



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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131st General Assembly sworn-in

Opening ceremonies for the 131st General Assembly were held this week with four new senators and 29 new state representatives taking their seats.

House members took the oath of office administered by Ohio Supreme Court Justice Judith French to kick-off the new legislative session and unanimously elected Representative Cliff Rosenberger, the 33-year-old Clarksville republican, to serve as Speaker of the House, where he will lead 65 GOP members, the largest legislative caucus in decades. The chamber also elected Rep. Ron Amstutz (R-Wooster) Speaker Pro Tempore and Rep. Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) Minority Leader.

Speaker Rosenberger announced that committee appointments will be made in the near future and that he plans to increase the number of panels slightly from the current 17, with some multi-subject committees splitting into two. However, the chamber will still have fewer than 20 committees, he added. At this point the only committee chair designated has been Ryan Smith (R-Bidwell) as the House Finance Committee Chair.

Speaker Rosenberger also said he intends to make some changes in how the chamber tackles public policy issues. For example, he wants to plot out a long-term plan called "Ohio 2020" to set specific education and economic goals for the state to accomplish over the next six years. "What we have to do is stop thinking every two years as legislators and worrying about what's going to happen in the next election cycle, and be more proactive and think long-term," he said.

On the Senate side, Senate President Keith Faber, elected to his second term as Senate President, convened the newest class of the Senate on Monday, telling members that education "deregulation" will be a major focus during the new session.

In an address shortly after taking the oath of office, the Celina republican urged colleagues to remember their roots and who they have come to the Statehouse to serve. He continued by saying that the chamber in the 131st General Assembly will concentrate its work on educational opportunities for Ohioans. "Ohio and Ohioans will not have a level of opportunity we need to compete in the world economy" if the state's education system doesn't improve, he said.

Sen. Chris Widener (R-Springfield) was elected to continue in his post as President Pro Tem, as were Tom Patton as Majority Floor Leader and Larry Obhof (R-Medina) as Majority Whip.

Democrats taking on or continuing in leadership roles are Minority Leader Joe Schiavoni (D-Boardman), Assistant Minority Leader Charleta B. Tavares (D-Columbus), Minority Whip Edna Brown (D-Toledo) and Assistant Minority Whip Lou Gentile (D-Steubenville).

21 legislators enter their final session of the General Assembly

In the Senate six senators begin serving in their final General Assembly. Those term limited at the end of 2016 include: Senate President Keith Faber (R-Celina), Sen. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati), Sen Tom Patton (R-Strongsville), Sen. Chris Widener (R-Springfield), Sen. Jim Hughes (R-Columbus) and Sen. Capri Cafaro (D-Hubbard).

The beginning of the 131st General Assembly also marks the final terms for 15 House members. Those set to depart the lower chamber at the close of the 131st legislative session include: Rep. Ron Amstutz (R-Wooster), Rep. Barbara Sears (R-Maumee), Rep. Nan Baker (R-Westlake), Rep. Terry Boose (R-Norwalk), Rep. Tim Derickson (R-Oxford), Rep. Cheryl Grossman (R-Grove City), Rep. Bob Hackett (R-London), Rep. David Hall (R-Millersburg), Rep. Ron Maag (R-Lebanon), Rep. Jeff McClain (R-Upper Sandusky), Rep. Margaret Ann Ruhl (R-Mt. Vernon), Rep. Denise Driehaus (D-Cincinnati), Rep. Debbie Phillips (D-Albany), Rep. Ron Gerberry (D-Austintown Twp.) and Rep. Stephen Slesnick (D-Canton).

House will tackle algal blooms this session

Governor Kasich has indicated that his next executive budget will likely contain provisions aimed at combating toxic algae. New House [Speaker Cliff Rosenberger](#) (R-Clarksville) said lawmakers shouldn't wait on the issue.

"I think the water quality issue is something that is extremely important. I think it's something you'll probably see as a priority bill that we need to get done early on...I think it's something that we need to address and address quickly. And I think we had some good provisions there in 490 that we can bring back up and move forward," Speaker Rosenberger said in an interview with Gongwer News.



Speaker Rosenberger

Amendments that House Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rep. Dave Hall (R-Millersburg) added to House Bill 490 would have restricted the application of livestock manure and chemical fertilizers in the western Lake Erie basin during times when it is most likely to run off into waterways.

Other algae-related provisions would have imposed new regulations on dumping dredging material in the lake and tributaries and would have required wastewater treatment facilities to monitor the levels of phosphorous they discharge into the water.

While the bill had backing from the Ohio Farm Bureau and other agriculture groups, other late amendments dealing with telecommunications deregulation, the Great Lakes Compact, the oil and gas industry, and public sewer lines drew substantial opposition, prompting the Senate to set the measure aside during last month's busy lame duck session.

2014 casino revenues \$12 million less than 2013

Ohio's four casinos reported \$809.2 million in net revenue for 2014, which is \$12 million below the \$821.2 million taken in during 2013. A Casino Control Commission (CCC) spokesperson indicated that the change in revenues reported from 2013 to 2014 may be attributed, in part, to the opening of more racinos in the state over the past year and suggested that until all of the facilities are open for a year, it's difficult to forecast trends of where Ohioans are gambling their money.

The dip in annual total revenue came despite a year-end uptick in which casinos reported more than \$70.7 million in December net proceeds. The gaming establishments pulled in just \$62.8 million in November, CCC reported. While all four gaming establishments saw revenue increases in the final month of 2014, Horseshoe Cleveland reported the largest surge with \$21.2 million in net proceeds - \$5.1 million more than it recorded in November.

Cincinnati's Horseshoe casino followed, collecting \$17 million in net revenue in December after pulling in just \$15.8 million during the previous month. Hollywood Columbus and Hollywood Toledo reported more moderate gains in December, collecting a respective \$17.2 million and \$15.1 million in net revenue. The facilities reported \$16.8 million and \$14 million in net revenue, respectively, for November.

Ohio's seven racinos also continued to see total net revenue rise in December, as they pulled in \$634.5 million for the month - an increase over the \$598.6 million reported for November, the Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC) reported. Northfield's Hard Rock Racino continued to lead revenue collection in December with \$153 million in net proceeds after reporting \$136.7 million in net revenue in November. Columbus-based Scioto Downs Racino and Racetrack saw net revenue rebound to \$120.1 million last month after pulling in just \$109.8 million in November.

Miami Valley Gaming in Lebanon also reported a rebound in monthly revenue in December with \$104.2 million compared to the previous month's \$98.7 million. Cleveland's Thistledown Racino collected \$85 million in net revenue last month - a slight increase over November's \$84.4 million. Meanwhile, Cincinnati's Belterra Park and Hollywood Mahoning Valley Race Course pulled in a respective \$50 million and \$61.1 million in December net revenue. Hollywood Gaming Dayton Raceway was the only racino to see revenues fall last month, collecting \$60.8 million compared to November's \$61.1 million.

Statehouse Etc.



State Revenues Stay On Track At Midway Point In Fiscal Year - Tax revenues came in slightly higher than expected last month and remains on course to meet Office of Budget and Management (OBM) planning numbers for the fiscal year ending June 30, the latest state data show. OBM's preliminary revenue charts, released this week, show the state collected \$1.818 billion in taxes during December, a total that was \$22.2 million, or 1.2 percent, better than OBM estimates revised last summer for the second year of the biennium. The performance didn't completely offset the \$35 million shortfall seen the month before; however when added to the overall positive reports from the first half of Fiscal Year 2015, it kept state coffers on pace to finish the year in the black once again.

The \$10.3 billion in taxes collected through the first six months of FY 2015 is \$205 million, or 2 percent, ahead of OBM estimates, the agency's data show. Compared to last year, state tax intake is running nearly \$339 million, or 3.4 percent, better, according to the revenue charts. Continuing to illustrate GOP policymakers' push to shift the tax burden to consumers and away from income earners, sales taxes over the six-month period came in \$498 million (11 percent) higher and income tax collections are \$132 million (3.1 percent) lower compared to the first half of FY 2014.

2014 showed slight increase in early voting – Figures released by the Secretary of State this week indicate the percentage of Ohioans who voted early in November's election increased slightly compared to 2010, even though voters had less time to cast absentee ballots last year than the previous gubernatorial election. However, with 20 percent fewer Ohioans casting a ballot in 2014 than in 2010, it's unclear to what extent revisions of the state's election law are responsible for changes in absentee and provisional balloting. From a statewide perspective, last year's absentee voting rates, including early in-person and vote-by-mail, increased by about 1 percent. This increase was attributed entirely to more Ohioans voting by mail.

The percentage of voters who cast early in-person absentee ballots remained the same in 2014 as it was in 2010 at about 4.6 percent of the total vote. Meanwhile, voting by mail increased from 21.6 percent of the total four years ago to 22.8 percent.

Adult Protective Services Proposed Budget Language – The Administration has made available its proposed language for the biennial budget around new adult protective services (APS) program requirements. The proposed language impacts both the state and counties in the administration of adult protective services programs. The language is attached to funding applications for APS planning funds and innovation funds. To view the packet, click [here](#).

Swearing in ceremonies for statewide elected officials

Monday, January 12

Kasich-Taylor official swearing-in ceremony, Senate Chamber, Statehouse, Columbus, 12 a.m.

Secretary of State Jon Husted swearing-in ceremony, House Chamber, Statehouse, Columbus, 10 a.m.

State Auditor Dave Yost swearing-in, Statehouse Atrium, Columbus, 10 a.m.

Kasich-Taylor inauguration ceremony, Southern Theater, 21 E. Main Street, Columbus, 11:30 a.m. (Ticketed event)

Treasurer Josh Mandel swearing-in ceremony, Statehouse Rotunda, Columbus, 3 p.m.

Kasich-Taylor inaugural gala, Hilton Columbus Downtown, 401 N. High St., Columbus, 7 p.m. (Ticketed, invitation-only event)

Wednesday, January 14

Swearing-in ceremonies for Justices Judith French and Sharon Kennedy, Ohio Judicial Center, 65 S. Front St., Columbus, 3 p.m.

Hearing Schedule

Legislative Committees

Wednesday, January 14

Senate Session, (Chr. Faber, K., 466-4900), Senate Chamber, 1:30 p.m.

House Session, (Chr. Rosenberger, C., 466-3357), House Chamber, 1:30 p.m.