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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. Please note that the issues are listed alphabetically and in no way signify the level of importance:

ABORTION

Anti-abortion and abortion rights supporters met at dueling rallies at the Statehouse on Tuesday, with two dozen Republican lawmakers gathering on the South steps to advocate for HB 125, the "heartbeat" legislation, while Senate Minority Leader Capri Cafaro (D-Hubbard) and Rep. Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) rallied an opposing crowd, touting prevention-first legislation from the Democrats.

AUDITOR OF STATE

Ohio Auditor Dave Yost unveiled the SkinnyOhio.org website -- an online clearinghouse of strategies devoted to streamlining government -- during a news conference at the Statehouse Museum. He said the website shares ideas and best practices from performance audits conducted across the state and nationally. Subject areas range from staff and facility planning to vehicle fleet operations and maintenance to financial forecasting, energy management and technology.

Auditor Dave Yost's office said a regional auditor's laptop containing information from audits in Northwest Ohio was stolen from his Findlay home. The regional auditor got a 15-day suspension because he had attached his password to the laptop, a violation of Yost's technology policy.

BALLOT ISSUES

The Ohio Education Association (OEA) took the anti-SB 5 campaign to the next level Friday, approving a special union dues assessment on all of its nearly 130,000 members. The goal is to raise \$5 million to overturn collective bargaining reform.

FY12-13 BUDGET

Long-term care drew consistent attention from lawmakers when Office of Health Transformation Director Greg Moody and other cabinet directors testified in the Senate Finance Committee about Gov. John Kasich's proposals to overhaul Medicaid. Moody and the others held firm on the need for provider rate cuts for both PASSPORT and nursing homes, though he expressed a willingness to revisit proposed service utilization caps for the former.

Interim Superintendent Stan Heffner told the Senate Finance Committee that House changes to charter-school provisions in HB 153 (Amstutz) are "at odds" with the push for greater oversight. Robert Sommers, director of the Governor's Office of 21st Century Education, said the administration would prefer to address areas the House delved into after the frenzy of the budget, saying House members "did the best they could do in the time that they had."

CORRECTIONS

The Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) announced a new program to assist ex-offenders who may be promising entrepreneurs: "How to Start a Business as a Restored Citizen." This all-day seminar will include representatives of Small Business Development Centers of Ohio, Minority Business Assistance Program, Capital University, Telhio Credit Union, Artsafe, and professional business owners providing in-depth overviews of programs and services to assist potential entrepreneurs and business owners in all stages of starting a new enterprise.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mark Kvamme, director of job creation in the governor's office, told Ohio Public Radio he's moving to Ohio. His previous lack of Ohio residency status forced him to vacate his original appointment as director of the Department of Development.

EDUCATION

The State Board of Education weighed a number of hot-button issues last week as it moves ahead with a state superintendent search and reevaluates statewide diversity recommendations for Ohio schools. On this latter issue, the Capacity Committee reopened its discussion of a study produced jointly by the state board and the Ohio State University Kirwan Institute, "Interim Report: Diversity Strategies for Successful Schools," which had been scheduled for possible adoption by

the full board in April until several members suggested that the demographic plurality envisioned by the study might not be possible in many of Ohio's rural and regional schools. Using these "interim" recommendations, the board will ultimately craft a model school diversity policy for the state that would include certain provisions not subject to local control including federal standards around race and gender.

Innovation Ohio and former Rep. Stephen Dyer, the think tank's education fellow, released a report criticizing poor performance by e-schools and lax government oversight of those schools, while acknowledging a need for greater use of distance learning in education.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Jon Husted announced two new initiatives aimed at getting high school seniors registered to vote and younger Ohioans interested in the electoral process: Grads Vote is an outreach initiative that provides graduating high school seniors with the information needed to become an active Ohio voter, while the "Elect Your Sticker" initiative invites Ohioans of all ages to help select the next "I Voted Today" sticker.

Companion election-reform bills in the House and Senate, HB 194 (Mecklenborg-Blessing) and SB 148 (Wagoner), that had been set for committee votes will now wait another week. Local elections officials expressed concern in the House State Government and Elections Committee about a lack of authorization for satellite early-voting centers, shortening of the in-person absentee voting period and a prohibition on sending unsolicited absentee ballot applications to voters. Democrats convened a press conference to argue that the bill will restrict voter access, a charge Rep. Bob Mecklenborg (R-Cincinnati), a bill sponsor, labeled "the politics of distraction." The Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee introduced a substitute version of SB 148 that eliminates special elections in February and August, among other changes.

Reps. Mike Dovilla (R-Berea) and Michael Stinziano (D-Columbus) introduced HB 224 to make changes to voting for military and overseas voters to more accurately reflect recommendations in the federal Voting Assistance Program.

The Ohio Elections Commission unanimously dismissed two complaints against House Republicans and the Ohio GOP that alleged they improperly coordinated with a Virginia-based political nonprofit in 2010 House races and conspired to plant a mole in the campaign operations of Rep. Debbie Phillips (D-Athens). Commission members said the evidence was too thin to support the complainants' attorney's request for a grant of discovery to seek evidence to bolster his case. The Republicans' attorneys argued the complaints were in fact motivated by the desire for a grant of discovery to gain access to sensitive, internal political documents.

ELECTIONS 2012

Local school districts put fewer issues on the ballot this spring but drew the same level of voter support as last year. Ohioans passed 86 of 146 property levies, bonds, income taxes and combination issues for a success rate of 59 percent, mirroring May 2010.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The national Bureau of Labor Statistics offered a mixed bag in its assessment of the nation's economy Friday, announcing that 244,000 jobs were added in April, while unemployment rose to 9 percent, up from 8.8 percent in March.

ENERGY

Gov. John Kasich announced he'll convene a summit on energy and economic development at Ohio State University in September, saying in a statement that Ohio "essentially has no energy policy."

GAMING

Rock Ohio Caesars, the joint venture developing casinos in Cleveland and Cincinnati, announced a suspension of construction at the casino sites because of "uncertainty" regarding how the Commercial Activity Tax will be applied to the casinos. A spokesman for Penn National Gaming, which is developing casinos in Columbus and Toledo, said it has no immediate plans to follow suit.

Penn National Gaming named Richard St. Jean as general manager of its planned Hollywood Casino Toledo.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

With both Sen. Keith Faber (R-Celina), sponsor of SB 3, and Rep. Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon), sponsor of HB 69, saying they're skeptical of the pension systems' assumptions of 8 percent investment returns over the long term, House Speaker William Batchelder (R-Medina) said Thursday he wants outside experts to evaluate the retirement systems.

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) permitted the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and the State Board of Pharmacy to proceed to rescind controversial rules that brought private commercial vehicles weighing between 10,001 and 26,000 pounds under the commission's jurisdiction and that prevented consumers from transferring prescriptions to a different pharmacy more than once.

The Controlling Board allowed Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine to proceed to outsource DNA testing to a public lab in Ohio, continuing his efforts to speed up testing in the state. In addition, the board approved payment of attorney fees in a lawsuit against the state over the funding of a spillway replacement project in Mercer County and the renewal of a contract between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and Jewish Employment and Vocational Services of Philadelphia to provide fiscal management for the HOME Choice Demonstration Project and the Access Success program.

The House unanimously passed HB 121 (Rosenberger), which would help active military members in child custody cases by preventing courts from taking away custody because of active service.

Senate President Tom Niehaus (R-New Richmond) said Senate Republicans are taking applications from those interested in filling the Senate seat to be vacated by Sen. Gary Cates (R-West Chester), who was appointed senior vice chancellor at the Board of Regents. Both Rep. Tim Derickson (R-Springboro) and Rep. Bill Coley (R-West Chester) confirmed their intention to seek the seat. Meanwhile, Rep. Courtney Combs (R-Fairfield), whose district also overlaps Cates', said he won't seek the appointment but instead will see through his legislative proposals and committee chairmanship, then run for Butler County commissioner when term limits force him out of the House next year.

The House passed two gun-rights bills Wednesday: HB 45, the controversial "guns in bars" bill to allow concealed carry in establishments serving alcohol; and HB 54, which addresses restoration of civil firearm rights. The former sparked lengthy debate and a final vote of 56-40 with three Democrats in favor and six Republicans opposed. The Senate has already passed companion versions of both bills, but House Speaker William Batchelder (R-Medina) said it has not been decided which will be the vehicles.

Sen. Tim Grendell (R-Chesterland) and Rep. Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon) introduced legislation to implement the Great Lakes Compact in Ohio. The Coalition for Sustainable Water Management, a coalition of business groups including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, endorsed the measure.

GOVERNOR

Gov. John Kasich said at the Ohio Chamber of Commerce annual meeting that if the budget comes out well and the economy continues to improve, he'll try to cut taxes in 2012, though he declined to elaborate on what rates he'd look to lower.

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released a report showing that few families without health insurance can afford to pay potential hospital bills, and that on average uninsured families only have assets sufficient to cover 12 percent of hospital stays they might experience.

JUDICIAL

The Supreme Court of Ohio is seeking comments on new rules that provide for court-appointed "parenting coordinators" to advise "high-conflict," challenged parents on their parental rights and responsibilities. Parenting coordination is considered a "child-focused" alternative form of dispute resolution. Proposed Rules 90-93 of the Rules of Superintendence of the Courts of Ohio define a parenting coordinator's role, qualifications he or she should possess, and the need for courts to adopt local rules on parental coordination. The rules also define the kinds of issues present in a parent-child relationship when a court orders parenting coordination.

President Barack Obama nominated Jeffrey Helmick of Toledo for a seat on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio. Helmick's nomination was recommended by a bipartisan commission convened by U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and former U.S. Sen. George Voinovich (R-OH).

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Lt. Gov. Mary Taylor co-hosted an event with General Electric Company, the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB/Ohio), and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce -- the 2011 GE Small Business Supplier Symposium -- to bring GE together with Ohio small businesses to identify contracting opportunities and other potential partnerships.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) announced Friday that it will treat Grand Lake St. Marys with aluminum sulfate and a buffering solution of sodium aluminate in an effort to prevent harmful algae blooms and to improve water quality at the lake. Recent heavy, prolonged rainfalls are contributing to high levels of nutrients and algae in the lake, resulting in revisions to the state's initial plan for a whole lake alum treatment.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Division of Geological Survey has released a digital version of Map EG-3, Known Abandoned Underground Mines of Ohio, on CD-ROM. Along with a PDF file of the map, which can be printed by users, the CD-ROM features geographic information system (GIS) data on abandoned underground mines throughout Ohio.

PENSION FUNDS

The Ohio Retirement Study Council said it will hire outside experts to examine the five state pension systems and to recommend how they can be restructured to ensure long-term solvency. Further action on pension-reform proposals in SB 3 (Faber) and HB 69 (Wachtmann) will have to await the outside experts' report.

PEOPLE

William G. Batchelder II, father of Speaker of the House William G. Batchelder III, died at his home on Saturday at the age of 96. The funeral will be held Saturday, May 14 at noon at the Waite and Sons Funeral Home in Medina for the attorney, former county prosecutor, former head of the Medina City school board and former chairman of the Medina County Republican Party.

Melissa Fazekas, director of communications for the House Minority Caucus, tweeted that she has become the spokesperson for the "We Are Ohio" campaign -- the effort to put SB 5, the overhaul of the state's collective bargaining law, on the November ballot.

Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director James Zehringer appointed Michael Bailey as executive director of the Office of Farmland Preservation, where he will administer the Clean Ohio Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, the Ohio Agricultural Easement Donation Program, and the Ohio Agricultural Security Area Program. He will continue to serve as executive director of the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board.

POVERTY

The Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) released its annual report on poverty in Ohio on Friday, showing rates creeping up to their highest in 17 years and estimating that federal guidelines on who is poor come nowhere close to earnings sufficient to meet basic needs. From 1999 to 2009, poverty in Ohio increased from 10.6 percent to 15.2 percent.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Parole Board granted a full hearing for Akron-area mother Kelley Williams-Bolar, who was convicted of two felony counts of tampering with records for enrolling her daughters in a school district where they did not live. The case caught the governor's attention, who had asked the board to look into it.

Officials from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Mineral Resources Management were on hand for the signing of an agreement to protect mining employees between the Interstate Mining Compact, of which Ohio is a member, and the U.S. Department of Labor's Mine Safety and Health Administration.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The Bureau of Workers' Compensation Task Force led by Sen. Tim Grendell (R-Chesterland) convened again Thursday to resume its discussions of whether to privatize workers' compensation insurance in Ohio, and heard a presentation from Jones Day attorney Chad Readler on the constitutionality of private market competition. Readler would not disclose who had funded his study although Grendell said the committee did not have the funds to pay for his analysis.