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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.

**ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

Reps. Joe Miller (D-Amherst) and Bill Roemer (R-Richfield) introduced HB208, which they said would increase the penalty for assaulting a sports referee on the job or in retaliation for a prior incident, putting the offense on the same level as current laws protecting teachers, school administrators and bus drivers.

**ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Ohio should unify pharmacy benefit manager (PBM) contracts across agencies and pension funds and change the law to make the state's financial interests paramount in such contracts, Attorney General Dave Yost said Monday. Drawing on a year-plus of work to scrutinize PBMs, previously as state auditor and now as attorney general, Yost delivered a set of four policy recommendations for Gov. Mike DeWine and the General Assembly to consider as a means to ensure Ohio is getting a good deal.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced a 13-year prison sentence Friday for a sex trafficking ringleader brought down by the Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force. The task force, a collaboration of the attorney general's Organized Crime Investigations Commission, found Curtis Gossett had recruited women from the streets and jail, used narcotics to control them and trafficked dozens for commercial sex in the capital area.

## **FY20-21 BUDGET**

One element complicating deliberations on the FY20-21 budget is an obscure, 2006 state law known as the State Appropriation Limitation -- SAL for short. Passed 13 years ago by the Legislature to head off a statewide vote on the Tax Expenditure Limitation (TEL) constitutional amendment supported by then-secretary of state and one-time gubernatorial candidate J. Kenneth Blackwell, the SAL limits growth in the General Revenue Fund (GRF) basically to 3.5 percent per year with some exceptions, as explained in Gov. Mike DeWine's "Blue Book" for FY20-21. The budget laid out in HB166 (Oelslager) spends nearly up to the SAL limit, coming in \$3.3 million below in FY20 and \$1.2 million in FY21. However, with the Legislature's including GRF appropriations of \$35 million for the Department of Public Safety in FY21 and \$70 million each year for public transit in the just passed transportation budget -- HB62 (Oelslager) -- proposed GRF spending is now over the limit.

The Senate Finance Committee Wednesday began its work on HB166 (Oelslager), the biennial budget, by hearing the forecasts from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) and the Legislative Service Commission (LSC) while questioning why the two have different estimates.

While the House continues work on its version of the biennial budget HB166 (Oelslager), Ohio's state education officials appeared before the Senate Wednesday to outline strategic investments made by the governor in his proposal. Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) Chancellor Randy Gardner and Superintendent of Public Education Paolo DeMaria appeared before the Senate Finance Committee, delivering public testimony largely mirroring their comments before the House Finance Committee last month.

The number of Medicaid enrollees rose for the first time in 21 months during March 2019, Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) Director Maureen Corcoran said Thursday. Speaking to members of the Senate Finance Committee during informal budget testimony on HB166 (Oelslager), Corcoran said the slight increase mostly occurred in the "covered families and children" (CFC) category, which has the least expensive enrollees on average.

In their second hearing of the budget cycle, members of the Senate Finance Committee asked the DeWine administration about its plans for expanding early child care programs.

## **BUSINESS/CORPORATE**

Following the recent appointment of five new members to the Common Sense Initiative's (CSI) Small Business Advisory Council, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted addressed the council at its meeting Friday -- the first of the DeWine administration. Government agencies often don't look at the level of customer service they provide, Husted said, and improving that is a goal in both his work as head of CSI and the new InnovateOhio initiative on using technology to improve government efficiencies. He also told reporters that progress is being made on the "backlog" of rules at CSI and that there would be a formal update soon.

Business Roundtable, a national association of chief executive officers, released a study that finds international trade supports nearly 1.4 million jobs in Ohio, representing nearly one out of every five workers in the state. The report says trade with Canada and Mexico alone supports 428,400 jobs in Ohio, and that exports from Ohio to Canada and Mexico have increased by 189 percent since implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

## **CIVIL RIGHTS**

Ohio students inspired by the lessons and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. presented original speeches based on his teachings during the 20th Annual Statewide MLK Oratorical Contest recently held in Columbus. Twenty-seven regional contest winners from grades one through 11 spoke before judges and others at the King Arts Complex.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

With two meetings remaining until its June 3 reporting deadline, the Governor's Task Force on Arrest Warrants reinforced an emerging consensus Monday that Ohio lacks the centralized database needed to report warrants among law enforcement jurisdictions and to audit outstanding warrants remaining in common pleas, municipal and mayors' courts -- some of them decades old. Data System Administrator Jeremy Hansford spoke on behalf of the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP), which administers the Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS). It is one of several statewide databases that include the Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG), administered by the Ohio Attorney General's Office. Hansford reiterated his comments from the task force's first meeting, pointing to the "disparate" systems used by home rule courts.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted opened a presentation Wednesday to local leaders, investors and economic development professionals on Ohio's opportunity zones, including the release of an online marketing portal created by the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA).

## **EDUCATION**

Two new audits recently released by Auditor of State Keith Faber resulted in findings for recovery against employees of two Ohio public school districts. In the first case, auditors issued a finding for recovery for \$5,344 against Gayle Huff, former high school secretary in Vinton County Local School District. An internal audit of the school district revealed that Huff, responsible for depositing money from student fundraisers, had instead been stealing the funds. In a separate audit, Faber's office found that the superintendent of Stow-Munroe Falls City School District authorized illegal expenditures for unworked employee time, gifts and personal travel expenses.

Fourteen Ohio schools received recommendations from the Ohio STEM Learning Network (OSLN), a public-private partnership managed by Battelle, officially recognizing them as "STEM schools." A total of 30 schools applied for the designation. The designations were then formally granted by the Ohio STEM Committee, a group comprised of policymakers, agency directors and business leaders.

The U.S. Department of Education this week released a guide to resources for parents and educators on improving school climate as a means to address student mental health challenges and prevent violent incidents. The guide comes in response to a recommendation of the Federal Commission on

School Safety, announced by President Donald Trump in the wake of the February 2018 mass shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. Among the commission's suggestions was identification of resources and best practices for improving school climate.

Education officials agreed Thursday that the achievement component of the state's school district report cards needs improvement, and they disagreed about whether it serves as a valuable indicator of student progress or an unnecessarily punitive and unrealistically high bar for students. At Thursday's meeting of the Joint Education Oversight Committee (JEOC), experts offered suggestions for improving the achievement component, including Tom Reed, executive director of achievement and leadership services at the Educational Service Center (ESC) of Central Ohio, who recommended incorporating a measure of socioeconomic status into the component.

Members of the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) unanimously approved their full voting agenda Thursday, moving forward projects, amendments and updates to the Ohio School Design Manual and commission guidelines.

## **ELECTIONS**

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Wednesday announced the formation of a bipartisan working group to help craft legislation to update Ohio's voter registration laws, while expressing support for a system where Ohioans are automatically registered or have their registrations updated whenever they interact with Ohio state government unless they opt out. LaRose held a Statehouse press conference with Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) and Rep. Bride Rose Sweeney (D-Cleveland), who may help co-sponsor the legislation when it is introduced later this year.

## **EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT**

Ohio's unemployment rate dropped to 4.4 percent in March, down from 4.6 percent in February, according to data released Friday by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The state added 6,300 jobs, from a revised 5,593,200 in February to 5,599,500 in March. The number of unemployed workers also dropped, from February's 265,000 to 258,000 in March. The number of unemployed workers has decreased by 1,000 in the past 12 months, and the March 2018 unemployment rate was 4.5 percent.

## **ENERGY**

New Jersey's nuclear power plants will receive \$900 million in ratepayer subsidies after its public utilities commission approved zero-emission certificates (ZEC) Thursday for the three generating facilities. The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) followed last year's passage and signing of state legislation creating ZECs for the Hope Creek and Salem One and Two nuclear plants, which along with the rest of the state sells energy into the PJM Interconnection wholesale market encompassing Ohio. The New Jersey Legislature had cited the "moral imperative" of reduced greenhouse gases and the rise in pollutants with the threatened retirement of nuclear plants and resulting increase in natural gas and coal generation.

Opponent and interested party testimony on HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) was wide-ranging and often contradictory Tuesday, as various speakers claimed "Clean Air" price supports for nuclear, renewable and "reduced emissions" generators would increase or decrease consumer costs, increase

or decrease carbon pollution, and increase or decrease economic activity in Ohio, depending on the stakeholder group.

Lawmakers heard a wide range of opinions on energy bill HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) as interested party and opponent testimony continued on Wednesday, with major Ohio business and consumers' groups citing serious problems with the legislation. While representatives of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the Columbus Partnership offered more gentle criticisms of HB6 while speaking to the House Energy and Natural Resources Energy Generation Subcommittee, the bill was lambasted as a "bailout" of the nuclear plants by the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and natural gas electricity generation company Clean Energy Future LLC. Additionally, while the organization didn't testify on Wednesday, AARP Ohio announced its opposition to HB6 and said the bill would create an "unfair and unnecessary annual \$300 million nuclear bailout tax."

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Ohio schools that prioritize environmental education will now be eligible to be recognized by the state government, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) Director Laurie Stevenson announced Monday. The Encouraging Environmental Excellence in Education (E4) program is open to any K-12 public or private school, according to Ohio EPA. Three Newark schools were recognized by the state on Monday, which was Earth Day.

This coming weekend, more than a dozen teams will compete at the University of Toledo in the first round of Erie Hack 2.0, a water solutions contest aimed at developing innovative solutions to the problems facing Lake Erie. Teams of researchers, designers, engineers, developers and students will compete in five regional competitions before moving up to semifinals in Detroit on June 5. Winners of the semifinals will advance to the final competition on Thursday, June 20 in Cleveland. Teams are competing for more than \$100,000 in prizes.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) announced additional committee changes, including the addition of members to the Energy Generation Subcommittee of the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which is hearing HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). The changes to that subcommittee include the following: Remove Rep. Glenn Holmes (D-McDonald); appoint Reps. Kristin Boggs (D-Columbus), Sedrick Denson (D-Cincinnati), Haraz Ghanbari (R-Perrysburg), and Brett Hillyer (R-Ulrichsville).

Freshman legislator Rep. Brett Hillyer (R-Ulrichsville) said in an interview with *Hannah News* that focus on local government issues put him over the top in a close GOP primary that ultimately led to his comfortable victory in the general election. He succeeded term-limited Rep. Al Landis (R-Dover).

Freshman Rep. Juanita Brent (D-Cleveland) never would have predicted serving in the General Assembly after having grown up while her aunt and guardian, former Rep. Vermel Whalen (D-Cleveland), served in the Ohio House, saying she "despised all of this when I was a kid." Now, she says, she understands.

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) announced the upcoming commemoration of the 154th anniversary of the repose of President Abraham Lincoln in the Ohio Statehouse Rotunda on Monday, April 29. The day begins with the dedication of a historic flag, and will include a replica casket, an exhibit, honor guards, Civil War reenactors and cannon firings.

Freshman Rep. Bride Rose Sweeney (D-Cleveland) began her career at the Statehouse "behind the scenes" by working as a fellow with the Legislative Service Commission before running for and being elected to the House seat formerly held by her father Martin Sweeney.

Two House members announced plans to leave the chamber this week. Rep. Steven Arndt (R-Port Clinton) will retire at the end of July, House Republicans announced Wednesday. Gov. Mike DeWine said Thursday he's appointing Rep. Sarah LaTourette (R-Chesterland) as executive director of Ohio Children and Family First. House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) announced screening panels to interview people interested in appointment to the seats seat. Applications are due by Thursday, May 30. The panels will interview candidates the week of Monday, June 3.

Sen. Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) announced the recent creation of the Ohio Legislative Children's Caucus, meant to help focus policy and funding to support proven strategies and find innovative solutions to support children. She will serve as cochair. An inaugural meeting is set for Tuesday, April 30, and Gov. Mike DeWine is expected to attend to highlight children's issues being considered in the budget.

Cameras for live-streaming and recording of committee hearings are now installed in two additional hearing rooms, House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) announced Thursday. Hearing Rooms 114 and 115 now have working cameras.

## **GOVERNOR**

Gov. Mike DeWine planted a white oak tree with Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz on Monday. Mertz described DeWine as a "conservationist at heart."

Gov. Mike DeWine met Thursday with the British ambassador to the U.S., Sir Kim Darroch, to talk politics and trade development. DeWine said the real work would begin after the introductory meeting, when JobsOhio and the Development Services Agency can follow up on topics discussed Thursday. DeWine said the aerospace industry in particular accounts for a substantial part of Ohio's export business to the United Kingdom. He noted the common language and special relationship of the U.S. and U.K., making it simpler to do business with the U.K. than any other country except Canada.

## **GREAT LAKES**

The Board of Lucas County Commissioners has filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), arguing the agency isn't complying with its legal obligations under the Clean Water Act regarding the impaired status of Lake Erie. The complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio Western Division, states that the refusal of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) to submit a total maximum daily load (TMDL) to USEPA violates the requirements of the Clean Water Act and other federal regulations.

## **JUDICIAL**

The Supreme Court of Ohio heard oral arguments Tuesday in *Miracle v. Ohio Department of Veterans' Services and Office of the Governor* which addresses whether the governor's office is the employer of executive branch staff and therefore can be sued by them for wrongful discharge. The Court also will review whether probationary civil service employees can be terminated for any reason, or whether their performance must be deemed "unsatisfactory."

The Ohio Supreme Court opened a public comment period Tuesday on proposed amendments to the Rules of Superintendence for the Courts of Ohio creating standard forms for sealing or expunging court records. Proposed sealing and expungement forms can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y3ellvpu>

The Ohio Board of Professional Conduct issued a legal opinion Thursday affirming its previous determination that a "lawyer's acceptance of representation of a client creates a conflict of interest if the representation of that client will be directly adverse to another current client or if there is a substantial risk that the lawyer's ability to consider, recommend or carry out an appropriate course of action for that client will be materially limited by the lawyer's responsibilities to another client, a former client, a third person or by the lawyer's own personal interest."

## **LIBRARIES**

The Ohioana Library will hold its annual book festival on Saturday, April 27 from 10:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. at the Columbus Metropolitan Library Main Library on South Grant Avenue, where 153 Ohio authors will showcase their work and participate in 20 panel discussions.

## **LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR**

The InnovateOhio Advisory Board was created through Monday's issuance of Gov. Mike DeWine's Executive Order 2019-14D. Lt. Gov. Jon Husted's office swiftly followed that announcement by releasing the list of board members and their first meeting date, as well as an official website for the initiative. InnovateOhio, which was created through an amendment to 132-SB296 (Hottinger), works to make state government more effective and efficient in using technology, talent and investment to improve customer service, save Ohio tax dollars and help the state prosper, according to the executive order.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife has announced that Saturday-Sunday, May 4-5 will be Ohio's free fishing weekend -- when Ohio residents may fish for free in any of Ohio's public waters, including Lake Erie and the Ohio River. It is the only weekend all year when those 16 years old or older are not required to obtain a fishing license to fish in the state's public waters, ODNR said.

Young hunters harvested 1,319 birds during Ohio's 2019 youth spring wild turkey season, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Hunters age 17 and under were eligible to participate in the two-day season, which occurred on April 13-14. In 2018, youth hunters checked 1,860 wild turkeys, ODNR said.

Current high prices for white oak and black walnut timber have created a recent increase in timber theft, according to ODNR.

The Controlling Board Monday approved a request from ODNR to spend more than \$1 million to purchase 118 acres of land adjacent to the Lakeside Daisy Nature Preserve in Ottawa County. Jeff Johnson, ODNR's chief of the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, told the Controlling Board that the land the agency seeks to purchase is currently limestone bedrock that formerly contained a mining quarry and is adjacent to 19 acres of land that he said contains the only naturally occurring Lakeside Daisy in the state and one of the last natural populations in the United States. The endangered plant is found in Ohio, Michigan and Illinois.

## **PEOPLE**

The League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Columbus will present former Rep. Ted Celeste with its 2019 Democracy in Action Award for his outstanding participation in civic affairs on Wednesday, May 8 at the Fawcett Center at Ohio State University. The ceremony, which begins at 6 p.m., is open to the public. Tickets will be available through the league's website at [www.lwvcols.org](http://www.lwvcols.org)

Former Experience Columbus Director of Membership Melissa DeGraw is now the director of business development and growth at the Ohio Restaurant Association (ORA), the group announced Tuesday.

Michael Bailey, a former state government administrator at the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), has been named vice president of strategic partnerships for the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF).

## **POLLS/STUDIES**

While much discussion about women's economic status focuses on pay inequity, panelists at Wednesday's Columbus Metropolitan Club forum said wealth accumulation - or lack thereof - plays a major role in achieving security and agency. The Women's Fund of Central Ohio and the Institute for Women's Policy Research released at Wednesday's forum a new report, "Assets for Equity: Building Wealth for Women in Central Ohio," which looks at gender and racial differences in wealth. Panelists discussing the report and related topics included Christie Angel, president and CEO of YWCA Columbus; Suparna Bhaskaran, senior researcher at the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; Darrick Hamilton, executive director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity; and Kelley Griesmer, president and CEO of the Women's Fund of Central Ohio. Angel moderated the discussion.

Around 30 percent of Ohio respondents hadn't heard of Gov. Mike DeWine or U.S. Sens. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH), according to a report released by polling company Morning Consult on all 50 states' governors and U.S. senators over the first quarter of 2019.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Ohio Attorney General's Office issued an update Tuesday on the number of law enforcement agencies -- over 300 -- now participating in the Ohio Law Enforcement Body Armor Program. Administered by the attorney general since August 2018, the body armor program is funded by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) and awards grants of up to \$40,000.



Gov. Mike DeWine endorsed Ohio Distracted Driving Task Force findings Thursday that urge the General Assembly to enact "hands-free" laws making smart phone use by all Ohio drivers a primary offense with increased fines, penalties and enhancements for "harm caused." Gathering with Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) leaders, DeWine said he will start by banning both hand-held and hands-free digital devices for all state employee fleet cars.

## **STATE GOVERNMENT**

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday named Nikki Guilford to head the state of Ohio's new office in Washington, D.C. Guilford is currently the director of NGA (National Governors Association) Consulting. Guilford will start her new position with the state in June, according to the governor's office.

InnovateOhio's Advisory Board continued its quick trajectory following its creation Monday with a first meeting Wednesday of its executive committee. Members and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, who serves as director of the InnovateOhio initiative, discussed potential subcommittees to narrow down key topics at length during the meeting. Improving state marketing efforts and streamlining policies on intellectual property rights at public universities were identified as areas members hope to act on within six months, with committee member Mark Kvamme stressing they should get some quick successes to demonstrate what the initiative can do.

Gov. Mike DeWine signed SB30 (Kunze, Williams) Wednesday morning during a ceremony in the Statehouse Ladies' Gallery. The new law creates the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission, which will plan celebrations next year honoring the 100th anniversary of the 1920 adoption of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote.

## **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

DriveOhio and the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission (OTIC) Tuesday announced their participation in a project that will dramatically improve the way Ohio and Pennsylvania manage work zones and increase safety for employees and the travelling public. The U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recently awarded a \$2.69 million Advanced Transportation and Congestion Management Technologies Deployment (ATCMTD) grant to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation with the OTIC and the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission as co-recipients for their Work Zone Reservation and Traveler Information System (WZRTIS). The new system will replace the existing processes that are used by Ohio and Pennsylvania to improve and streamline coordination between maintenance crews, construction crews and operation managers in work zones.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Administrator Stephanie McCloud told BWC's Board of Directors Thursday that she expects activity on the BWC budget in HB80 (Oelslager) to be "sprinkled" through May. They are currently in a "holding pattern" as amendments from the bureau and stakeholders are finalized for a substitute bill coming shortly, McCloud said. "From there, we're expecting a very interesting process, we're probably expecting some things to be added to our budget by members of the House as they do year over year, and we'll see what those are and the wording of those and report back," she said in her administrator's report.

**LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:**

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

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