CLIENT ALERTS & INSIGHTS

Legislative Leaders Set For Upcoming General Assembly

NOVEMBER 29, 2022

The first few paragraphs of this article have been updated as of 1/4/23 to reflect the officials results of the leadership votes on 1/3/23. Before concluding the work of the Legislature, the caucuses voted to select their leadership teams. House Republicans agreed on Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Monclova Twp.) to be speaker for the 135th General Assembly. Merrin was expected to be formally elected by his colleagues on the opening day of session on January 3, 2023. However, with the support of the 32 members of the Democratic caucus and a group of 22 Republicans, Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) was elected to the position. Rep. Oelslager (R-Canton) will serve as speaker pro tempore, with other leadership positions still to be determined. A list of standing committees and chairmanships are expected to be released soon.

House Democrats selected Rep. Dontavius Jarrells (D-Columbus) as assistant minority leader, Rep. Jessica Miranda (D-Forest Park) as minority whip, and Rep. Tavia Galonski (D-Akron) as assistant minority whip.

In the upper chamber, Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) was handily reelected by his Republican colleagues to lead the Senate in the 135th General Assembly. Sen. Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) will advance to president pro tempore. Sen. Rob McColley (R-Napoleon) was elected majority floor leader and Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) was elected majority whip.

Sen. Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) was elected by her colleagues as minority leader for the new session. Her leadership team will include Sen. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus), who will be assistant minority leader. Two House members who are moving to the Senate next session, Rep. Kent Smith (D-Euclid) and Rep. Paula Hicks-Hudson (D-Toledo), will serve as minority whip and assistant minority whip, respectively.

Republicans will hold an historic supermajority in both chambers of the Ohio Legislature. In the Senate, the GOP secured their largest majority since 1951 - 26-7, one more than the current General Assembly. And in the House, despite the bipartisan election of Speaker Stephens, Republicans have their best supermajority with a 68-31 margin - a net gain of four seats over the current 64-35 split. These veto-proof majorities will give the legislative branch an unprecedented level of power heading into the next session.

We are now in the throes of the lame duck session for the 134th General Assembly. With lawmakers returning to the statehouse for a limited time, there are many bills to consider before the legislature adjourns sine die at the end of the year. This is the time in a legislative session that all issues that need to be addressed get done with some urgency because anything left unfinished will need to start over in January with a new General Assembly. There are approximately 150 bills that will be debated over the next two weeks in 28 scheduled standing committees.

Legislative leaders in the House and Senate have outlined their priorities for the final weeks of session. One of the biggest issues left for the General Assembly to tackle is how to spend Ohio's share of federal coronavirus relief money. Nearly $10 billion in federal COVID funds under the American Rescue Plan Act and other COVID relief bills passed by Congress remain unspent.

Other issues under consideration include criminal justice reform, focusing on easing the sanctions Ohio places on people leaving prison, numerous election law changes, and legislation to require public educational institutions and private colleges to designate separate single-sex sports teams, banning the participation of trans athletes. Senate Bill 261, legislation proposing reforms to Ohio's medical marijuana oversight, is under deliberation by the House Government Accountability and Oversight Committee, with its fate still undetermined. Abortion access, a controversial topic during the election, may likely not see any action in the coming weeks. With a court case pending and limited legislative days, this may be a topic that will be brought up again in the next General Assembly.

This election also saw the Ohio Supreme Court maintaining its 4-3 Republican majority. In addition, all Constitutional officeholders were handily reelected to their posts for the next four years, with Mike DeWine as Governor; Joh Husted as Lt. Governor; Dave Yost as Attorney General; Frank LaRose as Secretary of State; Keith Faber as Auditor and Robert Sprague as Treasurer.

Amongst the Governor's priorities, his wish list contains raising the state income limits for childcare assistance and Medicaid for pregnant women and children, as well as enacting a stricter distracted driving law.

With less than a handful of legislative sessions scheduled for the remainder of the year, whatever happens in the coming weeks, it will happen fast. Hold on to your hats...

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