



GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC. RH RESOURCES

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Week in Review

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ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Gov. Mike DeWine appointed Robert B. Radcliff to the OneOhio Recovery Foundation Board. Radcliff, of Pickaway County, will finish the unexpired term of John Tharp, who resigned. Radcliff has agreed to serve a full, two-year term once he finishes the unexpired term. Radcliff's professional background is in law enforcement. He is currently the chief bailiff for Pickaway County Common Pleas Court Judge P. Randall Knece and is a reserve deputy sheriff for Sheriff George W. Lavender Jr. of Ross County.

BALLOT ISSUES

The Ohio Ballot Board Monday unanimously adopted a proposed constitutional amendment to increase Ohio's minimum wage as one issue, allowing backers to start collecting signatures on the proposal. Corey Columbo, an attorney representing the petitioners, told the Ballot Board that the issue is nearly the same as it had approved last year with changes to the effective dates and new proposed minimum wage rates. Backers will now need to collect 413,446 valid signatures in order to make the ballot, though it is unknown which ballot they will aim for. After the previous issue cleared the Ballot Board, an attorney for the measure said they were aiming for the 2024 General Election ballot. If the amendment were to appear on this year's ballot, it would need to be submitted by Wednesday, July 5.

BUDGET – F.Y. 24-25

House Speaker Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) told reporters after session Wednesday that the biennial budget is slated for a final House vote on Thursday, April 27, though he signaled potential changes in HB33's (Edwards) final language.

The House unveiled hundreds of revisions to the executive budget proposal Tuesday morning in a substitute bill that uses new cost data for the school funding formula, collapses the bottom two brackets of the income tax and increases direct service provider pay from the executive proposed \$16-per-hour to \$18-per-hour by the end of the coming biennium. The House changes to HB33 (Edwards) increase General Revenue Fund (GRF) appropriations by \$484.3 million or 1.15 percent in FY24 and \$809 million or 1.82 percent for FY25; All Funds total would rise by \$2.1 billion or 2.23 percent and \$1.4 billion or 1.53 percent, respectively.

The House Finance Committee convened Tuesday, adopted the substitute bill without discussion or objection and then adjourned in the space of a few minutes. Speaking with reporters after the vote, committee Chair Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) said the House changes aim to benefit middle-income Ohioans. Hence, he said, the decision in tax reform to consolidate the lower rather than upper brackets of the income tax. "I think it's a middle-income, middle-class tax cut that will be very beneficial for the people back home and across the state of Ohio," Edwards said. Specifically, the substitute bill would consolidate the existing 2.765 percent bracket for incomes between \$26,050 and \$46,100 and the 3.226 percent bracket for incomes between \$46,100 and \$92,150, and set a new rate of 2.75 percent for the combined bracket.

Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed \$2,500 per child income tax deduction wouldn't do much to help low-income families, Sen. Louis Blessing (R-Cincinnati) told Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kimberly Murnieks on Tuesday. "I kind of feel like we would be much better served to look at the refundable earned income tax credit (EITC), given the cost of all of

these things, and given what it would cost to do a 10 percent refundable EITC, it would be much more impactful than doing a \$2,500 per child tax deduction," Blessing said during the question-and-answer portion of Murnieks' HB33 (Edwards) testimony before the Senate Finance Committee. "Now, if that would be a bridge too far -- going to refundability -- much hay has been made about the cliff effect and how some of that works with some of these low-income families with children," he continued. "We do have a non-refundable EITC here in Ohio ... maybe we should consider adding a five-year carryforward to that, such that it would work this way - if you're making \$35,000 a year and you have a family of four, each year that you make more money, you're then more able to fully take advantage of that non-refundable EITC, such that it can help in breaking parts of that cliff effect. I think it would be great policy, and simpler than doing something like the \$2,500 per child deduction." Murnieks said the \$2,500 per child income tax deduction represents "significant" tax relief, noting it will result in \$130 million per year in savings for families. However, she said she would be happy to discuss other policies as the budget process moves forward.

CENSUS

Recently released estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau showed Ohio and a majority of its counties had a net loss in residents from July 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022, with 68 counties showing declines and only nine having an increase of more than 1 percent. Ohio's population estimate was 11.76 million as of July 2022. The state population dropped by 0.35 percent in that period, representing a net loss of 41,459 residents. By percentage, the five counties with the highest loss from 2020 to 2022 were Athens, 5.44; Lawrence, 2.55; Scioto, 2.23; Cuyahoga, 2.1; and Vinton, 1.87. Cuyahoga County had the highest number of total lost residents at 26,482, followed by Hamilton, 5,283; Lucas, 4,191; Summit, 3,910; and Athens, 3,392. Union County saw the highest growth by percentage at 6.04, followed by Delaware, 5.19; Warren, 2.7; Pickaway, 2.35; and Fairfield, 2.17. The order of the top three changed in terms of new residents added, with Delaware County leading at 11,157, followed by Warren, 6,577; Union, 3,809; Fairfield, 3,455; and Lorain, 2773. Nine counties added over 1,000 residents during the 2020 to 2022 period.

CORONAVIRUS

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Thursday reported the number of new COVID-19 cases in the last seven days fell from 5,165 to 3,372. This is the lowest weekly level since the seven days ending on March 31, 2022 when there were 3,103 new cases. The last period below 3,500 new cases before that was July 9-15, 2021, with 2,406 cases reported by ODH. Other weekly figures reported Thursday include 241 hospitalizations, down from 288; 19 ICU admissions, down from 27; and 53 deaths, up from 45. In total ODH has reported 3.45 million cases, 140,069 hospitalizations, 15,187 ICU admissions and 42,126 deaths. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also simplified its vaccine recommendations Wednesday and announced older adults and those who are immunocompromised can receive a second dose of the bivalent vaccine.

DEATH PENALTY

Gov. Mike DeWine Friday issued three more reprieves for Death Row inmates scheduled for execution in the second half of 2023, again citing the unwillingness of pharmaceutical companies to supply drugs used in executions. No executions have been carried out during DeWine's time as governor. The following inmates had their dates of execution pushed back about three years:

- James O'Neal, previously scheduled to be executed Wednesday, Aug. 16, now scheduled for Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2026.

- Jerome Henderson, previously scheduled to be executed Thursday, Sept. 14, now scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2026.

- Melvin Bonnell, previously scheduled to be executed Wednesday, Oct. 18, now scheduled for Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2026.

EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

The man in charge of Norfolk Southern Railway when tankers carrying toxic chemicals derailed in East Palestine appeared before the Senate Select Committee on Rail Safe Tuesday under a cloud of litigation to assure lawmakers his company is committed to long-term testing and remediation under federal supervision and in compliance with industry standards. CEO Alan Shaw touted Norfolk Southern's safety record during his one-year reign and focused on environmental cleanup and financial assistance to locals instead of Democrats' questions around crew size and safer routes for hazardous materials. Shaw apologized repeatedly for a train derailment that continues to make national news and said the company is conducting ongoing community "listening sessions" to understand residents' needs and concerns.

ECONOMY

An economic competitiveness study discussed in the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee Tuesday and then released at a Statehouse press conference ranked Ohio 13th nationally in 2022 -- up from 24th in 2018 -- and second in the Great Lakes region. Timothy Nash, director of the McNair Center at Northwood University in Michigan, presented the study. He told the committee the "greatest challenge" to further improving Ohio's position is its tax policy, saying it is "too complicated," particularly due to differences in tax burden within the state. Ohio ranked behind Indiana, which he said is also very business-friendly and the best state in the region for taxes. Areas where Nash said Ohio is doing well included ranking eighth in workforce composition and cost, which he said reflects programs and training in the trades and Ohio's higher education institutions. It was third in "labor and capital formation" and 18th for regulatory environment as well. Nash also praised Ohio for its balanced budget. He told the committee Ohio had been 42nd overall in 2013, indicating "great progress" since then.

EDUCATION

Questions from senators hearing about the DeWine administration's education budget proposals Wednesday highlighted what the state doesn't yet know about the current state of literacy instruction. Ohio Department of Education Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens gave budget testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, generally covering the same territory she did in the House Finance Committee and House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee on HB33 (Edwards). Committee Chair Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) asked Siddens if the schools that are not using "science of reading" methods are those with the lowest performance. "The department currently does not have the landscape of what schools are utilizing. For curriculum, we do not collect any of that centrally. The budget provides for us to do that," she said. Siddens said ODE's "working assumption" is that lower performing districts might not be using instruction aligned to the science of reading, but "it is not necessarily a one-to-one correlation."

ELECTIONS

Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) told reporters after session Wednesday that he opposes a provision added to HB33 (Edwards), the biennial budget, that would move the primary election in presidential years to May. The provision was one of a number added by the House Finance Committee this week. Huffman said the reason Ohio moved its primary to March was to make Ohio more significant in the presidential nominating process. If it moves back to May, a presidential candidate may be determined by then. He also said candidates on both sides of the aisle are planning on a March date rather than May.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose said legislators need to set an August special election – which Republicans in the General Assembly have been pushing for to vote on a proposed constitutional amendment to raise the threshold for future constitutional amendments to pass -- by Wednesday, May 10. Getting on the August ballot would get the amendment ahead of the November General Election, when Ohio voters could be deciding a proposed amendment that would enshrine reproductive and abortion rights into the Ohio Constitution. There is also a planned amendment that would raise the state minimum wage in the queue. In letters to House Speaker Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) and Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) on Friday, LaRose said boards of elections can conduct that election but asked for at least a 90-day election calendar, the timeline boards usually work on to program voting machines, recruit poll workers, and make other standard preparations. Ninety days from a Tuesday, Aug. 8 election, would be Wednesday, May 10.

Businessman Bernie Moreno officially launched his campaign for the U.S. Senate in 2024 with a Tuesday morning announcement followed by a statewide tour. Moreno said in his announcement, "I'm a businessman, a conservative, and an outsider. I know I'm the leader who can get Ohio back on the right track and be the voice of Ohio families in the U.S. Senate."

ENERGY/UTILITIES

Former Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Chairman and PJM Interconnection Vice President Asim Haque informed lawmakers Wednesday that the 13-state regional transmission organization (RTO) encompassing Ohio has launched wholesale electric market reforms since his comments to House and Senate members in early March. Haque reinforced his previous concerns over the 24/7 "capacity" of intermittent, renewable power but stopped short of calling natural gas generation more reliable than wind or solar. Haque reprised last month's presentations in an appearance before the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee, including a synopsis of PJM's delegated duties under the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) to secure the 13-state electric grid, but was more explicit about the need to correctly rate the actual capacity or reliability of various generation technologies at different times of day and under varying weather conditions.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Wednesday addressed the looming price spike for consumer electricity on June 1, noting Ohioans either will have to ride out higher costs in the hope that geopolitics and market forces bring rates down for the next annual service period, or resort to budget-minded measures including utility payment plans, weatherization, competitive electric suppliers and conservation.

Ohio natural gas output from horizontal wells held steady in the final months of 2022 after a slow start to the year, while shale oil production in Q4 outpaced July-September by 890,725/billion barrels (bbl) and spiked 50 percent year-over-year compared to fourth-quarter 2021. Natural gas

"fracking" began 2022 at a five-year low but rebounded to 543 billion cubic feet (cf) by mid-year. October-December output was more or less flat at 540 billion cf -- lower than the 2021 average and well off Ohio's historical high of 685 billion cf of gas in 2019.

ENVIRONMENT

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers awarded the University of Toledo (UT) a three-year, \$1.5 million grant to help protect Ohio's inland water sources and treatment plants from harmful algal blooms (HABs) and their toxins. The team at UT has new monitoring instruments and treatment methods that it has established work well under the conditions and types of cyanobacteria found in western Lake Erie. As part of their new project, the researchers will work with Defiance, Bowling Green and Wauseon to apply these new methods to HABs in reservoirs those cities use for drinking water production. The UT engineers and scientists also will work to understand the dynamics of HABs in the Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie and is used as a water source for public water systems and businesses.

The executive budget's \$58.8 million for the H2Ohio Rivers Initiative is even more necessary in light of the Ohio River's designation as one of the most degraded rivers in the U.S., Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz said Tuesday. "That is disappointing because it is an economic driver down there. It's not just a passageway for barges, it's used for recreation," Mertz said during testimony before the Senate Finance Committee. Committee Chair Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) said water quality is important to him, but wondered whether expanding the program to rivers so quickly is the best move as the state is continuing to struggle with harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Mertz said the H2Ohio Rivers Initiative will also contribute to water quality in Lake Erie, as rivers flow into the lake. "It's all connected. It's all one system, at the end of the day," Mertz said.

GAMING/GAMBLING

PlayUp Interactive will pay the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) a \$90,000 fine and withdraw its application to become a mobile management services provider (MMSP) in Ohio's sports gaming industry, according to a settlement reached by the parties. PlayUp also agreed to not reapply for a gaming-related license in Ohio for four years. During OCCC's review of PlayUp's application, the state found PlayUp offered a third-party product called "Slots+" that accepted prohibited wagers such as slots, lottery, virtual sports, match three and scratchers in Ohio after June 2021. The company also engaged in false, deceptive, misleading or otherwise impermissible advertising by publicizing Slots+ as legal in Ohio, according to OCCC.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Senate Wednesday passed legislation that would authorize a special election for Tuesday, Aug. 8, with a \$20 million appropriation, as well a joint resolution that would require future constitutional amendments to get 60 percent of the vote in order to be adopted. Meanwhile, an Ohio House committee passed a companion resolution after cutting off debate from opponents who had packed the hearing room, causing the audience to erupt, yelling "shame" at lawmakers. The Senate also passed SJR2 (McColley-Gavarone), which would set the threshold for ballot passage of constitutional amendments at 60 percent, along a party-line vote of 26-7, with all Republicans voting for it and all Democrats voting against it. SB92 (Gavarone-McColley), which authorizes the August special election, passed 25-8, with Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) joining Democrats

against it. What will happen with the bills in the House is unclear, with House Speaker Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) telling reporters they are counting votes, but that he may still bring them to the floor without knowing. HJR1 (Stewart), the SJR2 companion, cleared the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee on a 7-6 vote Wednesday morning after three hours of testimony. Rep. Brett Hillyer (R-Uhrichsville) joined with all of the Democrats in opposition.

The Senate also unanimously passed SB24 (Roegner) which designates April as "Sikh Awareness Month." Meanwhile, in the House, both the workers' comp budget, HB31 (Edwards), and the Industrial Commission budget, HB32 (Edwards), also passed: HB31, 89-4 and HB32, 92-1.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Family and community advocacy groups Tuesday told members of the Public Benefits Assistance Accountability Task Force that accessing benefits systems in Ohio is time consuming and confusing for many people and ultimately prevents them from accessing benefits they may be entitled to. The task force, which has been meeting for nearly a year, was created in 134-HB110 (Oelslager) to study various fraud prevention topics related to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Ohio Works First (OWF) and publicly funded child care, including the possibility of adding photos to SNAP cards. Hope Lane-Gavin, the director of nutrition policy and programs for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, told members that SNAP "is the first and most critical line of defense against hunger" and provides nearly 1.5 million children, parents, workers, older adults and disabled Ohioans with help to buy groceries.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Senate Finance Committee heard from Ohio Department of Higher Education Chancellor Randy Gardner Wednesday. He reiterated remarks he'd made in House budget testimony. Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland), chairing the afternoon portion of the hearing, returned with Gardner to a line of questions he'd posed to Office of Budget and Management Director Kim Murnieks the day before, wondering if there shouldn't be some strings attached to the new merit scholarship proposal to make certain recipients are staying in Ohio.

The Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee heard over seven hours of testimony against higher education overhaul bill SB83 (Cirino) on Wednesday, with opponents saying the legislation threatens academic freedom and will harm the state's education system. "SB83 is modeled after language developed by out-of-state interests that have a national political agenda that has nothing to do with enhancing Ohio higher education. These are not unique solutions to Ohio problems. In reality, the bill fails to address any of the actual problems that we face in Ohio higher education -- underfunding and disinvestment, administrative bloat, misplaced spending priorities, and an overreliance on adjunct faculty, to name a few," said University of Cincinnati political science professor Steve Mockabee, speaking on behalf of the Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). A "climate change" provision of higher education overhaul measure SB83 (Cirino) will likely be clarified in an amendment, Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) told *Hannah News* on Monday. Currently, the bill defines "climate change" as a "controversial belief or policy" alongside issues like electoral politics, foreign policy, immigration, marriage, abortion and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programs. That definition was recently criticized by State Climatologist of Ohio Aaron Wilson during a Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) forum on climate change. Cirino said his intention was not to define the science of climate change as a "controversial belief," but to characterize the debate over how policymakers should address climate change as a subject of controversy.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine announced roughly \$50 million in grant funding Thursday for jail projects including construction, renovation, security and needs assessment in 11 jurisdictions, led by \$15 million each to Greene and Wayne counties. Director Annette Chambers-Smith of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) joined DeWine for the roll-out of the second-round of funding at the Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio (CCNO) in Williams County, which also serves Defiance, Fulton, Henry and Lucas counties.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) recently awarded seven dispensary certificates of operation under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). There are now 75 dispensaries legally operating under the program.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Midway through the day-long informal FY24-25 budget hearing marathon on Tuesday, Ohio Department of Medicaid Director (ODM) Maureen Corcoran took nearly an hour to walk the Senate Finance Committee through her department's proposed budget. Corcoran's testimony addressed the budget as proposed by Gov. Mike DeWine and was basically the same as that presented before the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee on March 16. Corcoran fielded a number of questions from committee members, including ones around the issue of long-term care as well as the salaries for direct care workers. Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) asked for additional information about the difference in the cost to the state if more are enabled to stay in their homes versus moving into an institution. She said the greatest request they get is for folks to stay in their homes and, given the aging of the state, "We could never in a million years afford it if we had a predominantly facility-based service option." Participating in the federal Ambulance Supplemental Payment Program (ASPP) would not be a simple process for the state, ODM Director Maureen Corcoran told the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC) on Thursday. The substitute version of budget bill HB33 (Edwards) includes language providing \$119 million (\$43 million in state share) in each fiscal year to increase the Medicaid reimbursement rate for ambulance transportation services.

MENTAL HEALTH

Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) Director Lori Criss spoke Tuesday before the Senate Community Revitalization Committee, giving members an overview of the department's priorities and initiatives. Noting Gov. Mike DeWine's priority of strengthening behavioral health systems, Criss highlighted priorities for youth and families. These included increases in maternal supports for mothers who struggle with depression and substance use disorders, growing the number of health care professionals credentialed in early childhood mental health, and increasing the number of youth specific mobile crisis centers. Criss also highlighted the successful pilot of behavioral health coordinators in schools so that "teachers can focus on teaching," and other RecoveryOhio initiatives like OhioRISE, OhioSTART, Student Wellness and Success Funds, and the expansion of Ohio's Early Childhood Mental Health Credential. Criss also reviewed programs for adults with serious mental illness and addiction treatment plans. A large part of her presentation was spent discussing "data enhancement."

NATURAL RESOURCES

CROW, Citizens for the Rights of the Ohio River Watershed held a press conference Tuesday to launch a campaign for a Cincinnati charter amendment aimed at establishing rights for the Ohio River Watershed similar to a failed effort to protect Lake Erie several years ago. CROW said it has studied the Toledo decision and will spell out exactly how the Cincinnati charter could be enforced, unlike the Toledo measure which has been blocked by a judge.

Members of the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) Thursday heard an update on the remediation of the Mentor Marsh in Mentor, OH, one of the largest natural marshes remaining along the Lake Erie shoreline. It became a National Natural Landmark in 1966 and Ohio's first state nature preserve in 1971. OFCC was one partner among many others, including the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, in the restoration project. The Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources own the preserve, according to Cleveland.com.

PENSIONS

The State Teachers Retirement System Board of Trustees discussed Thursday a framework for deciding whether future benefit increases are "sustainable." Representatives of Cheiron, the contracted outside actuary for STRS, presented a "sustainable benefit enhancement plan," built on a three-part test about the sufficiency of current contributions and how quickly the system could bounce back from a major shock. Based on current conditions, that test does not provide a budget for granting benefit increases, said Cheiron's Mike Noble. However, he said, state law specifies that the board can make benefit changes if, in the actuaries' judgment, they do not materially impair the integrity of the fund. Noble said Cheiron would define a change that does not materially impair the fund as one having a cost of no more than 1 percent of current assets, which presently would be \$830 million.

PEOPLE

Government Policy Group, Inc. and RH Resources this week announced two promotions as well as two new hires. Kelsey Woolard, who joined the firm in 2021, has been promoted to director of government affairs. Sydney Sanders, who started in 2022, has been promoted to manager of policy and communications. In addition, Ronnie Romito recently joined the firm as the director of legislative affairs. The firm also hired Michael Guastella as the director of public affairs.

Klein/Johnson Group, a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying firm, announced the hiring of Kelli Briggs, chief of staff for former U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi, as a principal, to be based in Columbus. Briggs previously was Tiberi's legislative director. She has a bachelor's degree in criminology from Ohio University and now resides in her hometown of Columbus with her dog, Lambeau.

The board, staff and membership of the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO) as well as others on social media were grieving Tuesday the death of Gayle Channing Tenenbaum Monday morning. According to PCSAO, Tenenbaum's professional career was intertwined with the organization's history, though her advocacy extended well beyond her work with county children services agencies. Along with Dan Schneider, she helped to establish PCSAO in 1980 and began leading the association's public policy and governmental affairs in 1986. "Known statewide and nationally as a fierce advocate for abused and neglected children, Tenenbaum was a mainstay at the

Ohio Statehouse." She is survived by her daughters, Carin and Rachel. According to social media posts, details for a celebration of life will come later.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

Ohio has seen many positive developments in the past decade to move toward a future of being a technology hub in the country, but still faces many challenges, according to a panel discussion at the City Club of Cleveland held Friday. "We are moving from fly-over country to fly-to country. Unfortunately, Silicon Valley still has the image of the Heartland as fly-over territory," said Rebecca Fannin, author of "Silicon Heartland: Transforming the Midwest From Rust Belt to Tech Belt," who spoke on her book and the Midwest's resurgence before moderating a panel. She said old factories are not coming back to the region. It is all about new tech. Despite gains in the region in tech manufacturing, she said there are challenges for Ohio, including having the right workforce, pronounced poverty in certain areas, opioid addiction and lagging infrastructure. She noted that there is no high-speed rail that is found in other high-tech areas like in China, and there are bridges that need to be fixed.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Ohioans should drive around roadside workers like their own loved ones were in that position, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and other safety advocates urged Monday at a National Work Zone Safety Awareness Week kick-off event held at the Statehouse. Speakers included the mother and sister of a worker killed on the job in 2021. The lieutenant governor also highlighted the recent changes in Ohio law regarding use of phones while driving. Husted said drivers have a responsibility to "pay attention, move over and slow down" beyond that already being legally required, and that these workers are out on the roads to make them better for everyone else. In 2022 there were 4,628 work zone crashes and 23 deaths as a result. Since 2018 there have been nearly 26,000 such crashes and workers were present at 36 percent of them.

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission voted Monday to adopt annual toll increases for 2024 through 2028 to keep up with inflation and, in the first two years, provide for upkeep of bridges and other infrastructure. Rates will increase 7.7 percent on Jan. 1 of both 2024 and 2025, then will increase 2.7 percent annually through 2028. The resolution authorizing the increases states 2.7 percent is the estimated inflation rate, while the additional 5 percent add-on for 2024 and 2025 is to provide funding "to properly maintain the commission's bridges and other infrastructure." The full schedule of tolls for each year is listed at <https://tinyurl.com/j69v5yvd>.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

HOUSE

PASSED BY HOUSE

HB31 WORKERS' COMPENSATION BUDGET (Rep. Jay Edwards) To make appropriations for the Bureau of Workers' Compensation for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025, to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of the Department's programs, and to make changes to the Workers' Compensation Law.

Vote 89-4

HB32 INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION BUDGET (Rep. Jay Edwards) To make appropriations for the Industrial Commission for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of Commission programs.

Vote 92-1

SENATE

PASSED BY SENATE

SB24 MONTH DESIGNATION-SIKH AWARENESS (Sen. Kristina Roegner) To designate April as "Sikh Awareness Month."

Vote 33-0

SB92 AUGUST SPECIAL ELECTION, APPROPRIATION (Sen. Robert McColley, Sen. Theresa Gavarone) To allow a special election to be held in August for certain purposes, to require a special election to be held on August 8, 2023, and to make an appropriation.

Vote 25-8

ADOPTED BY SENATE

SJR2 CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE-60 PERCENT REQUIREMENT (Sen. Robert McColley) Proposing to amend Sections 1b, 1e, and 1g of Article II and Sections 1 and 3 of Article XVI of the Constitution of the State of Ohio to require a vote of at least 60% of the electors to approve any constitutional amendment.

Vote 26-7