DUANE MORRIS
GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

State of Ohio Policy Update

Weekly Government Affairs Report

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Week in Review

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AGRICULTURE

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Wednesday said it had completed a grain audit of United Equity Inc., with locations in Delphos, Spencerville and Neptune, and found the facility to be in failure, as defined in Ohio's grain law. The finding makes the Ohio Grain Indemnity Fund available to support farmers who may have eligible claims from grain they have previously delivered to these locations. The facility's grain handlers license was suspended earlier this month after an initial department inspection of records indicated a financial shortfall, ODAg said.

AMERICA 250-OHIO

Attorney General Andy Wilson is asking Ohioans to multiply "250 Acts of Kindness" as the state approaches the holiday season and a bipartisan resolution supported by Senate majority and minority leaders awaits consideration in lame duck session. Wilson says the initiative, celebrating the nation's 250th birthday in conjunction with the Values-in-Action Foundation and Kindland of Mayfield, aims to showcase the "goodhearted" interactions between law enforcement officers and the people they serve. "Beyond the lifesaving efforts sometimes required in the line of duty, officers perform countless acts of kindness that often go unnoticed. They might change a motorist's flat tire, rescue a trapped pet or volunteer at a charitable event," the AG says. "Members of the public, in turn, might treat an officer to a cup of coffee, send a deputy a thankyou note or clear snow so an officer has a place to park."

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohioans can begin checking their eligibility for settlement compensation from pharmaceutical companies accused of colluding to inflate generic drug prices, the Ohio Attorney General's Office announced. This followed the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut's recent approval of a preliminary plan by 48 attorneys general to distribute a $96.5 million settlement paid by drug manufacturers for certain generics purchased between May 2009 and December 2019. "If you paid too much for certain generic drugs, you may be entitled to money back," Ohio Attorney General Andy Wilson said in a statement. "Check your eligibility and get what you're owed." Settling companies include Glenmark, Lannett, Bausch, Apotex, Heritage and Emcure, Heritage's parent.

Wilson announced on Tuesday the formation of a working group to improve sexual assault kit (SAK) reporting to his office after his predecessor and current governor convened a similar advisory group in 2018. Wilson said the new panel will study law enforcement challenges in meeting annual reporting requirements adopted three years ago in budget bill 135-HB33 (Edwards) and codified in Ohio Revised Code Sec. 2933.821, which requires the AG's final report to include a "list of all governmental evidence retention entities that failed to participate," as well as specific dates for the following:

- When SAK results were delivered to a participating medical facility.
- When untested rape kits were reported to law enforcement.
- When law enforcement received SAK results from the medical facility.
- When the rape kit was submitted to a crime lab for DNA testing.
- When a second law enforcement agency retaining SAK custody was notified of its existence.
- When the second agency retrieved the rape kit.
- When SAK results were tested by the crime lab.

- When test findings were entered into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

Ohio is in a great foundational state when it comes to establishing doula care as a viable health care option for pregnant woman -- especially minority women and women in other underserved communities -- but the state still has room to improve in making doulas a part of the workforce that supports pregnant women, according to several doulas who joined a virtual meeting of the Ohio Legislative Children's Caucus on Tuesday. Ohio is one of 29 states and the District of Columbia that have started actively reimbursing doula services through their state Medicaid programs for health services delivered during each stage of a pregnancy.

DEATH PENALTY

Following the failed attempt to execute a woman in Tennessee Wednesday evening, Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) issued a statement reiterating her objection to the death penalty, saying injecting someone with "two full doses of lethal drugs can only be described as state-sanctioned torture." According to attorneys quoted in media reports, Christa Pike -- sentenced to death in Tennessee for her role in a 1995 murder -- was injected twice Wednesday night and is currently in critical condition receiving "lifesaving medical care" after the execution failed. Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, has ordered a halt to executions while the matter is investigated.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/URBAN REVITALIZATION

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for five projects expected to create 1,173 new jobs and retain 601 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority reviewed economic development proposals brought by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The projects are expected to collectively result in more than $79 million in new payroll and spur more than $431 million in investments across Ohio.

ECONOMY

The Ohio Department of Commerce recently announced Ohio's minimum wage will increase by 3.5 percent to $11.40 per hour for non-tipped employees and $5.70 per hour for tipped employees effective Friday, Jan. 1, 2027. That increase is in line with the 2006 constitutional amendment tying Ohio's minimum wage to the rate of inflation. The threshold for business applicability will also change, with the minimum wage applying to businesses that have annual gross receipts of more than $420,000. The 2026 threshold is $405,000. Employees of businesses below that level -- and all workers age 14 or 15 -- have a minimum wage at the federal $7.25 an hour level.

EDUCATION

Attendees of the eighth "Aim Hire" conference on aligning education and workforce heard lunchtime remarks from Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Director Steve Dackin and saw a brief video by Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel, who said conversations at the event "are so vital to the future of our state" and that Ohio success involves bringing the business community and education leaders together. "When we align what's happening in our classrooms with real-world needs for our economy, we build clear pathways for our students to step straight into great, high-paying jobs right here in Ohio," he said. The event was hosted by Ohio Excels and the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose this week said his office will undergo an enhanced audit process that will continually compare voter registration records maintained by Ohio's 88 county boards of elections with the statewide voter registration database. Ohio law requires the secretary of state's office to conduct a detailed audit of each county's voter registration records at least once each year. Through expanded capabilities

within the Office of Data Analytics and Archives, the state will now audit approximately two percent of each county's active and confirmed voter records every day, completing a full statewide audit every three months, the secretary of state said. The audit compares dozens of data fields between county and statewide systems, including voter information, registration status, addresses, precincts and electoral districts, the secretary of state's office said.

ELECTIONS 2026

The U.S. Supreme Court in a 6-3 ruling Friday, Sept. 25, reversed a lower court and allowed the Trump administration to continue to use a modified version of the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) to check the citizenship of registered voters ahead of the November election. President Trump had signed an executive order directing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to put new systems in place to allow state and local authorities to verify the citizenship status of registered voters and individuals registering to vote. It also directed the Social Security Administration (SSA) to make its records available to DHS for that purpose. The League of Women Voters and other groups sued, arguing among other claims that the modifications to the SAVE system violated a confidentiality provision in the Social Security Act that prohibits the disclosure of SSNs and other SSA records; that the modifications violated substantive and procedural protections in the Privacy Act of 1974, which prohibits the nonconsensual disclosure of certain information and requires that agencies complete a notice-and-comment process for program modifications; and that the modifications were arbitrary and capricious under the Administrative Procedure Act. In an unsigned per curiam opinion, the majority of the Supreme Court said that the lower court's ruling "inhibits the federal government's efforts to assist state and local agencies in the proper administration of the midterm elections. Under these circumstances, the equities weigh in favor of a stay."

Ohio will again be one of the premier battlegrounds on election night, and one NBC political analyst said the results coming out of Portage County could portend who will win Ohio's gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races. Steve Kornacki, chief data analyst for NBC News and NBC Sports was the keynote speaker Thursday at the Ohio Manufacturers' Association annual forum in Columbus, breaking down the race to control Congress nationally and statewide. With Democrats' needing to pick up at least four seats to take control of the U.S. Senate, he listed Ohio as likely the third best opportunity for a Democratic pickup as current U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) faces off with former U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown -- behind North Carolina and Maine and ahead of Alaska, Texas and Iowa. Meanwhile, Republicans will be eyeing a flip in Michigan, Georgia and New Hampshire, among others, to hold their majority. He called Portage County the bellwether of the state, with its demographic mix that includes a college town with Kent, rural areas and a working-class population.

The Franklin County Board of Elections Monday evening dismissed a challenge to Rep. Ismail Mohamed's (D-Columbus) voter registration brought by his November opponent, former Rep. Bernadine Kent, after an allday hearing. Kent, now running against Mohamed as a Republican after serving for a term in the Ohio House as a Democrat, brought the complaint that accused Mohamed of living in a home in Delaware rather than at the Northeast Columbus residence listed on his registration.

Campaign finance complaints filed against the gubernatorial campaigns of Republican nominee Vivek Ramaswamy and Democratic nominee Amy Acton were dismissed by the Secretary of State's Election Integrity Unit with findings of no violations. Secretary of State Frank LaRose Tuesday released an update of dispositions by the unit, which was created by the General Assembly in biennial budget bill HB96 (Stewart) to take over the functions of the Ohio Elections Commission, with the new entity housed in the Ohio Secretary of State's Office.

Ramaswamy said Wednesday the rapid enactment of a proposal to suspend fuel taxes about a week after its debut represents a taste of what Ohioans could expect should he be victorious in November. Ramaswamy's campaign convened a press conference within half an hour of lawmakers' vote to suspend the taxes via HB519 (A. White), and he was joined by House Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and Senate President Rob McColley (R-Napoleon), who is Ramaswamy's running mate. "You can consider this a preview of the way my administration in January will work, a constructive partnership with leaders in both chambers working together to solve problems for Ohioans," Ramaswamy said. "I think there's going to be a change of pace in

getting things done in this state," he said. "That property tax relief package that I've discussed, that's going to go into effect quickly after I take office," he said, mentioning housing construction as another where he wants to move quickly.

Acton's campaign released a statement cheering suspension of the gas tax, a concept she'd endorsed earlier the same day Ramaswamy debuted his plan. "As the first candidate in this race to propose a gas tax holiday, Dr. Acton is glad the Statehouse has voted with bipartisan support to establish a gas tax holiday and provide Ohioans much needed relief at the pump," said Virginia Schaus, spokesperson for the campaign. "Dr. Acton continues to show she is the only candidate in this race who cares about lowering costs, which is why she has also called on the Statehouse to pass immediate, bipartisan legislation to enact her conditional moratorium on data centers - unlike Vivek Ramaswamy, who has millions of dollars invested in data centers and called such legislation 'too complicated.' Ohioans know they can't trust Ramaswamy to take their concerns seriously or make life more affordable."
The following endorsements were made over the week:
- The Ohio Restaurant Political Action Committee endorsed Ramaswamy for governor and McColley for lieutenant governor.
- 314 Action Fund endorsed Kristina Knickerbocker for Ohio's 10th Congressional District.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

The $1.1 billion electric transmission plan bisecting Ohio from east to west was the topic of four public forums over the week on a joint American Power of Ohio (AEP) and FirstEnergy "Grid Growth" project that would shift 60 percent of proposed costs to "all Ohio consumers" in support of data centers and artificial intelligence, according to the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel. AEP and FirstEnergy, which currently charge the first- and second-highest transmission rates in Ohio, launched regional forums last week in Madison, Clark, Champaign and Union counties while this weeks were set in Franklin, Darke, Miami and Shelby counties.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) issued its winter reconnect order Wednesday for the 2026-2027 winter heating season running Monday, Oct. 12 through Friday, April 16. The annual order helps consumers served by state-regulated utilities restore or maintain natural gas and electric service during Ohio's coldest months. Residential customers of PUCO-regulated electric and natural gas utilities can use the order to avoid one disconnection during the heating season. PUCO said more than 227,637 Ohioans used the Special Reconnect Order for winter 2025-2026. The commission order allows Ohioans to pay utilities no more than $175 plus any reconnection charge not exceeding $36 to restore or maintain service. The balance of charges greater than $36 may be billed to the customer the following month.

ENVIRONMENT

Legislators from throughout Northeast Ohio applauded Gov. Mike DeWine's Tuesday directive to the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to begin the process of ending the E-Check vehicle emissions testing program in that part of the state. Among those issuing news releases in support of the move were Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) and Reps. Bill Roemer (R-Richfield), Jack Daniels (R-New Franklin) and Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) as well as the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. According to the governor's office, the move to end E-Check comes after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) redesignated the region as meeting the federal ozone standard in June. The USEPA began mandating emissions testing to reduce ozone in the Cleveland region in the late 1980s. Ohio formally launched the E-Check Program in 1996, requiring certain vehicles to undergo emissions testing every two years. The program is currently active in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage and Summit counties.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Prediction markets company Kalshi Inc. cannot show that its sports event contracts are "swaps" subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of federal regulators rather than the Ohio Casino Control Commission, the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in a decision cheered by Gov. Mike DeWine. "They are gambling. Just because they call themselves something [else] doesn't mean they are not gambling. If it's a pig, it's a pig. If we call that pig a sheep, it's still not a sheep, it's a pig. These guys are pigs, they are gambling, and they don't want to pay anything, they just want to have a free ride. We will certainly enforce the law," DeWine said Monday. Judge

Julia Smith Gibbons, writing for a panel including Judges Rachel Bloomkatz and Eric Clay, ruled that even if Kalshi's contracts on sports events are considered swaps, the federal Commodities Exchange Act does not preempt the gambling laws of Ohio or Tennessee, two states sued by Kalshi after they tried to enforce sports gambling laws against the company. Gibbons noted that federal law defines swaps as contracts dependent on an occurrence or event "associated with a potential financial, economic or commercial consequence."

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Rep. D.J. Swearingen (R-Huron) announced Thursday evening that he is resigning from the Ohio House of Representatives on Sunday, Oct. 4 to take a job with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Swearingen announced his plans on social media, saying he will begin his new job as a senior counsel in the National Fraud Enforcement Division in the DOJ on Monday, Oct. 5. The new role will be supporting the White House Task Force to Eliminate Fraud. "It has been the professional privilege of a lifetime to represent the people of the 89th House District. I will be forever grateful to them for trusting me to advocate for their interests over the last seven years. These are some of the finest people that I have ever met, and I am beyond grateful to call this community my home," Swearingen wrote.

The Wednesday, Oct. 14 unveiling of the Ohio Women's Monument at the Statehouse will represent "a vision decades in the making," according to Werth PR. The monument is meant to celebrate generations of women as leaders shaping the state and nation and was designed by nationally-recognized sculptor Brenda Councill. The Oct. 14 event is free but requires registration available HERE and will start with a 9:30 a.m. program at the Ohio Theatre, 39 E. State St. The unveiling will then be held at 10:45 a.m. on the Statehouse's South Plaza regardless of weather. More information on the unveiling is available HERE.

House Republicans voted unanimously Wednesday to seat attorney Sean Hutson of Wadsworth as the new District 66 representative. Hutson was already Republicans' nominee for the seat in November. He succeeds former Rep. Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth), who declined to seek re-election this year and then resigned earlier in September to take an appointment as Medina County recorder. Hutson faces Democrat Chris Nardo and Libertarian Justin Peroli in the November election. Hutson made only brief remarks about wanting to work with colleagues to make Ohio a good place to work and live, joking that he was told he'd get a standing ovation for making a short opening speech -- which he did.

Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) President Rep. Terrence Upchurch (D-Cleveland) and other OLBC members criticized the gas tax suspension in a press conference after Wednesday's session, with Upchurch calling it a "rushed process" that would not provide adequate relief to working Ohioans. He also said a majority of OLBC members voted against HB519 (A. White), amended to include the 90-day gas tax suspension.

***HANNAH NEWS* RACES TO WATCH**

Frank LaRose has repeatedly said during his nearly eight years as Ohio's secretary of state (SOS) that Ohio's elections are secure, easily accessible and highly accurate. With LaRose now term-limited and running in November for Ohio Auditor of State, the two competitors vying to replace him bring sharply different visions to the future administration of Ohio's elections. Republican SOS candidate and current Treasurer of State Robert Sprague told *Hannah News* he thinks LaRose has done a great job during his time as SOS, and he is running to build on LaRose's efforts to make Ohio even better in terms of elections security. Democratic SOS candidate and former House Minority Leader Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) said Ohio needs a SOS who is actually going to stand up to attacks against the state's voting and election processes, which she anticipates will only intensify over the coming years. A key component in Sprague's plans for election security is the expansion of photo ID requirements to verify the identity of not only those who try to vote in-person at Ohio polling locations, but additionally those who vote by mail. Russo invoked LaRose in telling *Hannah News*, "I will quote our current SOS: election fraud is exceedingly rare in the state of Ohio. ... We can't say it doesn't ever happen, but it is very rare when it happens. We want to make sure that it is rare or non-existent."

With the seat representing North Central Ohio's Senate District 13 currently vacant after former Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) accepted a judicial appointment this summer, the two candidates on the ballot for the seat both currently represent part of the district in the House. Rep. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) -- mother of Nathan Manning -- and Rep. Joe Miller (D-Amherst) are term-limited in the House,

having each served four terms as representative since their respective elections in 2018. Gayle Manning additionally held the region's seat in the Senate from 2011 to 2018, though district boundaries have shifted since during redistricting. Aside from serving in the House contemporaneously, Miller and Manning have both been members during this legislative session of the House Education and House Workforce and Higher Education committees, as both legislators worked as teachers before they were elected to office.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Greene County Board of Commissioners approved a petition submitted by the city of Xenia, at the request of Central State University (CSU) and with the consent of the Ohio Department of Administrative Services, to annex the CSU campus. According to the city, it has provided extra-territorial utility services to CSU since the 1930's, and contractual fire/EMS functions for over 15 years. For over 10 years, city and university leaders have contemplated a shared future and considered all alternatives for service delivery. The parties executed a pre-annexation agreement in May 2026 which, among other things, stipulated that upon an approval of annexation, the university will retain responsibility for its transportation and utility infrastructure and maintain its campus police force, while the city would continue to provide water and sanitary sewer services but at residential rates, as well as provide fire and emergency medical services as a standard municipal function for the campus.

CSU has received a $1.7 million Supplemental Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). The federal program provides resources to HBCUs to strengthen their institutions and expand educational opportunities for their students. The award comes as the university prepares for a significant campus facility renovation and demolition initiative supported primarily by state capital funding.

Stark State College recently received a $2.35 million National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to lead a statewide effort to modernize engineering technology education and address the state's growing need for skilled advanced manufacturing technicians. The initiative, known as the Strategic Coordination for Advanced Learning and Employment in Manufacturing Consortium, will create a statewide model for aligning education with industry workforce needs in automation, artificial intelligence (AI) and microelectronics, the college said in a statement. Launched in partnership with the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, Lorain County Community College and Owens Community College, the consortium aims to strengthen Ohio's manufacturing workforce while creating a framework that can be replicated in other states.

Graduate and undergraduate students in Ohio can now apply for a $2,500 grant award from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Geological Survey (DGS) for research conducted at the state's locations of geological interest. DGS will select the winner of the grant award based on the quality of their application, the strength of their professor's letter of recommendation and how relevant their proposed research is to the division's mission and to the further understanding of Ohio's geology.

Google is joining Ohio State University (OSU) in a new Innovation District Hub to support AI Fluency, accelerate scientific discoveries, expand campus access to technology and "assist students from admission to graduation and beyond." The joint project brings together Google Cloud engineers and "first-of-its-kind" student ambassadors for Google DeepMind collaborations and Gemini Enterprise and Gemini Notebook access campuswide via Google for Education. OSU calls it "one of the largest partnerships between Google Public Sector and any U.S. university." Multi-disciplinary research will explore the humanities, biomedical engineering and earth sciences through Google's AlphaEvolve and other DeepMind models.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Scott Turner returned to Columbus Friday, touring transitional living program Huckleberry House with U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH). The program provides younger Ohioans support and resources as they work towards independence, an issue Husted said is important to him as a product of the foster care system himself.

INSURANCE

The largest U.S. underwriter of attorney liability consolidated more control over the legal market Thursday

when the Ohio Department of Insurance approved its acquisition of the Ohio Bar Liability Insurance Company (OBLIC), a five-decade partner of the Ohio State Bar Association (OSBA). The Montana-based Attorney Liability Protection Society (ALPS) says OBLIC -- which calls itself a leading provider of professional liability insurance -- will continue to operate under its existing brand name within ALPS's national infrastructure and expertise and retain OSBA's "exclusive endorsement."

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court announced Monday that the cost to represent capital defendants will increase from $140 to $165 per hour on the recommendation of the Office of Ohio Public Defender (OPD). The Court said the Capital Case Attorney Fee Council adopted the OPD proposal to compensate for the increased complexity and cost in defending newly charged and Death Row inmates. Capital defense rates last increased in 2023, when the hourly charge rose from $125 to $140. The rate applies to all litigation in death penalty cases, including trials, appeals and post-conviction proceedings, and takes effect in November. More on the Capital Case Attorney Fee Council can be found HERE.

A Franklin County judge said Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager must pay attorney fees to the state for opposing subpoenas meant to reveal information about his finances but declined the state's request to hold Lager in contempt for withholding other financial information. ECOT, once Ohio's largest online charter school, shut down several years ago amid a cash crunch after the state challenged its enrollment reporting and started withholding per-student funding. The school lost a legal challenge over the state's enrollment reviews. The attorney general's office later sued Lager to recover state funding paid to ECOT. Judge Kimberly Cocroft of Franklin County Common Pleas ruled that Lager violated the law against a public official's profiting from a contract and had breached his fiduciary duty to the school. She found vendor companies connected to him liable for about $160 million and wrote that a trial would be necessary to determine the extent of Lager's own liability.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is increasing the number of locations statewide where the state's deer hunters this year can donate part of their hunt to help combat food insecurity. Ohio's white tailed deer archery season began on Saturday, Sept. 26 and will last through the fall and the winter until Sunday, Feb. 7, 2027. The ODNR Division of Wildlife and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction are again teaming up this year to accept deer donations as part of the division's "Field to Food Bank" program. The program allows deer hunters to donate the deer they have taken at designated locations throughout the state, where they will then be transported to the Ohio Penal Industries' meat processing facility at Pickaway Correctional Institution for processing and packaging.

PEOPLE

Sen. Kyle Koehler (R-Springfield) announced that he is competing in the All American Quarter Horse Congress in Columbus at the Ohio Expo Center, which began Saturday, Sept. 26. The All American Quarter Horse Congress is the world's largest horse show, with more than 28,000 entries annually. Held each fall at the Ohio Expo Center in Columbus, the Congress welcomes more than 500,000 people and generates more than $426 million in annual economic impact for Central Ohio. Koehler said he is unaware of any other members of the Ohio General Assembly to have competed at this level in the Quarter Horse Congress.

Purchases of the Imagination Library specialty license plate have more than doubled since the death of Dolly Parton in August, Gov. Mike DeWine said Thursday. DeWine said Ohioans purchased 533 plates, first introduced in January 2025 and featuring an image of the country music icon, from Jan. 1 through Aug. 24, but since Parton's death on Aug. 25, sales have surged to 1,113 plates. Each plate generates a $25 contribution to the Imagination Library program in the county where the plate is purchased. Since January 2026, more than $80,000 has been raised for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Ohio

American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) CEO Lisa Nelson will retire from her role at the end of the year after leading the organization for the last 12 years, ALEC said. She has served as CEO of ALEC since 2014. ALEC said during her tenure, the organization "strengthened its work bringing together state legislators, policy experts and private sector leaders around the organization's core principles of limited government,

free markets and federalism." Her retirement will be effective Thursday, Dec. 31.

The Buckeye Institute announced on Wednesday that economics researcher Hugo Diaz has recently joined the organization. Diaz will conduct original research and dynamic economic modeling, specifically examining how taxing and spending decisions affect businesses, workers, families, jobs, economic indicators and state revenues, according to a release from the institute. Diaz has experience applying quantitative methods to real-world policy challenges, specializing in public procurement analysis, governance mechanisms and innovative data to identify corruption patterns, according to his LinkedIn profile. Diaz spent years in academia in his native Colombia before coming to George Mason University to pursue both a master's degree and Ph.D. in economics. Diaz also holds a master's degree in international relations from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Colombia.

POLLS/STUDIES

New polls released Tuesday show Democratic gubernatorial nominee Amy Acton leads Republican nominee Vivek Ramaswamy just ahead of the start of early voting next week, a departure from more recent polls that put the race as a toss-up. A Suffolk University/USA Today Ohio Network poll of Ohio 500 general election likely voters showed Acton with a 9-point lead. It was conducted between Wednesday, Sept. 23 and Sunday, Sept. 27, using live telephone interviews and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points.

Among poll respondents, 50.4 percent said they were going to vote for Acton, while 41.4 percent said they would vote for Ramaswamy. Another 2.8 percent said they would vote for Libertarian Don Kissick, and 4.8 percent were undecided. With the gubernatorial campaigns of both candidates and their allies flooding the airwaves with attack ads, the poll asked respondents who they felt had run more negative ads. Nearly 48 percent said Ramaswamy had run more negative ads, while 23 percent said Action, and 11 percent said both. The Suffolk University/USA Today poll also shows the U.S. Senate race between U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) and former U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown as a toss-up, while a proposed constitutional amendment that would enshrine a photo identification requirement to vote in the Ohio Constitution has large support. The latest release shows Brown with a smaller lead of nearly 3 percentage points over Husted, 46.60 percent to 44 percent, smaller than the poll's 4.4 plus or minus margin of error.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ohio Emergency Medical Services is announcing the 2026 "First Responder Mental Health Survey" to be administered this fall in partnership with the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association, Ohio Professional Fire Fighters and Ohio State Firefighters Association. The annual survey helps to identify stressors, needs and support gaps impacting first responders' well-being and to guide future resources addressing the realities of the job.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Legislators on the Controlling Board raised several concerns on an Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) request for $5 million to address problem gambling and sports gaming, as it would fold calls on those issues into the 988 hotline for overall mental health and crisis services. The item was deferred at DBH's request as a result of the board's questioning. It had previously been deferred at a Sept. 14 meeting. Sen. Kyle Koehler (R-Springfield), who opened by saying he isn't "a fan of gambling," questioned whether the state could save $5 million by preventing TV commercials that promote gambling given their prevalence. DBH Deputy Director of External Affairs Vanessa McMahon said she didn't know how that would work in practice but called it an "interesting out-of-the-box theory." She added they want to provide resources and information to those with problematic gambling behavior.

Results for America, an advocacy group that encourages state and local governments to use evidence in decision making in order to encourage economic mobility, recognized Ohio as being among the top eight states in such endeavors. Results for America released its 2026 Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence recognition, highlighting efforts in 15 states to use evidence and data to improve results for their residents. Ohio received the top certification level, platinum, along with California, Colorado, Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, Rhode Island and Tennessee.

TAXATION

Gov. Mike DeWine on Thursday signed into law emergency legislation to suspend Ohio's excise tax on gasoline and diesel fuel for 90 days, putting it into immediate effect less than a day after the General Assembly approved it and less than two weeks after the plan debuted publicly. It has a price tag of $725 million. The Senate Wednesday had amended its gas tax holiday legislation into an existing House bill addressing the use of fraudulent key fobs in vehicle thefts, passing it through committee and the Senate floor after blocking Democrats from offering amendments or speaking on the legislation. The legislation was quickly taken up by the Ohio House, which concurred with the Senate amendments to HB519 (A. White). The bill then went to governor later on Wednesday.

The gas tax holiday provisions in the final version included removal of the permanent law change that required gas stations to itemize receipts, a request from retailers during Tuesday's hearings. Instead, the bill permits retailers to modify or cover the existing gas tax stickers during the gas tax holiday. Further, the substitute bill reduced the $1 million appropriation to $250,000 for the Department of Taxation to administer the holiday; made several technical changes to ensure the Department of Taxation can effectively implement the holiday and retailers have more flexibility in submitting their tax filings to the department; clarifies the enforcement provisions to ensure proper cross references with the Consumer Sales Practices Act; and specifies that the gas tax suspension will take immediate effect.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

Most state governments are increasing spending on upgrades for technology underlying their operations, according to a survey of states' central IT agencies by the National Association of State Technology Directors. Ohio was among 39 states and one territory to respond to the survey. About two thirds of respondents indicated their state central IT agency saw increased spending compared to the previous fiscal year, although half express uncertainty about spending for next fiscal year. A majority of respondents said their state's central IT agency was seen as a strategic enabler for achieving cost savings and efficiencies, versus a cost center for the state. Specifically, 41 percent said their agency is "somewhat" seen as an enabler of savings and 15 percent said it is "strongly" seen that way while 18 percent say it's strongly seen as a cost center and 11 percent said it's somewhat seen that way while 15 percent were neutral.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Gov. Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) announced that transit agencies in 13 counties will receive $13.5 million in funding to support public workforce transportation in rural and urban areas of Ohio. The funding comes through the state's Ohio Workforce Mobility Partnership (OWMP) Program and will go towards transit projects "that increase the ease and efficiency of transporting residents to economically significant employment centers or places of employment outside of their home communities." The OWMP Program was established with support from the Ohio General Assembly. The program provides funding for infrastructure, equipment, technology, vehicles and planning projects.

ODOT Wednesday released the final study of a potential U.S. 23/I-71 connector, determining an 18.2-milelong roadway between the two highways would be the most feasible route. The study was required by Ohio lawmakers in transportation budget bill HB54 (Stewart), which directed ODOT and the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission (OTIC) to work collaboratively to find the most feasible route between U.S. 23 and I-71, giving the agencies until Thursday, Oct. 1 to deliver their findings. The study identified a preferred route that would connect U.S. 23 north of Waldo to I-71 south of State Route 521 and would include an interchange at U.S. 42 north of the village of Ashley. ODOT said that if construction were to begin in 2035, the study estimates that the cost to build the highway would range from $857 million to $1.2 billion, depending on the extent of improvements to I-71 required as part of the project. It also found that the expected benefits, which include reduced travel time and safety improvements, outweigh the predicted cost.

VETERANS

The post-military accomplishments and achievements of 20 notable Ohio veterans will be etched into the state's history this fall after the Ohio Department of Veterans Services announced on Monday the 20 veterans

to be inducted into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2026. This year's inductees followed their military careers with additional service to their communities in fields including advanced technology, law practice and enforcement, teaching and mentoring, veteran advocacy and much more. One honoree is Robert Doyle, a former state representative, having served in the Ohio House for 10 years before leaving in 1992. The induction ceremony for this year's class is scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 12, 2026, at 10 a.m. at the Ohio Union, 1739 N. High St., Columbus, OH 43210, on the Ohio State University campus. The event will be open to the public. The honorees include the following:

- David A. Babcock (Clark) - Air Force
- Christi S. Bartman (Delaware) - Air Force
- Janette C. Brown (Mahoning) - Air Force
- Ronald S. Clark (Highland) - Army
- Former State Rep. Robert H. Doyle (Greene) - Navy
- Jeffrey R. Earley (Franklin) - Army
- Joseph W. Kiefer (Clark) - Army (posthumous award)
- Jacquelyn Kemp (Franklin) - Army
- Justin D. LeHew (Putnam) - Marine Corps
- Robert P. Madison (Cuyahoga) - Army
- Paul M. Moyer (Greene) - Air Force
- Jamie L. Paxton (Lucas) - Air Force
- Clifford E. Pinkney (Delaware) - Army
- Gary T. Rezabek (Medina) - Army
- Gregory A. Roseberry (Jackson) - Air Force
- William T. Spradlin (Greene) - Air Force
- Mark E. Storer (Franklin) - Army
- John W. Tepper (Ross) - Army
- Timothy E. Waechter (Clermont) - Army
- De Ann M. Williams (Wayne) - Army/Navy

WORKERS COMPENSATION

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) will soon begin sending dividend payment checks out to the state's businesses following the approval last month by the BWC Board of Directors. BWC Administrator and CEO Stephanie McCloud told the board of directors that BWC could begin sending the checks out as soon as that day as part of $1 billion to be distributed to Ohio businesses, or equivalent to approximately 90 percent of premiums paid to BWC in FY22. BWC Chief Financial Officer Kevin Giangola said in August that the dividend payments could reach between 150,000-160,000 employers. McCloud said on Friday that BWC has been reaching out to the state's employers via social media and BWC's employer services team to tell them that the check coming in the mail is not a scam.

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