



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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Top 5 concerns from Platform Survey are no surprise

CCAO wishes to thank all the county officials and affiliate members who responded to the Platform Survey. We had a record number of responses. We are now preparing to pass along the topics and issues raised by all of you in the surveys to the standing committees who can best incorporate them in the official Legislative Platform and Priorities for the 132 General Assembly.

TOP IMPORTANT ISSUES IMPACTING COUNTY GOVERNMENT:

- 1) **Medicaid MCO Sales Tax Elimination** – The loss of county revenue generated by the Medicaid sales tax was a major concern for many respondents.
- 2) **Voting Equipment Replacement** – Updating older equipment as well as the escalating cost of elections themselves were topics that need resolution.
- 3) **Sales Tax** – Stabilizing the current sales tax as well as finding other revenue streams featured prominently in many responses.
- 4) **LGF** – The Local Government Fund remains a critical concern.
- 5) **Opiate Epidemic** – The rampant use of opiates has strained county budgets in areas from jail overcrowding to increased JFS expenses.

The next five issues were: Prisoner Housing, Unfunded State Mandates, Water Quality, Indigent Defense and 911 Mandates. More than 50 separate issues for legislative action were identified in the survey.

Current Agricultural Use Values Advisory Committee meets

Farmers might soon see some more relief from the rising values of their agricultural properties, but not until tax year 2017. The Ohio Department of Taxation (DOT) suggested that there could

be an adjustment to the woodland value deduction for 2017 during this week's meeting of the Current Agricultural Use Values Advisory Committee.



DOT reviews all aspects of the formula every year, and based in part on feedback from farmers concerned about rising CAUV in recent years, the DOT made some adjustments to the formula last year.

Brad Perkins, executive director of the Ohio Forestry Association, said he was disappointed that the further updates discussed would not be implemented in time for tax year 2016, when 23 counties are scheduled to reassess property values. Ted Finnarn, who represents the Ohio Farmer's Union on the panel, agreed with Perkins and also indicated that in his opinion an adjustment needs to be made to the capitalization rate. "There is no way we could know

how low that would go and it increases the values unreasonably," he said, adding that farmers are facing a CAUV increase of up to 25%.

Gloria Gardner from DOT said changes in the capitalization rate are possible and indicated that the Department has been able to find data that would support those changes, but was still looking at it very closely.

According to Mr. Finnarn, eleven states that have similar formulas to calculate the value of agricultural land exempt woodlands. Because Ohio does not, many farmers have converted woodlands on their property to land that can be used for farming, stymieing conservation efforts, he said. "A lot of farmers were forced to clear their woodland and put it into product because taxes were getting so high on it," he said. . Mr. Finnarn said there were several changes made to the formula in 2015, however, "a lot of people feel those changes haven't been enough

Two bills have been introduced, [SB 246](#) and [HB 398](#), that would address the issue." Both bills would place a ceiling on the taxable value of CAUV land if it is also used for conservation purposes by requiring the land to be valued as though it included soil of the least productive type. The bills would also require that the method used to compute CAUV values must employ a capitalization rate that excludes factors expressing land value appreciation and equity buildup. The values are calculated based on a formula set by the Ohio General Assembly in 1972 that bases farmland on agricultural value, instead of market value. By permitting values to be set well below true market values, the CAUV normally results in a substantially lower tax bill for working farmers. The formula takes into account crop yields, pattern and price, along with non-land production costs and interest rates.

State Fair hosts joint meeting of House and Senate agriculture committees

Lawmakers heard updates about farming and water quality in Ohio Tuesday at a joint meeting of the House and Senate agriculture committees at the Ohio State Fair. Agency directors and agriculture leaders presented on a variety of topics, particularly on efforts to improve the quality of the state's water. Ohio EPA Director Craig Butler and Department of Agriculture Director David Daniels updated legislators about the state's efforts to improve the water quality in Lake

Erie and other bodies of water to avoid harmful algal blooms. Western Lake Erie is in better shape this year than it was last year, Director Butler said, though part of that has to do with natural forces.

Director Butler stressed the importance of the state working with farmers and others to reduce the amount of phosphorus, which spurs the growth of harmful algae, into the state's waterways. Ohio, Michigan and Ontario have signed an agreement, he said, to reduce the release of phosphorous by 40%, and the state remains committed to that goal. "We wanted to make sure that we just didn't sign this collaborative and it went away," he said. Director Daniels said farmers are taking the lead in reducing the amount of phosphorous that makes its way from farm nutrients into runoff. "I am proud of what agriculture is doing. They are stepping forward and working on their part of the problem," he said. "We understand that this is a problem for everybody. Not only do we need safe, clean water for our livestock but also for our families as well."



Department of Natural Resources Director Jim Zehringer touted work to streamline the department, particularly legislation ([SB 293](#)) that combined the divisions of parks and watercraft. "We've made our parks safer and we've made our boating community safer," he said. He also addressed the continued growth in the oil and gas industry in the state, saying companies continue to drill more wells in eastern Ohio. "It's not as rapid of growth as we've seen in the past few years but it is steady growth," he said.

Director Daniels spoke of efforts to educate the general public, particularly young people, about agriculture. He talked about the Ag is Cool program at the fair, which encourages children to visit booths and buildings focused on farming. "We stop and think about the people who think that a dozen eggs come from the grocery store. That bread comes from the same place," he said. "It allows us to teach those young folks and give them that connection to agriculture," he added. Mary Buehler, the Ohio State Fair Queen and State President of Future Farmers of America, spoke about the need to connect young people with agriculture. "In Ohio there's nearly 100,000 youth in FFA and 4-H, and they've all been blessed by the gift of agriculture," she said. "But why should we limit it to those 100,000?"

Quick reminder to keep talking up the Talking Points

As you know, CCAO has developed "[talking points](#)" covering our major legislative priorities. Summer affords many opportunities for you to meet with and talk to your legislators and we encourage you to discuss our major issues with them. While we have been focusing upon the elimination of the Medicaid Managed Care Sales tax we do have four other issues we want legislators to be familiar with.

Voting Equipment – state funding to replace the current voting equipment purchased under HAVA that is reaching the end of its useful life.

Preserving the County Sales Tax Base – The county sales tax is the number 1 source of revenue for counties. CCAO opposes HB 343 exempting employment services from the sales tax and any other bill that would exempt items from the sales tax.

Opiate Epidemic – Counties’ resources are being significantly impacted as we fight the opiate epidemic. Comprehensive strategies and adequate resources to implement those strategies are need at the county level.

Infrastructure Funding – Counties don’t have the resources to address our aging infrastructure. We ask support for HB 528 which provides additional permissive motor vehicle license fees and the allocation of additional public works bonding capacity to provide grants to fund water and sewer projects.

And, it is also important that you thank your legislators for several key appropriations they included in the state budget bill that support our counties.

Be sure and say THANKS for providing:

- Additional funding to reimburse counties for indigent defense. An additional \$12 million per year, along with an additional \$1.5 million per year for death penalty cases was appropriated.
- \$12.75 million for the purchase of electronic poll books, as well as eliminating the February special election and requiring pre-payment for the county to conduct other special elections.
- \$20 million for the Local Government Safety Capital Fund to assist local governments with public safety.

House seats two new members

Republican members of the Ohio House on Tuesday swore in a pair of new members. Former Bowling Green City Council member Theresa Charters Gavarone was sworn into the 3rd House District seat (vacated by Tim Brown) while former Waterville mayor Derek Merrin was installed to represent the 47th House District seat (vacated by Barbara Sears).



Rep. Gavarone



Rep. Merrin

A House panel chose Ms. Gavarone, an attorney, in July to succeed former Rep. Brown. Rep. Gavarone, was a member of Bowling Green City Council. She has spent 22 years as an attorney and co-owns a downtown Bowling Green restaurant with her husband. Rep. Merrin won a three-way Republican primary for the seat and is the Republican candidate for the seat this November. Mr. Merrin, who was endorsed by Rep. Sears and several other Republican lawmakers in the primary, is a former single-term mayor who subsequently worked for the state auditor's office and as a realtor.

Bills Introduced



- SB 342** ■ **WEAPON POSSESSION** ([Thomas, C.](#)) To grant municipal corporations the authority to impose a ban or restriction on the open carry or concealed carry of any firearm in a publicly secured area established by the municipal corporation during an event of regional or national significance being held in the municipal corporation. Am. 9.68, 2923.122, and 2923.126 of the Revised Code and to amend Section 9 of Am. Sub. H.B. 12 of the 125th General Assembly
- HB 587** ■ **DASHBOARD CAMERAS** ([Boyce, K.](#)) To require law enforcement officers to use dashboard cameras and body cameras during any time that they are interacting with any member of the public while in the performance of their duties, to provide for state financial assistance to local law enforcement agencies for the purchase of such cameras and related equipment, and to make an appropriation. Am. 109.73, 109.742, 109.77, 109.79, and 109.80 and to enact sections 2901.51 and 2901.52