pill in his car during a recent traffic stop. Denson had already pleaded guilty to a reduced traffic charge from the incident, which occurred earlier this month when the Ohio State Highway Patrol pulled over the freshman lawmaker and charged him with driving on a suspended license and driving under the influence in addition to the aforementioned drug charge.

The Capitol Square Foundation (CSF) announced Tuesday the receipt of a commitment from American Electric Power (AEP) to establish a speaker series for the next three years. The gift will establish the "Capitol Conversations" series and bring prominent national speakers to visit and lecture at the Ohio Statehouse. This year's event will occur on Tuesday, June 25 and will feature historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin. Event details will be released shortly.

The Sunset Review Committee this week heard from representatives of the Ohio Council on Uniform State Laws, Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Nominating Council, Ohio State Apprenticeship Council, Livestock Care Standards Board, Advisory Committee on Livestock Exhibitions and Commercial Dog Breeding Advisory Board.

The newly organized legislative Ohio Developmental Disabilities Caucus kicked off Tuesday under the leadership of Sens. Andrew Brenner (R-Powell) and Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood). Antonio commented that the purpose of the caucus is "to unpack and demystify" this complicated arena so legislators will understand it better and thus be able to make better decisions regarding the various programs.

Members of the Ohio Black Maternal Health Caucus said Wednesday that they are currently working to strengthen language in the two-year state budget dedicated to reducing maternal mortality. The caucus, whose formation was announced last week, said it will meet early next month in Columbus to discuss its mission and shared vision to strengthen Ohio women, children, families and communities.

House Democrats recently released a series of proposals to modernize Ohio's tax system to benefit working people, families and small businesses. According to them, "The comprehensive plan would put more than \$400 million back in the pockets of working people, seniors and families in each of the next two years, a move that ... will bring growth and investment to Ohio." House Democratic Leader Emilia Strong Sykes (D-Akron) said in a statement, "Ohio's promise of better lives, brighter futures and an economy that works for everyone starts with a tax structure that works for everyone -- not just those at the top."

Rep. Beth Liston (D-Columbus) told *Hannah News* that, as a part-time clinical physician, she plans to use her background to bring an analytical perspective to issues at the Statehouse, including how they connect to health issues.

Rep. Michael Rulli (R-Salem) told *Hannah News* he was surprised to have been elected to the Ohio Senate from a district that had long been seen as a Democratic stronghold, although the Youngstown area district has become more GOP-friendly in recent elections. He is also well-known in the community as director of operations for Rulli Bros. Markets and former president of the Leetonia School Board.

Rep. Phil Robinson (D-Solon) said in an interview with *Hannah News* that a belief that state government should work for everyone and not just the connected few led him to run for the 6th House District where he succeeded term limited Rep. Marlene Anielski (R-Walton Hills).

## **GOVERNOR**

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Lewis "Lou" Von Thayer of Bexley (Franklin County) and Jeff M.S. Kaplan of Galena (Delaware County) to the Ohio State University Board of Trustees for terms beginning May 14, 2019 and ending May 13, 2028.
- Mary Schell of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Miami University Board of Trustees for a term beginning April 12, 2019 and ending Feb. 28, 2028.
- William M. E. Kulis of Kent (Portage County) to serve as the student member on the Miami University Board of Trustees for a term beginning April 12, 2019 and ending Feb. 28, 2021.
- Richard C. Rooney of Chillicothe (Ross County) to the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board for a term beginning April 15, 2019 and ending Jan. 14, 2022.
- Robin J. Heise of Yellow Springs (Greene County) to the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board for a term beginning April 15, 2019 and ending March 31, 2022.
- Robert C. Smith of Westlake (Cuyahoga County) has been appointed chair of the JobsOhio Board of Directors for a term beginning April 16, 2019 and ending July 5, 2019.
- James M. Hughes of Upper Arlington (Franklin County) to the Industrial Commission of Ohio for a term beginning July 1, 2019 and ending June 30, 2025, who will serve as chairman when his term commences.

## **GREAT LAKES**

Growers of small grains in the Lake Erie Western Basin will be the target of a new state assistance program, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) announced Monday. The Ohio Working Lands Small Grains Program is a voluntary program that will encourage producers in the region to plant small grains such as wheat, barley, oats, or cereal rye on eligible cropland. Participants must plant and harvest small grains, land-apply manure and plant a cover crop to receive a cost-share payment to help offset operating costs. The program benefits the planting of small grains not only for the conservation benefits, but to provide livestock producers with a longer application window to land-apply manure and nutrients, according to ODAg.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

The lawsuit over whether the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) can release the full version of a report on pharmacy benefit managers' (PBM) business practices will stretch on for at least several more months. Following a telephone conference with parties Monday, Judge Jenifer French of Franklin County Common Pleas Court cancelled a hearing set for the end of the month and said she'll consolidate consideration of PBMs' request for an injunction with the trial, now scheduled for Monday, Nov. 4.

## **JUDICIAL**

U.S. Army Col. Jeffrey Hagler has been named administrative director of the Ohio Supreme Court, the Court announced Friday. Hager is currently a judge on the U.S. Army Court of Criminal Appeals. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and received a law degree from the University of Texas law school.

A new effort to rein in mayors' courts hit Capitol Square Monday as proponents urged the Ohio Legislature to curtail practices they say disproportionately impact minorities and the poor. Mayors' courts are not courts of record and therefore not under the supervision of the Ohio Supreme Court. Ohio and Louisiana are the only remaining states that operate mayors' courts. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Ohio held a lengthy press conference to release the new report "Off the Record: Profiteering and Misconduct in Ohio's Mayor's Courts." It chronicles a series of purported abuses, including excessive arrest warrants and license forfeitures, jail time for individuals who cannot pay fines, refusal to accept not guilty pleas, and a complete lack of recordings or transcriptions of mayors' court proceedings to allow for further investigation of apparent irregularities.

Lawyers should "avoid" designating their interest or shares in a law firm as a transfer on death (TOD) to a revocable trust that becomes an irrevocable trust upon death when one or more of the beneficiaries are non-lawyers, the Board of Professional Conduct says in its second advisory opinion of 2019. Such a designation would violate Rule 5.4 of the Ohio Rules of Professional Conduct and Rule III, Section 3(B) of the *Rules for the Government of the Bar of Ohio*, which bar attorneys from participating in a firm in which another member, partner or equity holder is a non-lawyer, Advisory Opinion 2019-2 states.

The Ohio Supreme Court announced more than \$2.9 million in technology grants Wednesday to 47 local court projects. In its fifth year, Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor's Ohio Courts Technology Initiative supports case management upgrades, security improvements and other projects.

## **LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR**

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted Wednesday announced the following new appointments to the Common Sense Initiative's (CSI) Small Business Advisory Council: Carvel Simmons (Ross County), founder, Trio Trucking, Inc.; Tyeis Baker-Baumann (Darke County), president, Rebsco, Inc.; Doug Barry (Montgomery County), president, BarryStaff, Inc.; Mike Kahoe (Summit County), president, Group Management Services, Inc.; and William Bishop (Delaware County), president, Associated Insurance Agencies, Inc. They join existing members Michael Canty, Thomas Demaline and Crystal Faulkner on the council.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Ohio's 10th District Court of Appeals won't revisit its decision to uphold a law included in the previous state budget to allow central filing of municipal net profit taxes. The appellate court ruled in favor of the state in January in a lawsuit brought by dozens of communities alleging constitutional home-rule violations.

## **MILITARY AFFAIRS**

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine earlier this month sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan urging the Department of Defense to designate Camp James A. Garfield in Northeast Ohio, also known as the Ravenna Arsenal, as the third Continental United States Interception Site. In his letter, DeWine touted the synergies that the location would have with other military installations and aeronautical resources such as the Youngstown Air Reserve Station and the NASA John Glenn Research Center in Cleveland.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Blue Rock State Forest and Pike State Forest recently held special events for disabled hunters to enjoy the outdoors while hunting for wild turkey, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) said. The ODNR Division of Forestry hosts these hunts annually in Muskingum and Pike counties.

The Ohio Wildlife Council voted to increase the bag limit for walleye in Lake Erie and the Maumee River in March 2020. The walleye bag limit will rise from four fish to six fish daily from March 1 to April 30 in the Lake Erie sport fishing district, excluding the Sandusky River, when Ohio's total allowable catch exceeds 3 million fish, according to the ODNR, which noted the Sandusky River's four fish daily bag limit remains in place.

The Ohio Wildlife Council also approved the following 2019-2020 hunting season dates:

- Deer archery: Sept. 28, 2019 through Feb. 2, 2020
- Youth deer-gun: Nov. 23-24, 2019
- Deer-gun: Dec. 2-8, 2019; Dec. 21-22, 2019
- Deer muzzleloader: Jan. 4-7, 2020



Deer bag limits remain the same for all counties. The statewide bag limit remains at six deer, only one of which may be antlered, and a hunter cannot exceed a county bag limit.

## **NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

Gov. Mike DeWine's office announced Monday the appointment of Robert C. Smith as chairman of the JobsOhio Board of Directors. Smith is partner and market leader of Cerity Partners' Cleveland office, and previously was chairman and CEO of Spero-Smith Investment Advisers until it was acquired by Cerity Partners in 2016. He has more than 40 years of experience in investing, finance, accounting and business management, according to Cerity's biography. Smith has held a number of past and current board roles, including appointments to the boards of the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System, the Port of Cleveland and the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation.

## **PEOPLE**

Ohio's highest-ranking judge of Latino heritage and the first Latina to be elected to the court of appeals is being recognized by the YMCA as an outstanding career woman. First District Court of Appeals Judge Marilyn Zayas is among eight honorees to receive the Career Women of Achievement award from the YWCA of Greater Cincinnati.

The ACLU of Ohio Wednesday announced the hiring of Mary Paxton as its new director of development. Paxton goes to the ACLU from director-level roles with Cleveland nonprofits New Directions, United Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Villa Angela -- St. Joseph High School, E CITY and the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics from Allegheny College and a Master of Arts degree in nonprofit administration from John Carroll University. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in organizational psychology at Capella University.

Rep. Sarah LaTourette (R-Chesterland) was recently named the legislator of the year by the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN) for her work on palliative care legislation, 132-HB268, signed into law in 2018.

The Ohio State Bar Association (OSBA) announced Wednesday the addition of two staff members: Jocelyn Armstrong and Scott Lundregan. Armstrong becomes OSBA director of inclusion and outreach, having previously served in leadership roles at the Columbus Bar Association and as district director for U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus). She received her bachelor's degree from Ohio State University and her law degree from Capital University Law School. Lundregan will serve as the OSBA legislative counsel and director of member engagement, overseeing OSBA's 43 committees and sections. Lundregan was previously director of policy and deputy chief of staff in the Ohio House of Representatives and a staff attorney at Baker & Hostetler LLP. He received his undergraduate degree from Miami University and his law degree from the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

## **SECRETARY OF STATE**

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Thursday announced 13,747 new entities filed to do business in Ohio in March, which he said marks the most new business filings in a single month in state history. The secretary of state's office said that in comparison, there were 873 more new business filings in the state of Ohio in March than in the second highest month of April 2018. That month saw 12,874 new businesses file with the state.

## **STATE GOVERNMENT**

The Industrial Commission Nominating Council on Monday forwarded three names to Gov. Mike DeWine to consider in filling the upcoming vacancy on the Industrial Commission for an employee member. The seat is currently held by Thomas (Tim) Bainbridge, whose term expires at the end of June. They are James A. Barnes, a former Workers' Compensation Section chief in the attorney general's office; former state legislator Jim Hughes; and workers' comp attorney Daniel Knisley. On Thursday, DeWine announced the selection of Hughes, who will also become commission chairman when his term begins on July 1.

## **TAXATION**

Ohio should make the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) refundable to better support low-income workers, a coalition of advocates told reporters Monday, as outcomes in other states and through the federal EITC refunds show a range of positive benefits for families with young children. Ohio is one of only four states where the EITC is not refundable, and Voices for Ohio's Children CEO Brandi Slaughter said changing that could give families in poverty funds to buy three months of diapers or a pair of shoes, pay an electric bill or avoid eviction, making the state a better place for children to live and grow.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

Newly developed areas of technology, including robotics and artificial intelligence (AI), can have "amazing" benefits on people's lives, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted told attendees of the National Robotics Challenge award ceremony held in Marion Saturday. Ohio is already among the leading U.S. states for per capita number of robots.

## **TOBACCO/SMOKING**

Gov. Mike DeWine and health officials in his cabinet sounded an alarm Wednesday on e-cigarette use, a rising trend among middle and high school students that the administration said is abetted by a targeted marketing campaign from the vaping industry. The governor gathered with Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Dr. Amy Acton, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) Director Lori Criss and others at Nationwide Children's Hospital to discuss research regarding nicotine's effects on developing brains and the administration's budget proposal to raise the legal purchase age for all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, to 21.

## **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday announced that three new phases of the Columbus Crossroads reconstruction and reconfiguration of the Interstate 70/71 corridor are scheduled to proceed, thanks to new funding approved as part of HB62 (Oelslager). DeWine said the next phase, which had previously been approved and will include an area around Nationwide Children's Hospital, will begin next week. But he said that if the General Assembly had not approved a gas tax increase as part of the transportation bill, future phases would have been in jeopardy. The upcoming project will fix what DeWine called a "dangerous weave" around the hospital area and will give dedicated lanes that he said will eliminate lane changes by 70 percent. He said most accidents on the freeway through that area are caused by drivers' changing lanes to get to their destination.

## **UTILITIES**

At newly installed Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Chairman Sam Randazzo's first meeting Wednesday, the commission opened a formal investigation into two out-of-state competitive retail electric suppliers (CRES) accused of "egregious" violations of consumer protection laws. Brooklyn-based PALMco Energy LLC and Houston-based Verde Energy USA, also certified as competitive retail natural gas suppliers (CRNGS) in Ohio, together account for 40 percent of PUCO's open investigations into supplier-related complaints.

### **LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:**

**SENATE:** No legislative activity to report.

**HOUSE:** No legislative activity to report.