DUANE MORRIS
GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES

State of Ohio Policy Update

Weekly Government Affairs Report

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Week in Review

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ABORTION/REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

A Butler County judge this week dismissed a lawsuit brought by Reps. Levi Dean (R-Xenia) and Jennifer Gross (R-West Chester) challenging the reproductive and abortion rights constitutional amendment passed by voters in 2023, finding the lawmakers and another plaintiff did not have standing to bring the lawsuit. Dean and Gross, as well as Lebanon City Councilwoman Kristen Eggers, filed the lawsuit earlier this year, arguing that the constitutional amendment conflicts with other sections of the Ohio Constitution, and that the changes it made are only permissible through a constitutional convention rather than a ballot initiative. Defendants in the case -- then Attorney General Dave Yost and Bulter County Prosecutor Michael Gmoser -- had asked for the case to be dismissed due to the plaintiffs' not having standing to bring the lawsuit. They had argued that the lawsuit had failed to cite any actual injury and failed to distinguish their alleged harm from harm that is "borne by the population in general." The plaintiffs, in response, had argued that they have "alleged concrete injuries resulting from enforcement of this invalid constitutional provision and satisfy the requirement of pleading standing in multiple ways."

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Gov. Mike DeWine petitioned the OneOhio Recovery Foundation Board Wednesday for a "significant" sum from Ohio's opioid settlement to fund a state-level institution with potentially global significance to mental health and substance abuse. He offered the State of Ohio Action Resiliency (SOAR) Network administered by the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (ODBH) and Ohio State University (OSU) as one such initiative and urged directors to consider the "transformative" impact of a statewide center of excellence committed to OneOhio's mission. DeWine addressed board members more than four years after attending their first meeting in May 2022, when he said the administration would move forward with its 15 percent, $121 million cut from Ohio's $808 million opioid settlement while remaining open to working with OneOhio, which received $444 million, or 55 percent. DeWine applauded OneOhio directors and staff for their fiduciary commitment to assist Ohioans and service providers at the local and regional level but asked them now to consider an "innovation fund."

Kent State University's (KSU) Center for Public Policy and Health and the Prevention Action Alliance (PAA), a nonprofit dedicated to addiction prevention education and advocacy, received a $3 million, five-year federal grant to strengthen substance use prevention across Eastern Ohio from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the university recently announced. This Strategic Prevention Framework-Partnerships for Success federal grant will support a "coordinated prevention network" serving more than two million residents in Ashtabula, Belmont, Carroll, Columbiana, Coshocton, Geauga, Guernsey, Harrison, Jefferson, Lake, Mahoning, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Portage, Stark, Trumbull, Tuscarawas and Washington counties.

AGING

The most recognizable names among the 2026 Senior Citizen Hall of Fame class belong to former Gov. Bob Taft, 84, and former First Lady Hope Taft, 80. They join six others including a career nurse, an educator in the arts and a nationally recognized conservationist. Following his two terms as governor, Bob Taft has continued his civic engagement through teaching and mentoring students at the University of Dayton. Hope Taft has long worked with organizations across Ohio on environmental issues, as well as youth wellness initiatives through the nonprofit, Prevention FIRST! The honorees were inducted into the hall of fame by the Ohio

Department of Aging (ODA) on Wednesday.

AGRICULTURE

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) announced that grant funding is now available to a limited number of grants to organizations working to control spotted lanternfly (SLF) populations, including state and local government agencies, parks systems, and nonprofit organizations with a track record of success in invasive plant or pest management to help confront the scourge of the invasive SLF and the invasive "tree of heaven" species that hosts the fly. The grants will be awarded in amounts up to $15,000 with an in-kind match of 10 percent, and award priority will be given to agencies working in the most infected areas. Information from ODAg on managing SLF populations can be found HERE. Further information on the Spotted Lanternfly Community Control Grant program can be found HERE, as can eligibility requirements and the application form. The application submission deadline is Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2026.

DISABILITIES

This week brought the effective date for a new law that enables public safety officials to send emergency alerts in the case of missing children with autism or other developmental disabilities -- HB359 (C. Thomas-Gross). The law creates new "Joshua Alerts," named in memory of Joshua Al-Lateef Jr., a child with autism who was found dead in a pond near his home in West Chester. Under HB359, if law enforcement confirms a missing child has autism spectrum disorder or another developmental disability and that their disappearance poses a credible threat of immediate danger of serious harm or death, they must notify the Statewide Emergency Alert Program.

DISASTERS

Gov. Mike DeWine this week declared a state of emergency in 19 Ohio counties affected by recent severe weather. He signed the proclamation after meeting with local officials, first responders, and residents in Vinton County, which experienced significant flooding. The counties included in the state of emergency are Athens, Clermont, Gallia, Greene, Highland, Jackson, Logan, Meigs, Mercer, Montgomery, Morgan, Muskingum, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Preble, Ross, Van Wert and Vinton. The proclamation directs all relevant state of Ohio departments and agencies to lend their services, equipment, supplies, and personnel as necessary to assist in the cleanup effort.

ECONOMY

Ohio's unemployment rate dropped slightly from 3.4 percent in July to 3.3 percent in August, bringing the rate more than a full point down from August 2025's 4.4 percent rate. Employment increased by 2,100 over the month from a revised 5,686,600 in July to 5,688,700 in August. Ohio's rate is below the U.S. rate of 4.1 percent, which held steady from July and is slightly below the 4.3 percent seen a year earlier. Ohio's drop over the year was the second largest among states and represented the lowest rate seen in decades, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In August 2026, the labor force participation rate in Ohio was 61.3 percent, down from 61.4 percent in July 2026 and down from 62.3 percent in August 2025. During the same period, the national labor force participation rate was 61.6 percent, up from 61.4 percent in July 2026 and down from 62.3 percent in August 2025.

EDUCATION

Barberton City Schools in Summit County entered fiscal emergency Tuesday, making it the third Ohio school district subject to the highest level of state fiscal oversight. Barberton joins Hamilton County's Mt. Healthy Schools and Athens County's Trimble Local in fiscal emergency, a designation that allows a state financial planning and supervision commission to take some or all power of the local board of education. The Barberton Board of Education asked Auditor Keith Faber's office and the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) to make such a declaration in August, amid budget cuts, forecasting errors and a levy failure.

As students return for the school year, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is reminding the state's educators that Ohio: Wild at Heart, the movie and educational experience about the natural world of the Buckeye State, is available to screen in classrooms this year. It is available online and accessible for teachers to use as a learning tool that inspires curiosity, supports science curriculum and encourages students to explore the outdoors. Educators can click HERE and complete a brief form to receive access to the film. A trailer for the film can be seen on YouTube HERE.

The DEW K-12 Industry-Recognized Credential Review Committee convened Wednesday afternoon to review credential and bundle evaluation methodologies ahead of the group's November meeting. Over the summer, DEW told *Hannah News* the committee would review in November recommended credential bundles collected from school districts, businesses and credential venders via an application process set to close Saturday, Oct. 31. Wednesday's meeting primarily sought to provide an opportunity for members to discuss the guidelines for credential evaluation, given the committee will likely review a high volume of applications in the coming months.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose's office Monday published a list of 208,856 inactive voter registrations scheduled to be purged from Ohio's voter rolls in January, with LaRose encouraging voters to check their registration status. The registrations were flagged as part of the state's legally required General Voter Records Maintenance Program. With the Monday, Oct. 5, voter registration deadline approaching, LaRose said he was encouraging every Ohioan to check their voter registration status and make any necessary updates at VoteOhio.gov to ensure they are ready for the Tuesday, Nov. 3 General Election. The list can be found HERE.

ELECTIONS 2026

Military and overseas voting began last week as the deadline to register to vote in the Tuesday, Nov. 3 general election approaches. Uniformed And Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballots started to be sent on Friday, Sept. 18. Meanwhile, the deadline to register to vote is Monday, Oct. 5, with boards of elections and the Ohio secretary of state's office open until 9 p.m. on that date to receive late registrations. Absentee voting begins by mail and in-person on Tuesday, Oct. 6. Boards of elections will be open for early voting under the following schedule:
- Tuesday, Oct. 6 through Friday, Oct. 9: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 12 through Friday, Oct. 16: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 19 through Friday, Oct. 23: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 24: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Monday, Oct. 26 and Wednesday, Oct. 28 through Friday, Oct. 30: 7:30 a.m. through 7:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, Oct. 27: 7:30 a.m. through 8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Oct. 31: 8 a.m. through 4 p.m.
- Sunday, Nov. 1: 1-5 p.m.

Polls will be open on Tuesday, Nov. 3 from 6:30 a.m. through 7:30 p.m.

Additionally, absentee ballot applications to vote by mail must be received by boards of elections by 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 27. Completed absentee ballots must be received by boards of elections by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 3. Mailed UOCAVA absentee ballots must be received by boards of elections by Saturday, Nov. 7 in order to be counted.

The U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals Wednesday overturned a lower court order blocking the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) from enforcing a provision enacted in the transportation budget requiring Ohio voters to provide proof of citizenship when registering to vote at an Ohio BMV location. Judge Solomon Oliver had blocked enforcement of the provision passed as part of HB54 (Stewart), agreeing with plaintiffs Red Wine & Blue and the Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans in a lawsuit arguing it likely violated the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), which the judge said required minimal steps to register to vote while obtaining a driver's license. The judge later refused to stay his ruling in response to a request by the secretary of state's office and the BMV. Secretary of State Frank LaRose and Ohio Registrar Charles Norman appealed to the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, which sided with them in the 2-1 ruling Wednesday.

Former U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown addressed supporters at The Draft Room bar in Westerville Friday as he seeks a return to Congress, discussing how working Ohioans are struggling in the current economy and what he did on their behalf during his previous terms. Bar co-owner Pam Baker introduced Brown, describing how the bar faced challenges during the COVID pandemic and in the current economy as prices for utilities, health insurance and supplies have increased. She pointed to tariffs driving up wine prices as one example, and said their customers come in less often as well given their own tighter budgets. Brown said the current economic system is "rigged in so many ways," saying CEO salaries are 300 times higher than what the average worker is paid and the average age of first-time homebuyers has increased from 29 three decades ago to 41 now. He then criticized his opponent, U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH), by saying Husted doesn't recognize Ohioans' work ethic or the domestic effects of the conflict with Iran.

Democratic attorney general nominee John Kulewicz announced a series of reforms he said he would pursue in the attorney general's office to protect the privacy of Ohioans. His plan includes barring the use of electronic pricing and data mining to base grocery process on purchase history; limiting use of confidential tax information by government officials in Washington and Ohio; prohibiting government officials from using voting information to create a national database to track voter activity; forbidding the use of U.S. mail records to determine Ohioans' personal information; barring use of online history without investigative authority; eliminating use of non-disclosure agreements for certain economic development and data center agreements involving public funding; barring use of geo trackers on apps without the knowledge of cellphone users; providing for adoption of statewide standards for government use of Flock cameras; preventing use of AI to accumulate and track personal data; prosecuting telemarketing or cyberstalking of seniors 65 and over without affirmative consent to receive information; holding crypto firms and crypto deposit ATMs responsible to reimburse Ohio senior citizens from whom such firms extort money; and requiring banks to flag large first-time expenditures used for crypto purchases.

Republican Willa Concannon announced she will run a write-in campaign for the Ohio 12th District Court of Appeals after incumbent Judge Matthew Byrne was confirmed by the U.S. Senate for a federal judgeship. Byrne was running for re-election to the Ohio appeals court and was unopposed before his confirmation to the federal bench. Concannon, chief of the appellate division in the Butler County Prosecutor's Office, said she brings extensive, real-world appellate experience to the campaign. Her legal career includes serving as a prosecutor at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office and experience as a litigator at a leading Washington, D.C. law firm. She is a graduate of Cornell Law School where she met her husband, Hamilton-native Richard Kornylak, with whom she has two teenage sons.

Republican congressional candidate Derek Merrin launched the third ad of his campaign for the 9th Congressional District, which the campaign said highlights Merrin's working-class roots and his commitment to making life more affordable for Northwest Ohio families.

The following endorsements were made over the week:
- The campaign of Democratic gubernatorial nominee Amy Acton announced the endorsement of the National Security Leaders for America.
- The Ohio Women's Alliance Action Fund endorsed Jennifer Brunner and Marilyn Zayas for Ohio Supreme Court.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Thursday announced a $273 million federal award to the state of Ohio for advanced transmission technologies (ATT), allowing the Buckeye State to retrofit and upgrade its current electric grid without the cost of new towers. With $136 million going directly to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), grants to the state fall just short of the administration and commission's requests and put Ohio fourth after Colorado, Oklahoma and Indiana in funding received.
PUCO will use its half of Ohio's SPARK award -- short for "Speed to Power through Accelerated

Reconductoring and other Key Advanced Transmission Technology Upgrades -- for "large-scale" transmission refits providing "fast, cost-effective capacity increases that improve reliability, reduce congestion, accelerate interconnection of new load and generation, and enhance operational flexibility," DOE states in its project description. Ohio's share of federal infrastructure funding actually approaches a third of a billion dollars with

American Electric Power's (AEP) $50 million DOE award for "communication-enhancing technologies and a cutting-edge transmission capacity rating system," says DOE. DOE Deputy Secretary James Danly broke the news at the state Rhodes Tower conference room Thursday afternoon.

The PUCO is not tracking critical compliance data that may be required to satisfy energy overhaul HB15's (Klopfenstein's) case management requirements for PUCO and the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB), Auditor of State (AOS) Keith Faber says in a new performance audit of the executive agency. Faber says that the lack of a formal funding policy, moreover, left commission cash reserves 100 percent over its annual operations budget in FY20-25 -- including a 150 percent overage in FY21-23 -- and that nationally low civil penalties risk "potential negative impacts" to PUCO's gas pipeline safety monitoring and enforcement. The 104-page performance audit notes the commission does not track case resolution and staff hours in a way that would reveal "root causes of delays" and potential improvements. It says the agency's docketing information system (DIS) does not code utility and stakeholder filings or organize them to meet updated case milestones or deadlines in HB15.

Current and former legislators including Sens. Mark Romanchuk (R-Ontario) and Bill DeMora (D-Columbus) recently joined the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) for the agency's 50th anniversary. Attending the gala were current and former agency employees, Governing Board members and legislators, along with other utility stakeholders, among them Vice President Steve Nourse of American Electric Power (AEP) of Ohio's legal office. In addition to Romanchuk, DeMora and chair, former House Majority Whip Cheryl Grossman (R-Grove City), lawmakers past and present included onetime House member and current state Chancellor Mike Duffey of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE), former state representative and OCC board chair Gene Krebs, and President/CEO Laura Lanese of the Inter-University Council, Grossman's House successor in southwest Franklin County. Former consumers counsels joining current Consumers' Counsel Maureen Willis were the founding consumers' counsel, William Spratley (1977-1993), Robert Tongren (1994-2003), Janine Migden Ostrander (2004-2011) and Willis immediate predecessor Bruce Weston.

AEP Ohio announced Thursday it will begin operating as Ohio Power Company effective Thursday, Oct. 1 and is introducing a redesigned version of its monthly electric bill to customers. Changes to the bill were approved by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio earlier in the year, AEP Ohio noted. AEP Ohio's website will transition to OhioPowerCo.com on Oct. 1 and the new name will also be added to customer communications and other materials. "Ohio Power Company" has been AEP Ohio's longstanding legal name.

"Stagnant" natural gas production in Ohio and other parts of Appalachia is poised to rebound to industry highs from the shale boom of the previous decade with new pipeline completion through 2030. However, legacy infrastructure and approaching winter cold could suppress gas delivery during peak demand in the Great Lakes states and Northeast, a new report says. That could push up Ohio heating bills. Natural Gas Intelligence (NGI) says while gas supplies in Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia's Utica and Marcellus regions and in Texas's Permian Basin should "coast into winter at comfortable levels," lower transmission capacity in the Midwest and Eastern Seaboard combined with pipeline "freeze-offs" could trigger bottlenecks and rising natural gas prices in the region.

FEDERAL

Speaking at the Ohio Defense & Aerospace Forum at Wright State University (WSU Monday, U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH) and U.S. Rep. Mike Turner (R-Dayton) called for the region to become home to the U.S. Space Academy, following President Donald Trump's Aug. 28 announcement of that academy. Trump's executive order said the U.S. Space Academy would be "a proposed NASA-led federal academy dedicated to combining rigorous technical education with leadership development, discipline and a durable commitment to public service." One element of recommendations on establishing the academy is graduates' service obligations in the U.S. military and federal civilian work. Moreno showed images of what the prospective campus would look like at WSU/Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB). Turner said there is "a lot" that needs to be done but called this "an exciting effort."

Separately, Gov. Mike DeWine formed a steering group Monday to work quickly on Ohio's application ahead of the Monday, Oct. 26 deadline to apply to secure the Space Academy for the state. It will be led by Ohio Department of Development Director Lydia Mihalik, with Ohio Department of Higher Education Chancellor

Mike Duffey serving as vice chair. Other steering group members include the following:
- JobsOhio CEO JP Nauseef.
- Team NEO CEO Matt Dolan.
- Dayton Development Coalition President and CEO Jeff Hoagland.
- Gen. Lester Lyles (ret.), advisor to JobsOhio and Gov. DeWine.
- Lt. Gen. (ret.) JT Thompson.
- Jim Free, a retired NASA senior civilian.
- Col. (Ret.) Joe Zeis, aerospace and defense advisor to Gov. Mike DeWine.
- Meghan Wadsworth, assistant policy director in the DeWine administration.
- Ohio State University Vice President for Research John Horack.

A federal judge in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon has permanently blocked President Donald Trump's administration from penalizing states related to their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) operations, announced a coalition of attorneys general that filed a lawsuit against SNAP penalties in November. The new ruling makes the previously offered preliminary injunction against SNAP penalties permanent. The court also ruled in favor of the coalition in every other claim made in the lawsuit, ruling against the Trump administration's guidance restricting food assistance for lawful permanent residents and rejecting the "grace period" by which states must comply with new federal guidelines. The November lawsuit challenged the Trump administration's move to cut off SNAP benefits for tens of thousands of lawful permanent residents. It also challenged penalties against states for not coming into compliance with the new guidance quickly enough as the grace period expired before the administration finished issuing guidance on the changes.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Filling the vacancy left by the resignation of Rep. Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth) will also be on the agenda next week when lawmakers convene to take up a plan from legislation leadership and GOP gubernatorial candidate Vivek Ramaswamy to suspend the gas tax. Meanwhile, House and Senate committees set schedules for hearings on the not-yet-introduced legislation to suspend the tax, to be sponsored by lawmakers who joined Ramaswamy at a press conference on the plan earlier this week -- Reps. Jim Thomas (R-Canton) and Andrea White (R-Kettering) and Sens. Michele Reynolds (R-Canal Winchester) and Jane Timken (R-Canton).

Legislative leaders said Wednesday they will hold committee hearings and floor vote on Wednesday, Sept. 30 on their plan to suspend the gas tax for 90 days, regardless of whether passage is assured ahead of time. The proposal is estimated to cost up to $700 million. "We will have a vote when we call session. This is not going to be, 'Well, I'm going to put it on the floor if we have the votes.' Because sometimes folks tell me, 'I can't vote for it,' and we put it up on the floor and they vote for it," said House Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima). Huffman, Ramaswamy and his running mate, Senate President Rob McColley (R-Napoleon), joined other Republican legislators and Secretary of State Frank LaRose, the GOP nominee for auditor, at a press conference this week to discuss the plans and attack a similar proposal from Dr. Amy Acton, the Democratic candidate for governor, as undetailed. The proposal will require Democratic support to pass as an emergency, at least in the House. GOP leaders rejected the notion that Acton had beaten them to the punch with a call for a gas tax holiday Monday ahead of Ramaswamy's announcement, or that they were simply trying to boost his candidacy.

House Minority Leader Dani Isaacsohn (D-Cincinnati) responded to the gas tax suspension debate in a statement suggesting state leaders use budget money set aside to support a new Cleveland Browns stadium to offset the loss of gas tax revenue. He said lawmakers should look to "other special breaks in the current budget" if that money remains tied up in court. Judge Julie Lynch of Franklin County Common Pleas Court is presiding over a legal challenge to the use of unclaimed funds for the Browns project, with a briefing schedule that stretches into next summer. Isaacsohn gave Acton credit for the idea and said Ramaswamy's proposal shows a misunderstanding of the state budget process.

Meanwhile, Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) released a statement suggesting Republicans are feeling the heat on the campaign trail. "This appears to be a Hail Mary attempt from Republicans to gain favor from voters because they know they have an unpopular gubernatorial candidate. Democrats are prepared to come back and make life easier for Ohioans however we can, but the reason gas prices are so high is not just because of the gas tax. The Republicans' reckless and unnecessary war in Iran

has caused fuel prices to skyrocket. Ohioans have been asking for help for months. Despite cancelling Senate session just two weeks ago, Republicans now want to call the Legislature back on a week's notice on the heels of troubling polling data to pass an emergency gas tax holiday. It appears the real Republican emergency is their candidate, not the needs of Ohioans."

With Republican legislative leaders calling the General Assembly back next week to pass a gas tax relief plan, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Amy Acton said lawmakers should also address the issue of data centers with passage of a conditional moratorium. Her call for a moratorium was soon joined by Conserve Ohio, a group that is working to put a constitutional amendment banning large data centers before voters. Acton has proposed data center reforms that include provisions that prohibit data centers from passing additional costs on to ratepayers; from using nondisclosure agreements; from using non-union labor for construction; and from violating environmental standards. She also proposes they prioritize locating in brownfields and previously developed industrial sites. Ramaswamy has introduced his own data center plan that includes similar platforms but would also ensure Ohio residents who live near centers would receive free electricity with data centers providing power or compensation that directly lowers residential electric bills.

Reps. Brian Lorenz (R-Powell), Tracy Richardson (R-Marysville), Munira Abdullahi (D-Columbus) and Beryl Piccolantonio (D-Gahanna) appeared before students at Otterbein University in Westerville last week for a panel discussion exploring the value of public service and civic engagement. The forum, held in recognition of "Constitution Day" which fell on Thursday, Sept. 17, was moderated by Nick Robinson, assistant professor in the university's Department of History, Political Science and Modern Languages. In a more personal and conversational setting, the representatives reflected on inspirations that drew them to the sphere of public service.

GOVERNOR

State leaders from across Ohio joined Gov. Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine Friday afternoon for the 2026 Ohio First Lady Luncheon, sponsored by the Ohio First Lady's Charitable Foundation. This year's event, which dedicated charitable proceeds to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio, was held at the Ohio Expo Center's new Ohio Agriculture Building and largely celebrated the first lady's state literacy efforts. The luncheon featured a sit-down conversation with Grammy Award-winning country star and cooking show host Trisha Yearwood who performed two songs for those in attendance, starting with "Jolene," a tribute to Parton, and her 1991 debut single "She's in Love with the Boy."

***HANNAH NEWS* RACES TO WATCH**

With incumbent Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton) term-limited in the House and instead running this November for the Dayton area's 5th Senate District, his current district will next be represented in the House either by a long-time public servant with decades of local government experience in the district or one of the youngest candidates running for the General Assembly this year who already has years of Statehouse experience. The Republican candidate in November's House District 39 race is Mark Campbell, who was first elected to serve on Huber Heights City Council in 1986. During his tenure, Campbell has also served as the vice mayor of Huber Heights on five separate occasions. Meanwhile, Democratic candidate Daquan Neal hopes to bring a younger voice to Columbus. He said he was prompted to run for a seat in the Legislature due to what he feels is a lack of representation of his generation in leadership. Neal described himself as "not really a very well-connected guy," mentioning his need to donate plasma to afford gas and groceries while working an internship in addition to college classes. He said getting his foot in the door was very difficult, but he met Sen. Michele Reynolds (R-Canal Winchester) when she toured Central State University while Neal was a student there, and Reynolds was impressed with his passion for politics.

Rep. Derrick Hall (D-Akron) and former Hudson Mayor Craig Shubert are locked in a competitive race for Ohio's 34th House District, a district giving Democrats a 53 to 46 percent partisan index, according to Dave's Redistricting. House District 34 sits within Summit County, spanning parts of Akron and Cuyahoga Falls. Incumbent and Democrat candidate in the race, Hall is seeking re-election for a second term serving as state representative. In 2024, Hall secured the seat with 53 percent of the vote. In an interview with *Hannah News*, Hall recounted his personal experience growing up in a low-income, single-parent household, deeming that to have been a motivating factor in his pursuit of public service. "It's important that we have people representing us that know what it's like to have been among the most needy in our communities," he

told *Hannah News*, noting his goal is to leverage his personal, academic and professional experiences on behalf of his district. Shubert did not respond to *Hannah News'* requests for an interview.

With Rep. Steve Demetriou (R-Chagrin Falls) looking to switch over to the Ohio Senate this election cycle, Ohio's 35th House District seat is open, finding a victims' rights attorney and entrepreneur contesting for the position. According to Dave's Redistricting, Ohio's 35th House District, which encompasses portions of Geauga, Portage and Summit counties, has a 52 to 48 percent Republican lean, nearly Demetriou's margin of victory in 2024. A seasoned attorney, small business owner and the district's Democratic candidate, Samantha Salamon of Northfield Center told *Hannah News* her motivation to run for office stemmed from a recognized need for lawmakers that are "actually listening to the people and giving credibility to those that deserve the credibility." Twinsburg native and the district's Republican candidate, Vik Sandhu's background merits him "a rare combination of private-sector entrepreneurship and hands-on local government experience," according to his official campaign website. However, Sandhu did not respond to *Hannah News'* requests for an interview.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Ohio State University's (OSU) total enrollment increased 1.4 percent over last year, climbing to 68,183 students, according to the university's fall 2026 enrollment census. The total enrollment on the Columbus campus reached a record high 62,010 students, up 1.1 percent from the prior year. Undergraduate enrollment on the Columbus campus also reached a record high, with the number reaching 47,308 students. The enrollment census highlights growth on the university's regional campuses as well. Regional campus total enrollment increased 4.1 percent to 6,173 students, and new first-year enrollment on the regional campuses is 3,256, a 6.1 percent increase over last year and a 22 percent increase over the past two years.

The University of Toledo (UToledo) is requiring every undergraduate student, regardless of major, to complete "hands-on, experience-based learning" before earning their degree, the university announced. Starting with this year's incoming class, all undergraduate students seeking a bachelor's degree will complete an approved experiential learning opportunity as part of their academic journey. The new requirement builds upon opportunities already in place through the university, where most academic programs already incorporate co-ops, internships, clinicals, research, performances and other field experiences into their curriculum.

JUDICIAL

A citizen initiative in the city of Wilmington to restrict data center development won't be on the ballot this November, following a ruling Friday afternoon from the Ohio Supreme Court. The private cause of action included in the initiative that would allow residents to sue data centers over zoning violations is not within the city's power to create, justices ruled in an unsigned opinion joined fully by five justices. Justice Jennifer Brunner concurred, while Justice Patrick Fischer dissented. Two Wilmington residents filed an initiative petition to create a new chapter in the Wilmington zoning code on data centers, but the Clinton County Board of Elections declined to certify it to the Nov. 3 ballot because of the right-of-action issue. The Wilmington residents then sued to win placement of the issue on the ballot. The Supreme Court noted that a state law passed in 2016 directs board of elections to examine initiatives "to determine whether the petition falls within the scope of authority to enact via initiative and whether the petition satisfies the statutory prerequisites to place the issues on the ballot ...."

The Ohio Supreme Court announced that registration for the 2026 Specialized Dockets Conference set for Wednesday, Oct. 14 at Ohio State University's Ohio Union is now open to judges, court staff, treatment providers and community partners. The conference brings together judges, court staff, treatment providers and community partners currently serving on specialized dockets and those considering one for training and collaboration sessions on best practices. "These dockets address substance use and mental health disorders among adults and children involved in the justice system," the Court said. "Some programs serve a broad range of participants, while others focus on specific populations such as those affected by domestic violence, human trafficking, veterans or individuals reentering their communities." Registration is free for both inperson and virtual attendance and closes on Wednesday, Sept. 30. In-person and online attendees can earn up to 6.0 continuing education (CE) hours, though online attendees will be limited to the virtual conference agenda.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

The Study Committee to Evaluate the Placement of Delinquent Children in Residential Facilities received three and a half hours of testimony Monday from a half dozen witnesses including Delaware County Probate/Juvenile Court Judge David Hejmanowski, Chief Eric Henderson of the Dayton Department of Police, Prosecutor Michael O'Malley and Juvenile Division Chief Brett Kyker of the Cuyahoga County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Director Kara Wente of the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY), Director Amy Ast of the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS), and Managing Counsel Brooke Burns of the Office of Ohio Public Defender's (OPD) Youth Defense Department.

LABOR

The Ohio AFL-CIO reelected President Tim Burga and Secretary-Treasurer Melissa Cropper to their positions at the 35th Biennial Convention of the labor federation held Tuesday in Columbus. Delegates to the convention from all over Ohio unanimously voted to re-elect the pair to another four-year term in leading the largest labor organization in the state.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

A representative of the hemp industry in Ohio Monday complained about what he said is a double standard in the enforcement of Ohio's marijuana and hemp law passed as part of SB56 (Huffman). Wesley Bryant, owner of 420 Craft Beverages in Brook Park, said at a Statehouse press conference that while his customers face getting stopped by law enforcement and products purchased from his business seized, marijuana dispensaries have been selling products that exceed Ohio's current 70 percent THC legal limit. Bryant's complaints come as the hemp and the marijuana industries in the state battle over the regulatory landscape since Ohio voters approved legal cannabis in 2023. Cannabis businesses have filed a lawsuit against hemp businesses in the state in Butler County.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

A sampling of 1,500 enrollees under Medicaid's aged, blind and disabled (ABD) coverage found 49 ineligible recipients, while a review of the whole ABD enrollment found thousands who'd died but were still enrolled in related programs. Auditor Keith Faber released interim results Tuesday as part of his work to fulfill a state budget requirement to review the ABD program. Lawmakers included a requirement in HB96 (Stewart) for Faber to audit ABD enrollment, as well as to conduct a performance and fiscal audit of the overall managed care system. The ABD audit grew out of Rep. Mike Dovilla's HB356, which he introduced after gathering LexisNexis data on ABD enrollees' assets and sparring with the Ohio Department of Medicaid over whether it demonstrated a substantial problem. Faber's interim report looked at 1,500 people who were enrolled under ABD in June 2025. Of the 49 found ineligible, 25 had assets exceeding eligibility limits. An average of $7,000 in benefits was paid out on their behalf. A few people had assets of more than $1 million.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Forestry has now made it easier for Ohioans to enjoy the fruits of the state's investment in state-native plants and conservation. Ohioans can now order seedlings available from the Buckeye State Tree Nursery (BSTN) near Zanesville via the nursery's website. Previously, customers needed to contact the nursery by phone or in-person to check the available inventory and make purchases. ODNR announced on Monday that the nursery's new online ordering system allows green thumbs statewide to choose from the species of seedlings currently available at BSTN and then either pick them up from the nursery or have the seedlings shipped directly. The BSTN website currently lists 38 species of native seedlings available for purchase, ranging from the Ohio buckeye to the pawpaw to the American chestnut. Seedlings are available for $3 per seedling, with a minimum online purchase of 10 seedlings. The nursery's current stock can be viewed and online orders can now be made at the BSTN website.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health at Prevent Blindness (NCCVEH) has presented Gov. Mike DeWine with its Bonnie Strickland Champion for Children's Vision Award in recognition of his OhioSEE initiative, which works to ensure that students who are screened in school for vision issues get follow-up care and eyeglasses when needed. The organization noted that OhioSEE provided eye exams to 1,900 children and free glasses to 1,200 in its first year.

OHIO HISTORY

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) invites families and history enthusiasts to a celebration of Ohio's cultural and agricultural traditions at Ohio Heritage Days at Malabar Farms State Park on Saturday, Sept. 26 and Sunday, Sept. 27. The free event, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, will feature hands-on activities and family-friendly entertainment, as well as immersive demonstrations of blacksmithing, broom making, quilting and wool spinning. Living history camps will revive life from the 1700s through World War II with archaeological displays, antique tractors, and rides in horse-drawn carriages and on individual ponies. Visitors can also tour both the Big House and the Ceely Rose House on the farm from 1-4 p.m. each day.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

The state of Ohio has built a strong foundation across state departments and local governments in recent years to modernize Ohio's cybersecurity, digital-service and fraud prevention landscape, according to a new Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) report, but further forward-looking actions were suggested Thursday to continue Ohio's upward trajectory. The report was adopted on Thursday by the Ohio Cybersecurity and Fraud Advisory Board (OCFAB) which has spent the past year examining and developing recommendations with regard to best practices and future efforts to improve cybersecurity and fraud prevention with respect to the information technology systems and shared services used across state agencies, per the board's charge established in 135-HB74 (T. Hall). Following the board's approval, the report will now be delivered to the governor's office, the President and Minority Leader of the Senate, and the Speaker and Minority Leader of the House. With the report delivered, the board will be abolished.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Ohio Turnpike E-ZPass customers will be able to use their Ohio transponders with an additional eight tolling authorities in four states under an interoperability agreement approved Monday by the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission. At the urging of turnpike Chief Information Officer Chriss Pogorelc, the commission unanimously adopted a resolution approving the interoperability agreement between the Central United States Interoperability Partners and the E-ZPass Interoperability Hub. The expansion adds eight agencies in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas to the E-ZPass interoperability agreement.
The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) are marking "See Tracks, Think Train" Week, Sept. 21-27, with news of significantly reduced rail crossing accidents in the last 20 years. Of the persons or vehicles hit by a train in the U.S. every three hours, 61 of them occurred at Ohio rail crossings last year -- a 50 percent drop since 2006.

After 20 years of leading the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) as its executive director, Matthew Dietrich will retire later this year. The 57-year-old Dietrich's retirement is effective Monday, Nov. 30. He has served as director since 2006, first as interim director, then in a permanent role. Dietrich previously served as the commission's secretary/treasurer, and worked in various roles at the Ohio Department of Development before that.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

The Unemployment Compensation Integrity Board (UCIB), created in the budget to advise the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) on unemployment compensation (UC) matters, discussed the ongoing effort to modernize Ohio's UC system at the board's first meeting Thursday. ODJFS Director Matt Damschroder said the system modernization is going well, although he said some time pressure is building ahead of the planned Monday, Nov. 30 go-live date. He also said the current UC trust fund balance stands at

$2.1 billion. He referenced conversations about system reforms, including the possibility of adding additional rating bands based on high system usage and indexing the tax base to inflation. "We continue to be hopeful around those conversations, but there's certainly more to be done. But we're in an OK spot right now," he said. Board members include the following, with business and labor organizations specified in statute:
- ODJFS Director Matt Damschroder, who serves as chair of the board.
- Sen. Mark Romanchuk (R-Ontario).
- Rep. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina).
- Kevin Shimp, as a representative of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.
- Jared Weiser, state director in Ohio for the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB).
- James Weant, as a representative of a third-party commercial consumer reporting agency.
- Matt Smith, legislative director for the Ohio AFL-CIO.
- Matthew A. Szollosi, executive director of the Affiliated Construction Trades of Ohio (ACT Ohio).
- Randy Verst, president of Teamsters Local 1199 in Cincinnati as a representative of the Ohio Conference of Teamsters.

WORKFORCE

The JobsOhio Board of Directors met Thursday morning in Cleveland at the Warren E. Anderson MidTown Collaboration Center, with Chairman Josh Rubin opening by saying "many great and exciting things" are happening, including Ohio's first-place ranking by CNBC. The Buckeye State was also first in a national ranking on liquor distribution by *StateWays* magazine, the third time it's been first in seven years, and that is particularly important to JobsOhio given its funding structure.

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