DUANE MORRIS
GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

State of Ohio Policy Update

Weekly Government Affairs Report

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Week in Review

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ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

At the quarterly meeting Tuesday of the organization created by Gov. Mike DeWine on his first day in office in 2019, DeWine himself told the RecoveryOhio Advisory Council that their work to address Ohio's mental health and substance use crises continues, even as the group itself may conclude with the end of his administration. Though DeWine told the council that he assumed the group will go away after next month's election of a new governor, he had started the group with the intention for Ohio to lead the nation in the scope of its approach to mental health issues.

AGRICULTURE

The Ohio Soybean Association (OSA) is asking Gov. Mike DeWine to build on the recently enacted gas tax holiday and provide further relief for farmers struggling with sharply higher diesel costs in the middle of harvest season. The association Monday said it is urging DeWine to direct a temporary pause in enforcement of penalties associated with dyed diesel fuel for agricultural operations during the critical harvest season.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Attorney General Andy Wilson announced the 2026-27 Teen Ambassador Board Tuesday, a cohort representing over half of all Ohio counties. Leading AG staff joined Wilson for presentations and a meet-and greet with high school juniors and seniors this week.

FY26-27 BUDGET

Over-estimate tax collections carried into September, beating forecasts by about $200 million, according to preliminary data released Thursday by the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). The non-auto sales tax led the trend, bringing in $156 million more than expected to reach $1.16 billion, a 15.5 percent increase over estimates. The auto sales tax was ahead $21.7 million or 13.3 percent, for a total sales tax overperformance of $177.9 million or 15.2 percent.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

State and local leaders have an opportunity to be at the forefront in creating guardrails for the use of artificial intelligence (AI), panelists on a Cleveland City Club forum exploring the effects of AI on early childhood development agreed Tuesday. Moderated by Ideastream Public Media's Ida Lieszkovszky, the conversation featured Marcia Egbert, program director of thriving families and social justice for the George Gund Foundation; Nancy Mendez, president and CEO of Starting Point; and Shawna Rohrman, director of the Cuyahoga County Office of Early Childhood.

DISASTERS

Gov. Mike DeWine announced that he had been notified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that President Donald Trump has approved a Presidential Major Disaster Declaration for seven Ohio counties impacted by severe weather in August. The counties approved for federal disaster assistance are Clermont, Franklin, Hamilton, Licking, Morgan, Muskingum and Perry.

Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) is available to eligible Ohioans following a major disaster declaration by the president on Oct. 2, 2026. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) is accepting DUA applications from individuals in Clermont, Franklin, Hamilton, Licking, Morgan, Muskingum and Perry counties whose employment or self-employment was lost or interrupted due to severe storms and 17 confirmed tornadoes that occurred between Aug. 10 and Aug. 22, 2026. Individuals have 60 calendar days from the date of the disaster declaration to submit their DUA applications. Applications for DUA must be filed by Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2026.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/URBAN REVITALIZATION

Speaking at the forthcoming Ohio Life Science Training Center in New Albany, state leaders and Bayer executives announced the company plans to invest $2.2 billion in a new pharmaceutical manufacturing site in New Albany as well. The facility, planned to be a modular site with potential for future growth, will create 600 permanent jobs along with around 1,500 construction jobs. It will draw on that training center, scheduled to be opened in summer 2027, as a resource to prepare Bayer's new biomanufacturing operators and technicians.

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) announced recently its Minority Development Financing Advisory Board (MDFAB) had approved a $286,590 Women Business Enterprise loan to Gandolf Veterinary Services in Muskingum County. The company is owned and operated by Amy Gandolf and was established in 2021. It provides mobile vet care services including surgery to pets in underserved areas. The loan will be used to refinance existing debt at the company, creating substantial annual savings. That will create seven jobs and retain one job.

EDUCATION

Ohio's state high school soccer championship matches this fall have been relocated due to ongoing field improvements at the stadium in Columbus that previously hosted the games. The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) announced Monday that four championship matches will be held at Scotts Miracle-Gro Field in Columbus due to ongoing turf maintenance at Columbus' Historic Crew Stadium, where the matches had been scheduled.

The University of Dayton (UD) recently received $1.4 million to build artificial intelligence (AI) tools intended to speed up feedback on K-12 school improvement plans and reduce administrative burden. Funded by the Gates Foundation, the project will create technology to assist school leaders that often "get bogged down in paperwork or lose momentum when key staff leave," according to Meredith Wronowski, UD associate professor of educational administration.

ELECTIONS

Ohio Secretary of State (SOS) Frank LaRose Friday announced the launch of new online resources designed to educate Ohio students about elections, civic engagement, entrepreneurship and the virtues of citizenship. The digital resources bring together interactive activities, educational tools and programs from the secretary of state's office and partner organizations into one place. The resources build on LaRose's efforts to make election and business information more accessible to Ohioans, his office said. The new student resources can be explored HERE.

United States Attorney Dominick Gerace for the Southern District of Ohio and United States Attorney David Toepfer for the Northern District of Ohio announced Tuesday that three noncitizens have been charged with illegally voting in federal elections. All three have lawful permanent resident status in the United States but had allegedly cast ballots in one or more elections in Ohio. The charges allege the three had attested on their registration forms that they were U.S. citizens. They face charges of illegally voting in a federal election as an alien, which is punishable by up to 12 months in prison.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced Thursday the launch of the "First-Time Voter Initiative," a program focused on recognizing young Ohioans and newly naturalized U.S. citizens voting in their first Ohio election. The initiative has the goal of helping the new voters "form a lifelong habit of active civic engagement as voters," according to the secretary of state's office. Under the initiative, first-time voters can scan a QR code

available at their polling place or early voting center to participate. After scanning the code, voters can request a personalized state proclamation recognizing them for casting their first ballot in an Ohio election, as well as graphics to share on social media. If a first-time voter chooses to cast their ballot by mail or wants to sign up after leaving the polls, they can do so HERE.

The Ohio Voter Rights Coalition (OVRC) announced this week that it will be sending handwritten "thank you" postcards to all 88 county boards of elections "recognizing them for their dedication to ensuring Ohio's elections remain efficient and accessible." The coalition said it organized the initiative for Ohio voters and voter advocates to express their appreciation ahead of the November election. The postcard campaign also furthers OVRC's Board of Elections Monitors program, which encourages volunteers to attend public boards of elections meetings and learn about the work that goes into local election administration, OVRC said.

ELECTIONS 2026

Monday was the final day for Ohioans to register or update their voter registrations, and Tuesday begins the early voting period for the Tuesday, Nov. 3 general election. "Ohioans can head into this election with confidence knowing our elections are both secure and convenient," said Secretary of State Frank LaRose. "Whether you vote early in person, by mail, or at your polling place on Election Day, there are plenty of opportunities to make your voice heard. This is an important election, so make a plan, cast your ballot, and be part of deciding Ohio's future." More information about early voting and the upcoming election can be found HERE.

New campaign finance filings show Democratic gubernatorial nominee Amy Acton outraising Republican nominee Vivek Ramaswamy in September, but Ramaswamy continues to hold a large money advantage. In other statewide races, Republicans held the advantage in both fundraising and money on hand. Monday was the deadline for the last of three additional monthly finance reports required of statewide candidates to report contributions received during the months of July, August, and September. According to the reports, Acton reported $6.07 million in contributions, and $24.13 million on hand. Ramaswamy reported $3.06 million in contributions, $45.75 million on hand. Libertarian Don Kissick reported $671.05 in contributions and $9,228 on hand.

Republican Secretary of State nominee Robert Sprague's campaign Monday released a letter he sent to the Ohio Association of Broadcasters (OAB) asking the group to facilitate a debate between himself and Democrat Allison Russo. In the letter to Chad Budreau, president of the association, Sprague asked if the group would contact all of its radio and television station members and solicit debate proposals and concepts from them, including possible dates and locations, to help both campaigns understand the array of possible debate options.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Amy Acton toured a bagel shop Tuesday afternoon and then spoke with the proprietor and another small business owner about the issues they face in today's economy and what state government might do to help were she to be elected. Acton visited Fox's Bagel & Deli in Bexley then had a roundtable discussion with owner Jeremy Fox and Scott Bast of nearby Catering by Scott.

The candidates for Ohio attorney general (AG) Tuesday released a joint statement saying they have agreed to a debate what will be held later this month in Youngstown. The debate will be on Monday, Oct. 19 at 2:30 p.m. at the YSU Williamson College of Business Administration Auditorium.

Republican and Democratic county parties have both appointed nominees for the Fourth District Court of Appeals in the wake of the death of Fourth District Judge Peter Abele, a Republican, who was running unopposed for re-election. Jayme Hartley Fountain was selected by Republicans in the district as their nominee to replace Abele on the ballot. She was elected as Pickaway County prosecutor in 2024 after serving as assistant county prosecutor for 18 years. She has a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of Kentucky and her law degree from Capital University. Athens County Municipal Court Judge Todd Grace has been nominated by Democrats for the ballot. He has served as municipal court judge for 11 years, and previously served 13 years as a magistrate in Athens County Juvenile Court while maintaining a private law practice.

As the race for the governor's office reaches its final stretch, the campaigns of Democratic gubernatorial

nominee Amy Acton and Republican nominee Vivek Ramaswamy announced statewide tours. Acton's campaign said she is launching her "My Promise for Ohio" tour, during which she will deliver her closing message with the promise "Every single Ohioan, no matter where you live, should be able to thrive." Republican secretary of state nominee Robert Sprague has launched his first ad for the General Election. The spot, which began running statewide on Thursday, attacks Democratic nominee Allison Russo over her votes as a lawmaker, including for an increase in the gas tax and against the most recent state budget that included a tax cut.

The following endorsements were made over the week:
- NFIB endorsed Eric Conroy and Derek Merrin for Congress.
- Abortion Forward endorsed Sherrod Brown for U.S. Senate; Greg Landsman, Joyce Beatty, and Emilia Sykes for Congress; Allison Russo for secretary of state; Seth Walsh for state treasurer; Annette Blackwell for state auditor; Cara Jacob, Latyna Humphrey, Bride Rose Sweeney, and Bill DeMora for Ohio Senate; Dontavius Jarrells, Beryl Brown Piccolantonio, Meredith Lawson-Rowe, Christine Cockley, Anita Somani, Crystal Lett, Tristan Rader, Scott DiMauro, Megan Coy, Davida Russell, Nicole Sigurdson, Darnell Brewer, Ashley Bryant Bailey, Rachel Baker, Karen Brownlee, Noah Spinner, Rose Lounsbury, Desiree Tims, Daqual Neal, Timothy Hornbacker, Erika White, Michele Grim, Amy Rigsby, Kim McCarthy, Sheila Coressel, Arienne C. Childrey, Kent Halloran, Collin Docterman, and Scott Grund for Ohio House; named Amy Acton as its preferred candidate for governor; named John Kulewicz as its recommended candidate for attorney general; and named Jennifer Brunner and Marilyn Zayas as its preferred candidates for Ohio Supreme Court.
- Americans for Public Safety endorsed Vivek Ramaswamy for governor.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

Both U.S. employment and the unemployment rate saw little change in September with an increase of 29,000 jobs and a rate of 4.2 percent, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data released Friday. Employment in all major industries changed little over the month as well. BLS said the number of unemployed people totaled 7.1 million and was little changed in September. The unemployment rate has been in a "narrow range" of 4.1 to 4.3 percent since March. Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rate for people who are Black (7.0 percent) increased in September. All other major worker groups saw little change.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) once again deferred to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and PJM Interconnection Wednesday and redoubled the DeWine administration's position that Big Data must carry its load rather than "ratepayers having to bear the costs for an energy demand that they did not create." Commissioners denied Google, Retail Energy Supply Association (RESA) and Interstate Gas Supply's (IGS) requested rehearing of PUCO's 3-0 opinion authorizing American Electric Power (AEP) of Ohio to hold a separate energy auction for data centers rejoining its standard service offer (SSO) to protect other ratepayers on AEP's default generation plan from the threat of supply-and-demand cost hikes.

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Chris Wright visited Perry, OH Monday to announce a conditional loan commitment of $4.2 billion to modernize Vistra Corp.'s Davis-Besse Nuclear Power station in Oak Harbor, Ottawa County and Perry Nuclear Generating Station in North Perry, Lake County. DOE's Office of Energy Dominance Financing (EDF) says the finalized loan will deliver more reliable energy, strengthen the grid, lower costs and meet growing demand across the 13-state regional transmission organization (RTO) serving Ohio, PJM Interconnection, L.L.C. (PJM) and encompassing additional Vistra nuclear assets in Pennsylvania.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) gave all sides of the supply-demand debate a qualified win Wednesday when state regulators agreed to reconsider their August interpretation of HB15's (Klopfenstein) procedural and administration goal for utility cases to be more efficient and less cumbersome. Commissioners granted parties including the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), Retail Energy Supply Association (RESA) and regional utilities rehearing on administrative rules to shorten time limits on case filings, witness questioning, and agency hours of operation and page limits on briefs.

A bipartisan group of 13 governors and the mayor of Washington, D.C. announced Thursday the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that formally establishes the PJM Governors' Collaborative, a multistate, bipartisan organization designed to strengthen states' collaboration as they strive to reduce costs for working families and strengthen grid reliability for the region's electric system operated by PJM. The announcement came at the 2026 Governors' Summit on the State of PJM, convened by Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA) approved over $2.9 million in low interest loans for several projects across the state to improve wastewater and drinking water infrastructure and make water quality improvements.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) took no action on the rules on its agenda, allowing those rules to move forward. Rules on the agenda included revisions from the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) concerning separate changes regarding public children services agencies (PCSAs) and the placement of foster children. Other rules also included a series of occupational certification changes from the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire and Transportation Services (EMFTS).

GOVERNOR

Even as his time in office grows shorter, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Tuesday that the number of people pardoned through the Ohio Governor's Expedited Pardon Project has now exceeded 300. DeWine created the program in 2019 to support individuals with relatively low-level criminal records who have led law-abiding lives in the decades since their convictions. To date, the governor has signed expedited pardons for 323 individuals, with more than 340 people actively working toward an expedited pardon.

Appointments made over the week include the following:
- Deborah L. Saunders of Gallipolis (Gallia County) reappointed to the Rio Grande Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Oct. 11, 2026, and ending Oct. 10, 2031.
- Ritch L. Ramey of Marion (Marion County) to the Marion Technical College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending April 29, 2029.
- Robert A. Montagnese of Pataskala (Licking County) reappointed to the Central Ohio Technical College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 30, 2029.
- John I. Silverman of Cincinnati (Hamilton County), Mark D. Walton of Liberty Township (Butler County) and Theodore M. Scherpenberg of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) reappointed to the Cincinnati State Technical and Community College Board of Trustees for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Aug. 31, 2032.
- James Lowe of Blacklick (Franklin County) appointed and Jason A. Cromartie of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) and Douglas P. Hubaker of Perrysburg (Wood County) reappointed to the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 19, 2029.
- Jack W. Bradley of Lorain (Lorain County) to the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Aug. 21, 2030.
- David P. Schwartz of West Chester (Butler County) to the Ohio Post-Traumatic Stress Fund Commission for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 23, 2027.
- Daniel L. Davis of Columbus (Franklin County) appointed to the State Board of Psychology for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Oct. 4, 2030 and Jacqueline W. Wynn of Grandview Heights (Franklin County) reappointed for a term beginning Oct. 5, 2026, and ending Oct. 4, 2031.
- Eric O. Pempus of Rocky River (Cuyahoga County) to the Ohio Architects Board for a term beginning Oct. 3, 2026, and ending Oct. 2, 2031.
- Julienne R. Cromwell of Milford (Clermont County), Gregory S. Barney of Tipp City (Montgomery County) and Joseph F. Denk, Jr. of Fairview Park (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the Board of Building Standards for terms beginning Oct. 14, 2026, and ending Oct. 13, 2030.
- Nita Gupta of Wadsworth (Medina County) to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission for a term beginning Sept. 30, 2026, and ending July 28, 2031.
- Steven E. Werman of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Ohio Cemetery Dispute Resolution Commission for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending July 1, 2030.
- John E. Sharier of Coshocton (Coshocton County) reappointed to the Historical Boilers Licensing Board for a

term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 30, 2031.
- Laura M. Clemente of Kirtland (Lake County) to the State Cosmetology and Barber Board for a term beginning Sept. 25, 2026, and ending Oct. 31, 2027.
- Stephanie R. Cepec of Huron (Erie County) and Erik W. Hemenway of Blacklick (Franklin County) to the Ohio Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Athletic Trainers Board for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending August 27, 2029.
- Rebecca K. Mellino of Westlake (Cuyahoga County) and Matthew M. Tyler of Kettering (Montgomery County) to the Radiation Advisory Council for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 6, 2028 and Sept. 6, 2029, respectively.
- Richard J. Simmers of Uniontown (Stark County) appointed to the Oil and Gas Commission for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Oct. 14, 2029 and Christine L. Shepard-Desai of Akron (Summit County) reappointed for a term beginning Oct. 15, 2026, and ending Oct. 14, 2031.
- Alex N. Pitts of Massillon (Stark County) to the Underground Technical Committee for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Dec. 31, 2029.
- Thomas F. Needles of New Albany (Franklin County) reappointed to the Motor Vehicle Dealers Board for a term beginning Oct. 5, 2026, and ending Oct. 4, 2029.
- David E. Prentice of Akron (Summit County), Denise K. Evans of Lebanon (Warren County) and R. Sean Grayson of Powell (Delaware County) reappointed to the Industrial Commission Nominating Council for a term beginning Oct. 21, 2026, and ending Oct. 20, 2030 and Robert K. Schmitz of Bexley (Franklin County) reappointed for a term beginning Oct. 21, 2026, and ending Oct. 20, 2028.
- Elizabeth A. Whelpdale of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) appointed and Kevin R. Flynn of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) and Shannon L. Monyak of Olmsted Township (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council for terms beginning Oct. 27, 2026, and ending Oct. 26, 2029.
- Breann Gonzalez Almos of Bexley (Franklin County), Manuel Lopez Ramirez of Springfield (Clark County) and Mary J. Santiago of Lorain (Lorain County) reappointed to the Commission on Hispanic-Latino Affairs for terms beginning Oct. 8, 2026, and ending Oct. 7, 2029.
- Radhika Ramasahaym of Dublin (Delaware County), Gregory J. Davda, Sr. of Delaware (Delaware County) and Yong Lin of Loveland (Hamilton County) reappointed to the Minority Development Financing Advisory Board for terms beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 30, 2033.
- Darren Bok of Hicksville (Defiance County) reappointed to the State Auctioneers Commission for a term beginning Oct. 10, 2026, and ending Oct. 9, 2029.
- Kathryn Bartter of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Great Lakes Protection Fund Board for a term beginning Oct. 11, 2026, and ending Oct. 10, 2028.
- John C. Young of Hilliard (Franklin County), Jason E. Dunn, Sr. of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) and Daniel S. Moder of Newark (Licking County) reappointed to the TourismOhio Advisory Board for a term beginning Oct. 2, 2026, and ending Sept. 27, 2029.

***HANNAH NEWS* RACES TO WATCH**

With Ohio Auditor of State (AOS) Keith Faber term-limited and running for Ohio Attorney General this election cycle, Ohio Secretary of State (SOS) Frank LaRose, also barred by term limits, and Maple Heights Mayor Annette Blackwell are running against each other to follow Faber as state auditor. In separate interviews with *Hannah News*, both LaRose and Blackwell touted personal government experience they said demonstrates their competence to serve as the state's fiscal watchdog and improve government efficiency.

In this fall's contest for House District 28, Rep. Karen Brownlee (D-Cincinnati) is seeking a second term in the northeast Hamilton County seat, facing a challenge from Blue Ash Mayor Jil Cole. Brownlee won her first term with a victory of more than 10 points over GOP challenger Jenn Giroux to fill the seat previously held by Reps. Jessica Miranda and Jodi Whitted - the former left early to take over as Hamilton County auditor; the latter was appointed to complete the term. According to the Ohio Manufacturers' Association 2026 Election Guide, the district tilts toward Democrats, with a Republican index of 43.68 percent. Former Vice President Kamala Harris won the district with 57 percent of the vote in 2024 against President Donald Turmp, while Gov. Mike DeWine carried it with more than 53 percent of the vote in his 2022 re-election campaign.

Rep. Brian Lorenz (R-Powell) and Democratic challenger Shelby Kimball have walked different roads and arrived at distinct places in their personal lives. One a sitting legislator and retired civic planner and the other a full-time mom and veteran platoon sergeant, both have a unique understanding of leadership and critical decision-making, and both are working to represent capital-north suburbs in the 137th General Assembly.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) is rolling out a new "Registry for Prevention and Early Intervention Programs" to help state and local officials, providers and everyday Ohioans find evidence-based services that fit community needs. The program portal with searchable registry, evidence page, review process and submission form can be found HERE.

U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH), U.S. Rep. Mike Carey (R-Columbus) and Health Resources and Services Administration Administrator Tom Engles gathered Monday morning at Nationwide Children's Hospital in downtown Columbus for a roundtable discussion highlighting a new federal investment supporting the state's Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV). Out of the more than $525 million invested in the federal program for FY26, the Ohio Department of Children and Youth was awarded approximately $13.5 million to support Ohio's home visiting Program. The total amount allocated to states represents the largest federal investment ever made in the program, Engles told reporters following the roundtable discussion, which had been closed to the press.

As part of its observance of the annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) in October, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is hosting a free webinar for employers to discuss how supervisors can meet their responsibilities under Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) later this month. OOD will host the webinar on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2026 at 10 a.m. Registration for the Microsoft Teams event can be found HERE.

Gov. Mike DeWine has been a game changer for mental health access and substance abuse treatment in the Buckeye State, retired Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton told leaders gathered at the Ohio Judicial Center Thursday for The Ohio Project's "Stepping Up Initiative" in conjunction with the National Association on Mental Health (NAMI). Stratton has long supported behavioral health reforms in the criminal justice system both on and off the bench and now leads the state "Stepping Up Initiative" to reduce the number of mentally ill persons behind bars and help them reenter and remain in the community. A 16-year member of the Ohio Supreme Court and regular Capitol Square contributor since her 2012 retirement, she's had a front-row seat to public policy priorities since the mid-1990s and took the opportunity in DeWine's final months as governor to thank him for championing behavioral healthcare.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Kent State University received a five-year, $1.3 million TRIO Teacher Preparation Student Support Services (TPSSS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) to support undergraduate students preparing to enter the teacher workforce. The university will receive more than $272,000 annually to serve 140 students who are first-generation college students, income-eligible students or students with disabilities. The grant is specifically focused on students pursuing teacher preparation programs and will provide comprehensive support from college enrollment through graduation, licensure and entry into the teaching profession, Kent State said.

Calling it a scheme that "may seem complex at times, but at its heart, it's a very simple story about greed," Auditor Keith Faber announced the indictments of three individuals connected to the now-defunct Eastern Gateway Community College in Jefferson County, charging them with racketeering and other alleged crimes. What started as a technical institute in the late 1960s and grew into a regional community college in the 2000s, Eastern Gateway closed in September 2025 due to financial and legal challenges. Faber's office last year flagged $17 million in spending at the college after a review by his office's auditors from July 2022 to June 2023. Indictments announced Thursday include Michael Perik, the owner of Student Resource Center (SRC), a for-profit entity; SRC partial owner Nicole Marie Rowe aka Nicole Marie Colclasure; and Michael John Geoghegan, the former chief financial officer and president of the community college.

INSURANCE

A magistrate indicated Tuesday morning he'd be issuing a decision quickly promising fines against a health insurer put under state oversight should it not return nearly $3 million withdrawn from a bank account that a

judge put under Ohio Department of Insurance control. Magistrate Mark Petrucci, hearing the case on behalf of Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Sheryl Munson, presided at a hearing requested by ODI for insurer Thin Blue Line to explain why it should not be held in contempt of prior court orders. Ahead of the hearing, however, Thin Blue Line's attorneys filed a waiver of their right to appear.

LIQUOR/ALCOHOL

For the second time in just three years, StateWays magazine named Ohio Liquor (OHLQ) the 2026 Overall Best Practices winner, recognizing Ohio's innovative approach to beverage alcohol operations, education, enforcement and industry collaboration. OHLQ is the public-private partnership between the Ohio Department of Commerce Division of Liquor Control (DOLC) and the JobsOhio Beverage System (JOBS), OHLQ explains. This year's recognition marks the third time Ohio has received StateWays' top overall honor, following previous wins in 2019 and 2024.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The exchange of fire in rural Nelsonville continues after the Ohio Supreme Court returned the years-old feud between the town's "dueling" governments to the 4th District Court of Appeals Thursday to settle whether one official's claim to be chartered city council president ended when she resigned and executed an aboutface hours later, making way for a competing statutory president and new slate of city officials. Whether Nelsonville is in fact a city instead of a village below the 5,000-population threshold is a debate still to be decided. The original 2020 Census count of 4,612 was later revised to 5,373 following a challenge by city hall. Estimates for 2026 are again in the 4,600 range, though that is one small-town dispute not implicated by *Margarita Nguyen, et al. v. Opha Lawson, et al*., appealed to the Supreme Court last spring.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Asked about progress in Ohio's bid to secure the U.S. Space Academy, U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH) told *Hannah News* he planned to fly back to Washington, D.C. with President Donald Trump after Trump's remarks in Vandalia and he expected to speak to Trump about that topic at length. "It should only be in Ohio. This is where the world learned how to fly, was in Wright Field, and I've told the president over and over again he doesn't want to be associated with LBJ. He wants to be associated with the Wright Brothers, with Neil Armstrong, with John Glenn, the Magnificent Seven. We're the only location in the United States of America that can have that location open next year," Moreno continued.

NATURAL RESOURCES

While for some the month of October counts down spooky season until the frights of Halloween, the month in Ohio is when spectators can expect the bright reds, yellows and oranges of the leaves on the trees as autumn settles in statewide. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is expecting this month to showcase a more vivid color show than the state has seen in recent years, due to substantially more rainfall statewide this summer. "Conditions this year seem to be aligning for great fall colors," ODNR Fall Color Forester David Parrott said. "Unlike previous years, we are entering autumn without near-drought or drought conditions, and the weather forecast is giving a 50 percent chance of average autumn weather. These are all good signs for producing vibrant fall colors."

PENSIONS

A finance journal article flagging discrepancies in investment return reporting from the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) related to staff incentive payouts relies on a misunderstanding of different reporting methodologies in pension finance, according to advisory firms that have helped lawmakers with pension issues in recent years. The state's pension oversight body asked Thursday that the article be retracted. In August, the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) discussed "Retirement at Risk: The Political Economy of Public Pension Governance," an article in the *Journal of New Finance*, and asked its staff to reach out to the authors, Allen Mendenhall of the Heritage Foundation and Dan Sutter of Troy University. The

council returned to the topic Thursday, considering reports from two experts they've relied on in the past: Jim Voytko of RVK, who provides twice-yearly reviews of investment performance by all of the state's public pension systems: and William Fornia, who was part of the advisory team the council hired to provide guidance on the major reforms of 2012. Voytko called the article "fatally flawed."

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Office of Information Security and Privacy will host the Ohio Cybersecurity Day Conference from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 16. The conference will take place at the Ohio Department of Transportation office at 1980 W. Broad St. in Columbus. The conference is meant for state employees who are chief information officers and technology leaders; information security officers and staff; IT staff who play a critical role in information and cybersecurity; and private and data governance staff who work with state data. Registration information is HERE.

TAXATION

The Ohio Department of Taxation last week released administrative guidance to implement the state's upcoming 90-day motor fuel tax holiday after Gov. Mike DeWine signed HB519 (A. White) into law on Thursday, Oct. 1. The department said it will continue to provide updated information and guidance on the initiative through its website HERE.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Speaking to reporters after announcing Bayer's $2.2 billion investment in New Albany, Gov. Mike DeWine explained how he had initial concerns the gas tax suspension would involve taking money from the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) but once it was clear that wouldn't be used "it made sense to me." "This is really the only way that Ohio legislators and the governor can give some relief -- the cost of gasoline is horrible, but these are all forces outside of our control. We don't control what the worldwide market is, we don't control a lot of different things. This is the one thing that we could do that will give some relief for the next 90 days," he continued.

The temporary suspension of state excise taxes on gasoline and diesel went into effect Sunday, bringing the average price of regular unleaded gas below $4. Sunday was the third day after the signing of HB519 (White), which temporarily lowers Ohio's motor fuel taxes to a hundredth of a cent for 90 days. The legislation, which took effective immediately after Gov. Mike DeWine signed it Thursday because of an emergency clause, specified the reduction would begin the third day after signing. According to AAA, Ohio's average regular gas price Sunday was $3.97. On Monday, it was $3.87. In contrast, a week earlier the average price was $4.31 per gallon; a month ago, $3.93; a year ago, $2.99.

While drivers in Ohio today still must sit behind the wheel of their vehicle to navigate to their destination, one Central Ohio business, in partnership with the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) DriveOhio initiative, has taken its hands off the wheel, as EASE Logistics is now using autonomous electric trucks that can drive themselves between warehouses on the company's Marysville property and some local public roads. Officials at EASE on Monday showed off two autonomous electric vehicles in use at the company's Marysville location that were built by Swedish freight technology company Einride AB.
Gov. Mike DeWine joined Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and local officials Monday open four new rest areas along I-75 in Butler and Auglaize counties. DeWine has worked to improve the safety, experience, and accessibility for travelers in Ohio, while sharing Ohio's natural history, historic past, and popular attractions at re-imagined rest areas. New facilities include native Ohio plants, dog trails, rocking chairs, and Storybook Trails, which give kids and families the chance to read a Dolly Parton Imagination Library book along a short trail while stretching their legs.

In a 6-1 decision issued Tuesday, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) cannot be held liable for the death of a passenger when a teen dropped a sandbag from a Toledo bridge where construction fencing had been removed, reversing an appeals court. The lawsuit had been brought by Patricia Wilkes, the mother of Marquise Byrd, who died while riding in a car traveling on Interstate 75 in December 2017. According to the Court, the Indiana Avenue overpass bridge where the

incident occurred was open to pedestrian traffic. The teen dropped the sandbag from the side closed to traffic where vandal-protective fencing had been removed. The teen was later adjudicated delinquent for the murder of Byrd.

Sen. Bill DeMora (D-Columbus) and Rep. Eric Synenberg (D-Beachwood) Wednesday announced legislation that would regulate e-bikes, e-scooters, and other mobility devices not currently governed by Ohio law, instituting a registration requirement and age limits. At a Statehouse press conference, DeMora, who said the bill in the Senate is officially SB477 (DeMora), proposes a solution to "an increasingly serious issue" across the state. "In my district alone, e-bikes and e-scooters are becoming more and more popular and more frequently used, especially among the college students that I represent on Ohio State University's campus and throughout the Short North and downtown," DeMora said.

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