Statehouse Update

March 27, 2020

Monday, March 23, 2020
DeWine Freezes State Hiring, Orders Cuts Amid Dire Revenue Outlook

Gov. Mike DeWine announced a state hiring freeze one day after announcing a "stay at home" order to combat the spread of the coronavirus.

The governor said Monday the decision reflects expectations that revenues will drop precipitously as the economy grinds to a virtual standstill due to the pandemic. Analysts have compared the looming economic hit to the Great Recession, which caused Ohio tax revenue to shrink by double-digit percentages during 2008-2009.

"Commercial activity is slowing down dramatically across the state of Ohio," Mr. DeWine said.

The governor also announced a freeze on new contract services and directed cabinet officials to find cuts of up to 20% in their departments, while acknowledging that some cannot meet that goal due to the nature of their missions.

"The earlier we start slowing down the spending, the more impact obviously it's going to have," Gov. DeWine said.

Asked to specify what agencies may see more cuts that others, the governor said it's too early to tell and pointed out that Medicaid spending under the expected economic downturn is likely to rise.

"Some of this is going to go the other way," he said.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said this is the third economic crisis he has faced as a public servant, with the first following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 and the second coinciding with the financial crisis of 2008.

"All of them bring unique challenges. Every one of them is a little bit different than the other," he said, adding the common denominators are declining revenue and increasing costs for health and human services.

The extent of the unemployment situation is expected to be significant, but Mr. Husted said the state did not release its most recent data at the request of the U.S. Department of Labor. The federal agency asked states to not announce data ahead of its own regular reports.

Gov. DeWine also indicated he is likely to ask lawmakers to tap into the state's "rainy day" Budget Stabilization Fund, which currently sits at about $2.7 billion.

"This is the type crisis that Gov. Kasich and the legislature intended when they put this money away," he said.

Ohio received hundreds of millions in bailout funds during the Great Recession, but still bled money for some time thereafter as its economic recovery lagged the nation's. At one point in early 2009, Ohio's tax revenue lagged the prior year's intake by nearly $800 million.

Another likely ask of lawmakers will be to match the state's tax filing deadline with that of the federal government, which recently pushed its date to July 15.

"Our goal will be to align those two together," Gov. DeWine said.
The governor also sought to clarify the order he announced Sunday that will close daycares across the state at the end of business Thursday. He said priority will be given to healthcare workers or first responders for the limited spots available at centers that applied for temporary pandemic child care licenses. If any slots remain, other families will have the opportunity to apply.

During the administration's daily COVID-19 update, Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton announced the death toll in Ohio due to the virus is now six.

There are now 442 confirmed cases in 46 counties, resulting in 104 hospitalizations, she said. The age of the victims spans from infant to 93.

The number of cases by county is as follows: Ashland (1), Ashtabula (3), Belmont (2), Butler (17), Carroll (2), Clark (1), Clermont (5), Clinton (1), Columbiana (2), Coshocton (3), Cuyahoga (149), Darke (1), Defiance (2), Delaware (7), Erie (1), Franklin (44), Gallia (1), Geauga (2), Greene (1), Hamilton (26), Hancock (1), Highland (1), Huron (1), Knox (1), Lake (8), Licking (1), Logan (1), Lorain (24), Lucas (9), Madison (1), Mahoning (23), Marion (3), Medina (15), Miami (17), Montgomery (7), Portage (2), Richland (1), Sandusky (1), Stark (12), Summit (28), Trumbull (9), Tuscarawas (2), Union (1), Warren (5), Washington (1), Wood (2).

**Legislative Plans Start To Gel For Sessions This Week**

Legislative leaders on Monday were hammering out action plans for this week, when both chambers are expected to act on coronavirus-related measures, capital reappropriations and a potential short-term fix for school voucher eligibility.

In the House, leaders over the weekend circulared suggestions for possible inclusion into a COVID-19 bill. Members were still discussing how to proceed heading into Monday evening, said Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville).

"There's a lot of stuff in play," he said. "We're narrowing it down to what we feel is a necessity right now."

House lawmakers introduced two placeholder measures Monday evening during nonvoting session, said Rep. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) who authored both bills.

One (HB 581) is being eyed for the omnibus COVID-19 provisions and the other (HB 582) is expected to serve as a "watered-down reappropriations" bill, Rep. Callender said.

HB 581 is also being eyed as a vehicle for a potential "fix" to the pending EdChoice Scholarship Program expansion, although details of that plan were still being sorted out as of Monday evening.

"It will be addressed in there, but exactly what the resolution is in there I think there's still a lot to work out," Rep. Callender said.

The omnibus measure is expected to include a host of other policy items, according to several House sources, including:

- Language aligning Ohio's tax filing day with the new July 15 federal deadline.
- Easing requirements for issue campaigns circulating petitions to make the November ballot.
- Revising open meeting requirements in light of the ongoing emergency.
- Language related to shutting off municipal water service.

Among the points of debate is apparently whether the state should adopt the election plan pushed by Secretary of State Frank LaRose, which entails an in-person voting option for June 2, or go with a vote-by-mail deadline of April 28.

House members appear to largely be backing the April 28 date, with Rep. David Leland (D-Columbus) saying there remains "enormous resistance to the June 2 plan the secretary of state is proposing."

"Most people you talk to…realize there's not going to be any guarantee we're going to be in any better shape (by then)," Rep. Leland said.
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Exactly when the two chambers will actually meet given the desire to minimize exposure opportunities during the votes, was an open question heading into Monday evening as legislative leaders continued to discuss specifics on how and when to hold session.

The House has session days slated for Tuesday, Wednesday and, if needed, Thursday. The Senate previously scheduled a Wednesday session.

Both chambers could suspend rules to forego the committee process in order to act on the emergency legislation, although House leaders were still discussing their legal options Monday.

Rep. Edwards, the chamber's majority whip, said discussions continue to center on how to best protect members in light of how easily the virus spreads.

"We're trying to make this as safe as we can for our members and as efficient and all-encompassing as we can," Rep. Edwards said. "I think the plan is to possibly come in tomorrow. If we can't get an agreement by then, then Wednesday."

Added Rep. Callender: "We're trying really hard to get it done tomorrow."

Other potential items remain ripe for discussion. Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said over the weekend he agrees on scrapping mandated tests for primary and secondary education students, who are potentially done for the year given the spate of government-ordered closures.

Senate and House Democrats on Monday participated in caucus conference calls to discuss next steps. And the minority has already detailed several pieces of legislation – including efforts to curtail utility shut-offs and foreclosures – they'd like to see included in the omnibus.

In the Senate, members have been asked to remain on notice for a voting session anytime this week. Members were told they will receive three hours' notice and could possibly convene Monday, although the Senate Monday evening notified members session would not be held that day.

Whatever day is chosen for action by either chamber is likely to be the only time they will meet this week. Officials are discussing how to conduct the sessions with an eye toward limiting unnecessary contact per health agency guidelines, and Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) has indicated a preference for limiting exposure opportunities for staff and members as much as possible.

**Agencies Seek Controlling Board OK For Virus-Related Efforts**
The Department of Health is planning to use most of a $15.6 million batch of federal funding to battle COVID-19 to support local health departments.

ODH will ask the state Controlling Board this week to allocate the money included in the first federal coronavirus bill – the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act – signed by President Donald Trump on March 6.

The Controlling Board will meet 9 a.m. Wednesday, delaying its regular biweekly Monday afternoon meeting by two days over concerns with the virus. Other changes include a new room and a separate gathering place for the public during the meeting, which will be streamed on the Ohio Channel.

Congress passed an $8 billion funding bill at the beginning of the month as cases of the virus began to build nationwide. The measure included $15.6 million in support for the state.

The biggest portion of ODH's ask is for $10.15 million to be used to support local health departments in providing services related to monitoring, investigation, containment and mitigation.

Another $1.3 million will go toward developing and transmitting public awareness campaigns.
The funding also includes $1 million for COVID-19 testing at the state's public health laboratory and $750,000 to cover the cost of overtime and other payroll, and contracting costs associated with ODH's response that aren't covered by other sources.

Miscellaneous other expenses – possibly including additional funding for the previously mentioned items or other needs, such as the coronavirus call center and personal protective equipment – account for the other $2.4 million of the funding.

ODH said the budget could change if needed as the state responds to the crisis.

In a separate request, the Department of Public Safety, on behalf of the Emergency Management Agency, will seek $3.8 million to cover ongoing and anticipated costs related to the coronavirus response.

The increase is needed to cover costs related to the state's emergency operations center, which was partially activated on March 9. The EMA request is in anticipation of an activation for 60 days.

DPS and OBM will monitor the need of the emergency fund throughout the response and return with additional requests if they are warranted.

Ban On Utility Shutoffs Sought; Licensing, Elections Actions Urged...

Rep. David Leland (D-Columbus) on Monday announced he has introduced legislation to prevent utility shutoffs during the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

While noting that most regulated utilities have announced plans to avoid shutoffs as the state and its citizens continue to grapple with the effects of COVID-19, some unregulated utilities and submetering companies have not, he said.

"A lot of people are taking a big hit to their income," Rep. Leland said in a statement. "As we all stay at home to fight this common enemy, we need to make sure Ohioans don't have their lights turned off because they can't make a payment."

Policy Brief: The Buckeye Institute on Monday released a series of proposals designed to fight the impact of the coronavirus.

The policy brief, "Policy Solutions for the Pandemic: How Ohio Can Fight the Impact of Coronavirus," focuses on proposals to improve the state's health care system and support Ohio's workers, small businesses and the economy as a whole.

In the area of health care, the group calls on lawmakers to universally recognize out-of-state medical licenses; join the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact; require price transparency for testing and treatment of COVID-19; utilize medical and nursing students; and authorize pharmacists to treat common illnesses and prescribe medications.

The group also warns against increasing taxes and calls for lawmakers to reprioritize government spending to manage the crisis, request federal support for state unemployment benefits and federal help with daycare for hourly workers.

"As the coronavirus pandemic threatens to overwhelm economies and health care systems, Ohio's policymakers must continue to act swiftly and boldly to protect citizens from the COVID-19 virus and its pernicious economic effects," Rea Hederman Jr., executive director of the Economic Research Center at The Buckeye Institute and vice president of policy, said in a statement. "To assist policymakers, The Buckeye Institute has outlined solutions that will strengthen Ohio's health care system and provide for families and businesses facing unexpected economic hardship."

Election Changes: More than 65 local groups are calling on lawmakers to expand early in-person voting and vote by mail in the wake of the postponed primary election.

The groups are also pushing for emergency preparedness policies for future election and an increase in poll worker pay.

In a letter to lawmakers and Secretary of State Frank LaRose, the groups outline a number of other proposals, including allowing absentee voters to designate additional individuals beyond immediate family who can return ballots.
"Ohioans have a right to make their voice heard and we need action now to ensure they can," Catherine Turcer, executive director of Common Cause Ohio, said in a statement. "The COVID-19 pandemic creates new hurdles for Ohio voters and election administrators, but there are clear solutions to make sure our elections are safe and accessible to every eligible voter."

**Hiring Freeze:** With Gov. Mike DeWine calling for a state hiring freeze due to an expected fall in revenues the Ohio Federation of Teachers is calling on lawmakers not to expand a private school voucher program.

"It is imperative that Governor DeWine and the Legislature act now to prevent a massive expansion to Ohio's EdChoice vouchers," OFT President Melissa Cropper said in a statement.

"With the Governor calling for a freeze on spending and asking state departments to cut their budgets up to 20%, and with the uncertain fate of school district emergency levies that were on the primary ballot, now is not the time to commit to sending more public funds to unaccountable private schools."

**Regulatory Relief:** The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio on Monday moved to extend temporary regulatory relief for hours-of-service requirements for commercial vehicles transporting consumers goods, medical supplies and other key commodities. The temporary regulatory change will last until the state emergency is lifted or until rescinded by the commission.

**Ohio Outpacing National Average For Census Responses**
A higher percentage of Ohio households have responded to the census than the nation as a whole, according to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

About 22.4% of Ohio households had responded to the census by mail, online or by phone through Sunday, compared with 21% of households nationwide.

The vast majority of responses in Ohio – about 83% – have been submitted via the internet. That method has been encouraged by census officials as the coronavirus pandemic continues to worsen throughout the nation.

The Census Bureau initially planned to count people who are homeless from March 30-April 1, then have census takers visit campuses, senior living facilities and other group residences in April. Those plans could be complicated by ongoing quarantines or shelter-in-place orders enacted in response to the outbreak.

In May and June, workers are scheduled to visit homes to follow-up with households that did not "self-respond" after receiving census mailers.

About 69% of households in Ohio "self-responded" to the census in 2010.

Ohio was outpacing neighboring Pennsylvania (22.3%), Kentucky (20.8%) and West Virginia (14.5%) in response rate for the 2020 census through Sunday but trailing Michigan (24.7%) and Indiana (23.4%).

The only county in Ohio with a response rate of more than 31% was Holmes County (35.7%). Ohio's other 87 counties all had completion rates between 15-31%.

None of the state's three largest cities – Columbus (18.8%), Cincinnati (17.6%) and Cleveland (17.1%) – had topped 20%.

Like just about every aspect of civic life, the census process has been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Albert Fontenot, associate director for decennial census programs, said in a conference call with reporters that many census field operations have been suspended until at least April 1.

"We're also actively working with colleges and universities to make sure students that have been temporarily sent home or sent away from their normal campus living situation know how to be counted," he said.

Mr. Fontenot said the bureau also is working with nursing homes and group homes to make sure residents are counted even if quarantines are in effect and reviewing its plans to reach out to homeless people.
"Even though many things may seem uncertain at the moment, one thing isn't: The 2020 census is here," he said. "It's important to our nation that everyone responds."

The current situation further illustrates the importance of the census, Mr. Fontenot said. He noted census data is used in determining federal funding for emergency services, hospitals and school lunch programs.

Tim Olson, associate director for field operations, said one bright spot among the crisis is that the bureau is not lacking for census workers. By Friday afternoon 2.8 million people had applied for temporary work, surpassing the bureau's goal of 2.67 million.

Despite that fact, Mr. Olson said the bureau will continue taking applications on its website.

"We are urging people to consider applying as we may need more temporary employees than originally planned for," he said.

Census projections released late last year show Ohio likely dropping from 16 to 15 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on the state's relatively low rate of population growth over the past decade. According to the estimates, the state had 11.69 million residents last year, up from 11.54 million in 2010.

**Tuesday, March 24, 2020**

**DeWine Resists Calls For Deadline On Virus Response, Eyes Expanding Hospital Capacity**

Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday threw cold water on the idea of the state resuming business as usual in the near term as the coronavirus continues to spread throughout Ohio.

The governor's remarks at a Statehouse news conference appeared to break with President Donald Trump's desire to get the nation "opened up and just raring to go by Easter," although Mr. DeWine repeatedly insisted he is aligned with the president.

The governor said it would be "not helpful at all" to resume pre-pandemic activity levels if it overwhelms the state's hospital system.

"The fact is that we save our economy by first saving lives, and we have to do it in that order," Gov. DeWine said.

The governor's comments came as criticism of steps taken by states such as Ohio to slow the virus' spread has grown in certain conservative circles.

While Gov. DeWine said he's "anxious for that day" when normalcy resumes, he predicted dire consequences if Ohio moves too soon to end restrictions.

"Leaving our hospital system, our health care system in shambles is not the way to grow our economy," he said.

The governor said that while he, like the president, would be happy if businesses and consumers could resume activity safely in the next few weeks, state officials project coronavirus cases may not peak in Ohio until May 1.

State Health Director Amy Acton announced by Tuesday afternoon that 564 cases of the virus and eight deaths had been confirmed across 49 counties.

"My caveat: This is the tip of the iceberg. This is still behind a little bit, lagging in time from getting test results," adding that a lack of available tests also is likely leading to underreporting of cases. She said the state's trend is likely running up to a couple of weeks behind New York, where the exponential growth in cases has led the nation.

Both Gov. DeWine and Dr. Acton touched on the need for the state to build hospital capacity as cases continue to grow. Dr. Acton said currently the state's hospitals are at about 60% capacity after the state ordered the postponement of elective surgeries.

A state team is currently working through the details of how to increase the number of available beds, Dr. Acton said. She said "existing structures" such as college dormitories and hotels are under consideration as makeshift hospitals.
"We stand ready to use all options," she said.

The press conference was the first for the governor since an order requiring residents to stay in their homes unless they are conducting "essential" activities took effect.

Gov. DeWine labeled compliance among Ohioans "pretty good" in the initial hours of the order.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted encouraged businesses to consult the "plain language" of the order when determining whether they can remain open.

"If you don't qualify, then consider yourself closed," he said. "But if you do qualify … be prepared to explain it to your employees, to law enforcement or health department officials if you're asked. Because that will come."

He also advised the state's dozens of local health departments not to create new rules for businesses during the crisis.

"Let's remain consistent across Ohio," he said.

The state also intends to release weekly unemployment data on Thursdays as the pandemic continues. Lt. Gov. Husted said he has been "really troubled" by a U.S. Department of Labor order not to release daily numbers but would abide by it.

"I believe that we should be allowed to release it on a daily basis, but that's what they asked for and, look, we have to collaborate. We have to work together," he said.

**Wednesday, March 25, 2020**

**Legislature Sends Coronavirus Package To Governor**

A united General Assembly Wednesday completed its initial work to help Gov. Mike DeWine combat the coronavirus pandemic in sessions that were marked by dramatic steps to protect lawmakers from exposure.

A measure that initially focused on tax-related changes (HB 197) made its way to the governor's desk after it picked up an emergency clause and dozens of changes in the Senate.

The legislation cleared the Senate in a unanimous vote during an unusual morning session in which members practiced "social distancing," waived the rule requiring they vote from the floor and dressed in casual attire. The House unanimously concurred in Senate amendments in the afternoon, with some members voting from the gallery or traveling from committee rooms to voice support for the measure.

Among the changes in the amendment were the extensions of the state's income tax deadline to July 15 and the March 17 primary election to April 28 through mostly mail-in voting.

The amended measure also contained several education-related provisions, including language waiving state testing and accountability requirements for the 2019-20 school year.

Other changes were aimed at supporting and giving flexibility to health and human services systems during the crisis.

Additional provisions in the bill:

- Prohibit water service disconnections.
- Extend leeway for professional license renewals.
- Allow public entities to meet remotely provided there is sufficient public access to video or telephone communications.
- Allow courts to extend statutes of limitations from March 9-July 30.
- Allocate $20 million for certain ongoing state agency capital projects.
- Delay Step Up To Quality requirements.
- Codify the governor's executive order on unemployment compensation.
Gov. DeWine, who said in a statement he looked forward to signing the bill "soon," thanked the legislature for its work at a Statehouse news conference.

"We have a long way to go, but your action today is certainly very, very helpful," he said. "It helps us move forward as we all deal with this crisis together."

Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) told reporters following the upper chamber's vote that lawmakers attempted to limit the changes to issues directly related to the pandemic.

"We tried very hard to make sure what ended up in the final version of this bill was specific to the coronavirus and the state's response to that and the needs created by that," he said.

Language was also inserted into the bill to allow a transfer from the Budget Stabilization Fund to balance the Fiscal Year 2020 books. However, the transfer requires Controlling Board approval, with at least two "yes" votes from each chamber.

All but one of the changes are temporary. The only permanent language incorporates a House bill (HB 224) to expand the scope of practice for nurse anesthetists.

Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) said the package, which addresses several requests from the governor, likely represents the end of legislative action in the state for the near future.

"If he needs more tools in his toolbox or he needs more appropriations, we may need to come back, but at this time we have no plans of coming back in session or in committee until things get better," he said, adding that an if-needed session for Thursday had been canceled.

Speaker Householder said the legislature will certainly have plenty to work on when it returns to action. Among the topics will be budget corrections, he said, citing high unemployment numbers and the delayed tax deadline.

"We're going to have a huge shortfall as far as revenue to the state of Ohio," he said. "These things are going to have to be addressed."

Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Hts.) acknowledged that some Democratic priorities were left out of the bill. But he expressed hope that those could be addressed at a later date.

"The safety of Ohio, the lives of Ohio, it's all at risk right now if we don't do something," he said.

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron), who praised the governor and State Health Director Amy Acton's actions to address the pandemic, said the measure represented the legislature's efforts to do its part.

"We are a co-equal branch of government and our constituents urge us, need us to participate in making sure all the needs are taken care of, not just through the executive office but through the legislative branch," she said.

**Lawmakers Extend Primary Mail-In Voting Period; Groups Demand New Registration Deadline**

Ohioans will have the opportunity to vote in the March 17 primary election through April 28, but only by mail for most citizens.

That language was one of several provisions inserted into a tax-related measure (HB 197) designed to address the impacts of the ongoing coronavirus crisis.

The legislation cleared both chambers unanimously after the Senate amended the bill and the House concurred in the upper chamber's amendments.

But a host of groups have hinted that they could pursue legal action.

Under the provision, those who were eligible to vote on March 17 will be able to cast a ballot by mail on or before April 28. Exceptions are provided for certain disabled citizens.
Secretary of State Frank LaRose will mail all voters a postcard informing them on how they can request an absentee ballot from their local election boards.

The change comes after Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton issued an order forcing all polling places to close on the March 17 primary date.

Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima), who sponsored a similar measure (SB 294), emphasized that the election was not canceled.

"We're merely allowing additional voting for the March 17 election," he said.

Sen. Bill Coley in a statement questioned Ms. Acton's decision, saying there are "serious constitutional questions" as to whether she had the authority to order all polling places closed.

"There are also questions as to how the legislature could prevent 7 million Ohioans from being disenfranchised without violating other provisions of our Constitution," he said. "I believe that the bill that we passed today allows all voters to cast their ballots and balances the need to protect the public health while at the same time conforming with our Ohio Constitution."

The plan passed by lawmakers bucks Secretary of State Frank LaRose, who had proposed in-person voting on June 2.

However, Sen. Huffman said entities across Ohio need answers sooner than that.

"We have candidates, of course, who have been campaigning," he said. "That's one issue. But more importantly we have a variety of levies, including school levies. Those folks need to know whether their levy is going to pass and whether they are going to have the money to operate, whether they have to lay off people, whether they can hire people, all of that. That's why we've chosen this April 28 date."

Rep. D.J. Swearingen (R-Huron) described the change as "a date and a process that is fair to voters given the circumstances."

Rep. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland) praised the bipartisan cooperation on the issue and called the extended voting period an "opportunity to restore people's faith in our electoral process."

But Rep. Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) expressed concern that it may not provide election officials enough time to adequately do their jobs. He suggested it might be better to just mail absentee ballots directly to voters.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said Wednesday during Gov. Mike DeWine's daily press conference that he and Secretary LaRose would have preferred more time for individuals to vote.

"A longer period time would be better for the voters of the state of Ohio, but the legislature has decided on a shorter period of time," he said.

Mr. Husted said Secretary LaRose has similar concerns and may try to make moves to supplement the new voting deadline.

"We will make the best of it. There will be a 30-day window, a similar time window they normally had," Mr. Husted said. "There's no doubt we would have hoped for a longer period."

Secretary LaRose in a statement expressed disappointment.

"The proposal that Gov. DeWine, Lt. Gov. Husted and I laid out was preferable, and unlike the plan enacted today, our proposal would have concluded the election by putting a ballot request directly in the hands of every voter along with a postage-paid return envelope," he said. "Though I advocated for a different plan, the legislature has spoken, and I will uphold my oath of office by doing everything in my power over the next 34 days to ensure that every Ohio voter has the opportunity to safely make their voice heard."
Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said following session that the sentiment in favor of a shorter timeline was shared among many lawmakers.

"I think there were a significant number of legislators in both chambers that felt we should get the election done sooner rather than later," he said.

He praised Gov. DeWine and Secretary LaRose for their action in difficult circumstances.

"I personally believe it was absolutely the right call to postpone election day and I know there are differing views on that," Sen. Obhof said. "If you look at other states who tried to hold elections that day it was messy."

Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford), who was publicly critical of the executive branch wading into the issue, said the chosen date with allow Democrats to meet their May 17 deadline to confirm delegates to the national convention.

"It's my understanding that we fall just under that May 17 deadline," he said.

The June 2 in-person date was also deemed unworkable due to ongoing questions about whether the outbreak would be calmed down by that date, he added.

The legislative solution is very similar to what the Ohio Democratic Party has asked the Ohio Supreme Court to order in a recently filed lawsuit.

However, a coalition of voting groups sent a letter to legislative leaders calling April 28 "an unacceptable, unworkable date for the primary," adding that voting should extend through at least mid-May. The coalition includes ACLU of Ohio, All Voting is Local, Common Cause Ohio, Faith in Public Life, the League of Women Voters of Ohio, the Ohio A. Philip Randolph Institute, the Ohio Council of Churches, the Ohio Student Association, and Ohio Votes

The groups also called for an extended voter registration deadline; the removal of barriers that they say disenfranchise voters, such as rigid signatures matching requirements; options for early voting; and an extensive state-sponsored education campaign.

"In this unprecedented situation, it is critical to balance the needs of various communities and stakeholders," they wrote. "We've set forth the policy conditions that we think provide the best opportunity to participate in this Primary Election Day in a safe, secure, and accessible manner."

**Controlling Board OKs Virus Response Funding**

More than half the items on the Controlling Board's Wednesday agenda were deferred by agency requests as the state continues to grapple with the growing coronavirus crisis.

Of the 68 items, more than 40 were deferred as the state prepares for what is expected to be a significant drop in tax revenue after many businesses were shuttered to stymie the spread of COVID-19.

Members held only three items for questions – all dealing specifically with the state's response to the virus.

The first, from the Department of Health, dealt with the distribution of $15.6 million of federal money allocated to the state to address the illness.

ODH Chief of Staff Lance Himes said most of that money will go to local health departments, while state allocations will support awareness and testing efforts.

Some of the money will be used to buy personal protective equipment, if possible, Mr. Himes told Sen. Jay Hottinger (R-Newark).

The increase brings the public health emergency preparedness line item to $41 million, Mr. Himes said.
"When we reach a pandemic like this there probably is never enough, there's always additional needs and needs for additional dollars," Sen. Hottinger said. "How comfortable do you feel with the appropriations you have, the state and federal of $41 million in this area, that that will be sufficient for us to adequately be able to do our jobs?"

Mr. Himes said the situation continues to evolve and the department might need to shift money around.

"We will absolutely do a constant assessment of our resources and response to make sure that we're protecting Ohioans in preventing the spread of this disease," he said.

Sen. Hottinger also asked about two requests by the Department of Public Safety regarding $3.8 million for the Emergency Management Agency to respond to the crisis.

Teresa Peters, financial manager at the EMA, said $3 million is existing funds to assist counties with personal protective equipment, while the $800,000 is additional money toward operations and payroll at the Emergency Operations Center.

Lawmakers praised the response efforts in statements after the meeting.

"During this unprecedented time in our history, Ohio has been a leader for the nation, proactively preventing, preparing and responding to this health crisis," Sen. Hottinger said. "These funds will ensure Ohio's Departments of Health and Public Safety are equipped with the resources needed to continue to combat this pandemic."

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) said the money is an essential part of the state's response.

"I'm pleased we could act swiftly to direct these funds where they're needed most—to aid our local health departments leading this fight in our communities and to increase testing capacity across the state," she said. "We will continue to work with partners at the federal, state and local levels to address this once-in-a-lifetime public health and economic crisis."

Rep. Jack Cera (D-Bellaire), a Controlling Board member, said the money is a "step in the right direction" responding to the crisis.

"Our local health departments are working overtime to respond to this public health crisis, and today's action gets funding to the front lines where it's needed most," he said.

Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) also praised the administration's response.

"I appreciate Governor DeWine's leadership in addressing the coronavirus pandemic," he said. "The increased investment will help the Department of Health's response to Ohioans' needs."

The board met in Room 313 of the Statehouse with members spaced several seats apart. Members of the public and agency representatives were in the Statehouse atrium and communicated through a video feed to members of the board.

**Capital Bills On Hold As Leaders Weigh Fiscal Concerns**

Lawmakers on Wednesday passed legislation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and addressing other pressing items, but more action is anticipated on other issues.

Among those is capital reappropriations. Lawmakers had hoped to introduce legislation to provide debt-backed funding for ongoing projects, but the coronavirus has thrown a wrench into plans to do so by the end of March. The forward-looking capital bill for the next biennium is also in limbo.

Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said he expects there to be a plan for capital reappropriations but that the legislature was focused on the emergency legislation Wednesday.

"I believe we will have a plan for tackling reappropriations and we in fact had a bill that was drafted and ready to go but our feeling was today we were coming in specifically to deal with things related to the current emergency and things that were particularly time sensitive," Sen. Obhof told reporters after the Senate's session.
"In light of some of the ongoing discussions we've had with the administration…and the fiscal situation of the state we thought it was better to take a deep breath, reassess the situation in a few weeks and make sure before we pass any significant spending bills we knew exactly what the fiscal situation would look like."

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) said the legislature still has time, but that he expected the reappropriations would "probably lapse."

"It doesn't mean those projects are lost," he told reporters after session. "It just means that we'll have to reappropriate it sometime and bring it back on line."

During the crisis, there is likely not much work happening on capital projects, he said.

As for a capital budget, the speaker cautioned it is not a good time to be taking on new debt.

"There's probably going to be things that we don't even realize that we're going to need to put money into," he said. "It's probably not the time to issue new debt for projects."

According to a summary of the amendments in the emergency bill passed Wednesday (HB 197), the legislature is shifting $20 million of non-General Revenue Fund money for the Department of Administrative Services toward state agency capital facility projects. That money would be repaid after an upcoming bond sale.

The General Assembly is not done with legislation to respond to the coronavirus emergency, Sen. Obhof said.

"That's entirely fluid and depends on what the situation on the ground is but we are talking to the administration," he said. "We've been working with them all along about other legislative packages as well and we anticipate that at some point over the next few weeks or maybe the next month or two they will come back to us with what I would call a fiscal package or a financial package of proposals that are also related. And we have some things that are already ready to go in that bill as well if and when we get there."

Speaker Householder said the legislature is following Gov. Mike DeWine's lead on the response to the crisis.

"The governor is the one that's in charge," he said. "We as a legislature at this point in dealing with a health care crisis like this, we have to take our lead from him."

At the moment, the House has no immediate plans to return for committees or session. Speaker Householder said he expects at some point that lawmakers will need to consider economic stimulus measures.

"Certainly we're going to have to make budget corrections," he said. "There's no doubt about that."

The movement of the tax filing deadline alone will have significant fiscal effects, he said, adding that future stimulus measures could include public works.

"Those types of projects are the ones that get people back to work the soonest and they're also projects that that dollar travels in that community multiple times," he said. "Those types of projects, those public works types of infrastructure projects, are what I think we ought to look at."

**Thursday, March 26, 2020**

**Unemployment Claims Soar Amid Outbreak, State Reports**

Ohio reported 187,780 initial claims for unemployment compensation last week – a weekly figure that, by itself, exceeded the totals for all but one month all-time.

That total reflects claims filed March 15-21, the Department of Job and Family Services reported Thursday. The state received 7,042 jobless claims the week before.

Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Labor reported 3.28 million initial claims for unemployment, the highest level in the history of the seasonally adjusted data. The previous high was 695,000 in October 1982.
The flood of claims comes as the state has faced concerns that many people seeking unemployment have been unable to do so because of delays caused by overloaded computer and phone systems.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said Thursday that the surge has included a dramatic increase in traffic at the state's call center for unemployment compensation – 1.71 million calls last week compared to 112,000 for the same period in February.

He said the state will make sure benefits are retroactive for people who can't get their benefits claims in because of delays.

"If you do not get through and you're worried about the timing of your benefits and not getting paid the full amount that you qualify for, they will make that retroactive," he said.

He also urged Ohioans to use the website and try doing so at off-peak times during the day.

Gov. Mike DeWine also addressed concerns about the solvency of the state's unemployment compensation fund.

"We have known for some time that we have to have a long-term fix," he said. "That's something we will have to do with the state legislature. People should not worry. The money will be there. They should continue to apply. That's what we want them to do."

ODJFS continued to urge Ohioans to use the website to file claims, although a phone line (1-877-644-6562) is also available. Workers who lose their jobs because of the novel coronavirus can use the mass-layoff number 2000180.

"Each claim is important to us, and we recognize the hardship that the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on many Ohio families," the department said in a release. "We have been working around the clock to streamline performance and boost capacity by adding servers so the online claims system can handle the unprecedented influx of claims, which has affected processing times."

"It's important to keep in mind that during previous downturns in the economy, claims came in waves as the recession worsened and industries began to shut down whereas these claims came in all at once and created a tsunami," the department continued. "This amount of claims in this short expanse of time would tax any online system, especially one that is 16 years old. It's also important to note that unemployment insurance automated systems around the country are also struggling with the increased claims load."

For comparison, the department provided the top five monthly jobless claims from the recession of the early 1980s. The month with the highest total was December 1981, which saw the state report 205,159 initial claims. The second-highest month was December 1982, at 167,638 claims.

Meanwhile, layoffs at Ohio businesses continued. JACK Entertainment announced a layoff at its Cleveland casino and Thistledown racino. They total 1,561 employees, according to a notice to ODJFS.

Regarding the federal figure, U.S. Secretary of Labor Eugene Scalia pointed to legislation working its way through Congress to provide support workers with cash payments.

"This large increase in unemployment claims was not unexpected, and results from the recognition by Americans across the country that we have had to temporarily halt certain activities in order to defeat the coronavirus," he said in a statement.

**DeWine Anticipates Coming Strain On Hospitals, Plans To Sign Response Bill Friday**

Gov. Mike DeWine expects to sign the General Assembly's emergency coronavirus bill Friday.

During his daily media availability regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the governor said the emergency measure (HB 197) includes language that will allow courts to postpone action on evictions through the end of July.

The Department of Health reported 867 Ohioans have tested positive for COVID-19 Thursday, an increase from 704 the day before. ICU admissions were 91, an increase of 16 over Wednesday's figure, and hospitalizations had risen from 182 to 223.
ODH said 15 Ohioans have now died from confirmed cases of the illness, up from 10 the prior day.

Health Director Amy Acton said social distancing and other steps to mitigate the disease's spread are starting to show signs of helping reduce the surge in cases and hospitalizations, but that the state is still early in the process.

"It's not if but when. We will surge. At our peak surge we could be as high as 6,000 to 8,000 new cases a day," she said. "We will exceed our capacity, but we've really been minimizing that amount. What Ohio is doing absolutely has been saving lives."

About 11% of the state's confirmed cases involve patients who are in intensive care units, and about 17% of those who have tested positive are health care workers, she said.

There has even been a local health department where two staffers have tested positive, she said. That demonstrates the importance of essential businesses and operations to have contingency plans for if and when people get sick.

Hospitals are also working to increase their capacity, Dr. Acton said. That includes efforts to create more intensive care beds and add units where people with the contagious illness can be served while reducing the risk to other patients. In some areas, hospitals might work together to concentrate COVID-19 cases in certain facilities and have other patients moved to other facilities.

As the demand for personal protective equipment increases, the governor said anyone with some to donate can reach out to his office by email.

The governor said demand at hospitals will increase significantly.

"We do not know exactly at this point what the capacity will have to be, but we know that it's going to have to be a lot, lot bigger," he said.

The number of beds might need to double, he said.

"It's a big, big expansion of the number of beds. It's a big, big expansion of getting the infrastructure ready to go," he said.

On evictions, the governor said a provision in the emergency legislation to toll civil, criminal and administrative time limits from March 9 to July 30 means courts have more flexibility in all cases, including evictions.

"An action to evict someone could certainly still be filed but the courts are relieved of their statutory duty to hear that case within a certain period of time," Gov. DeWine said.

The state didn't want to prohibit all evictions because they could be needed in some cases, such as in instances of domestic violence or if there is illegal activity, the governor said.

"In those unique cases, we certainly want the courts to have the ability to take the appropriate action," he said.

The governor marked what would have been opening day of the Major League Baseball season with a video by the Cleveland Indians and the Cincinnati Reds. He also wore a Reds tie and brought caps from both teams.

"When I got up this morning and saw the weather, I thought this would have been a great Opening Day," he said.

Speaker Larry Householder is forming a task force to prepare for the reopening of businesses forced to close during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Glenford Republican announced the plan Thursday, saying it is essential policymakers are prepared to restart Ohio's economy when the time comes.

"We don't know yet when the COVID-19 situation will improve to the point that Ohio businesses can reopen and people can get back to work, but we need to prepare now for the future," the speaker said.
"Right now, Ohio's resources must be invested in our healthcare system and keeping Ohioans well," he said. "But while we are focused on today, we also have an eye focused on tomorrow. How we transition and restart Ohio's economic engine is critical."

The panel is expected to use technology to accommodate social distancing as per government recommendations. How many lawmakers will sit on the task force and who they will be has not yet been announced, with the speaker promising that details are forthcoming.

Rep. Householder also urged Gov. Mike DeWine to create a task force of lawmakers and employers of all sizes to facilitate "the free flow of ideas between legislators and the business community."

"How Ohio rebounds from this epidemic in the near future is as critical as how we deal with the epidemic itself. We must prepare now for the future," the speaker said. "Ohioans have always been pioneers, leaders, innovators and resilient. We can come out of this challenge in a better position than anyone in the nation if we plan ahead and implement well."

**Public Utilities Commission:** In its latest move to cope with the COVID-19 emergency, state regulators issued an order suspending all completion deadlines for railroad grade crossing improvement projects.

"While the commission recognizes the importance of completing these safety projects, we acknowledge the impact this emergency will have on various workforces, including those tasked with upgrading grade crossing," the PUCO order reads.

The action took place during the commission's regularly scheduled meeting – an event only three of the five commissioners attended due to the risk of spreading the virus via face-to-face contact.

Chair Sam Randazzo said that although all five commissioners were able and willing to attend, the panel will endeavor to have three members at each meeting to limit the risk. The commission last week voted to enable Mr. Randazzo and Vice Chair Beth Trombold to issue orders on behalf of the full commission if necessary.

**Federal Stimulus Bill Clears Senate, Brown Expects Another Aid Package**

Hours before the third round of federal stimulus cleared the U.S. Senate, the state's senior member of the chamber touted changes made to the bill.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Cleveland) said even if the measure is signed into law as expected, more action will be needed to help stabilize the economy.

The nearly $2 trillion bill designed to blunt the impact of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic was approved late Wednesday in a 96-0 vote. The House is slated to take up the bill Friday.

Sen. Brown touted several provisions in the bill, including language boosting the unemployment compensation system, providing additional support for healthcare workers and state and local governments, and getting money directly in the hands of American citizens.

"My priority from the beginning was to get help directly to Ohioans," Sen. Brown said.

That direct help to residents will come in the form of $1,200 checks for most individuals and $500 for each qualifying child. The money begins to phase out for individuals with income above $75,000 for individual tax filers and at $150,000 for joint filers.

Sen. Brown expressed concern with how quickly those checks will get in the hands of Americans. He said he has been told by officials in President Donald Trump's administration the effort could take as long as two months, which he attributed to budget cuts made at the IRS.

"The administration really needs to put special effort into getting these checks out quickly," Sen. Brown said.
The lawmaker also expressed disappointed that the only Ohio city that will receive direct funding through the measure is Columbus due to a population threshold. However, he also expressed optimism that Gov. Mike DeWine will appropriately dole out portions of the state's share to local governments.

Negotiations between Republicans and Democrats occurred through the weekend and concluded late Tuesday night. Sen. Brown said the first draft of the measure that received little input from Democrats "simply wasn't good enough."

"The bill still is far from perfect but it's a much better deal for workers, their families and their communities," he added.

Sen. Brown predicted that there will be a fourth round of relief. He said he hopes the next package delays rent and mortgage payments for individuals impacted by the crisis and includes student loan debt relief.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Terrace Park) touted the passage of the bill following the vote.

"This historic effort is designed to help workers, families, employers, and health professionals weather the enormous impact of the coronavirus pandemic," he said in a statement.

"This measure includes billions to support our hospitals and health care providers, provides additional funding for the CDC to put in place more testing and to better collect data to track the virus, provides a significant increase in unemployment insurance benefits for workers who have been laid off, and authorizes loans to businesses, small and large, to help keep their workers on their payrolls," he continued. "I'm pleased this measure passed with overwhelming bipartisan support and urge the House to pass it quickly so it can get to the president for his signature."

National Conference of State Legislatures Executive Director Tim Storey said the aid to the states in the measure "will assist state leaders as they tackle enormous public health and economic challenges while affording them the ability to prioritize and address the unique needs of each state."

"States are at the public health and economic forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic," he added. "NCSL has worked hard to ensure that states are provided with immediate and flexible aid to continue to battle the catastrophic impacts of this outbreak. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act provides states with $150 billion in targeted funding, as well as $30 billion in emergency education funding, and resources for critical public health and unemployment benefits to support current state needs."

**Friday, March 27, 2020**

**DeWine Signs Emergency Coronavirus Measure As Ohio Cases Top 1,000**

Gov. Mike DeWine on Friday signed an emergency measure passed by lawmakers this week in extraordinary legislative sessions marked by efforts to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The bill (HB 197) began as a measure fixing typographical errors in the state's tax code but was loaded up Wednesday by the Senate with a host of amendments aimed at supporting the state through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Changes included mostly temporary law language addressing school testing, private school vouchers and the extension of absentee voting for the March 17 primary election.

"I want to thank the state legislature for stepping up," the governor said before signing the bill during his regular afternoon news briefing. "This bill does some things that we felt needed to be done in this crisis to help us get through this crisis that we were in."

Gov. DeWine praised the General Assembly for working together in a bipartisan way to get the legislation to his desk.

"This continues a great tradition of everyone working together and I'm very, very grateful to them for doing that," he said.

Prior to signing the bill, Mr. DeWine line-item vetoed the phrase “or deadline” from the section regarding the tolling of statute of limitations, which was aimed at giving the judicial system leeway in prosecuting cases during the pandemic. The administration described the move as correcting a drafting error.
“Removing the boxed language clarifies that this provision does not apply to statutory tax deadlines or due dates, including those tac deadlines or due dates adjusted elsewhere in this bill,” the veto message states.

The signing came shortly after the U.S. House passed a broad $2 trillion-plus stimulus measure to respond to the pandemic – a bill signed by President Donald Trump a short time after.

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) cheered the governor’s finalizing of the measure in a statement.

"This bipartisan legislation will begin to ease some of the hardship facing working people, families and businesses during this crisis," she said. "While we know that we everything will not be addressed in one bill, this is the first step to returning some normalcy to our lives by ensuring government continues to work for the people."

The Department of Health reported an increase of more than 200 cases over the day to 1,137 confirmed cases in the state. The number of admissions to intensive care units was 107, and the number of hospitalizations was 276. A total of 19 Ohioans have now died from confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Health Director Amy Acton said the Ohioans who have died range in age from 58 to 93 years old.

The number of cases is "a big underestimate" because of the lack of testing, she said.

The latest models provided by the Cleveland Clinic indicate the state could see as many as 10,000 new cases per day at the peak of the illness, putting a strain on the state's hospital system.

While waiting on federal guidance regarding unemployment compensation for independent workers and people who are self-employed, the state has already engaged tech companies to start building a system to help them, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said.

Another way the impact on the state's businesses can be mitigated is by banks and other lenders offering 90-day deferrals of commercial real mortgages and other loan arrangements, he said. That can give property owners an opportunity to alleviate costs for small businesses such as retail stores and restaurants that are not able to operate at full capacity.

"We believe that the private sector can best handle this," Lt. Gov. Husted said. "Most of them are doing it. We encourage all of them to do it. Because that will work out much better than if we have to pass some sort of government mandate, which we're willing to consider."

While many Ohio businesses have closed, others are hiring massive numbers of workers, he said. Kroger is looking for 10,000, Amazon is looking for up to 4,600, and manufacturers Honeywell, 3M and GE are all looking for workers to make hospital supplies.

"If you're in a position to help, to help be part of the essential supply chain, please do it," Lt. Gov. Husted said.

Battelle is also working on a system to sanitize N95 masks – an essential component of personal protective equipment to keep health care workers from getting sick. The lieutenant governor said they are just waiting on federal approval to do so and will then be able to deploy equipment that could sterilize up to 160,000 masks a day.

**Federal Coronavirus Relief Package Clears Final Hurdles**

A massive federal stimulus bill was signed into law by President Donald Trump Friday.

The approximately $2 trillion bill designed to blunt the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic cleared the U.S. House of Representatives Friday in a voice vote after U.S. Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky unsuccessfully tried to force a recorded vote.

U.S. Rep. Bill Johnson (R-Marietta) spoke on the floor in favor of the so-called "Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act," likening the impact of the coronavirus to "a nuclear bomb to our economy."

"Americans from coast to coast are pitching in to help the cause. Businesses are changing their production lines to make ventilators and hand sanitizer. Surgical masks are being donated by the millions, and we're lining up to give blood," he said.
"Health care workers are being cheered like rock stars during shift changes. Americans are pulling together. Everyday heroes are emerging - teachers teaching their classes over the internet, doctors and nurses working superhuman shifts while friends and neighbors step up to provide child care for them."


"This bill is not perfect," the Cincinnati Republican said. "But it does provide emergency relief legislation that helps our health care workers, our hospitals, our businesses with liquidity, and helps our workers to keep them on the payrolls as well as helping Americans most in need."

During his daily press briefing on the pandemic, Gov. Mike DeWine invited U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Terrace Park) to speak by phone about the bill. He highlighted provisions he said will allow business to keep their employees, provide help to individuals and to the health care system.

On the latter, the bill makes $115 billion available to health care providers, including hospitals.

Sen. Portman also touted expanded unemployment benefits, including an extra $600 per week and expanded eligibility to the self-employed and contract workers, and direct payments to Americans. That comes in the form of $1,200 checks for most individuals and $500 for each qualifying child. The money begins to phase out for individuals with income above $75,000 for individual tax filers and at $150,000 for joint filers.

He said he hopes those payments begin to go out next week.

"Our social safety nets are being tested like never before," Sen. Portman said.

Several members of Ohio's House delegation touted the passage of the bill in statements after the voice vote, including U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Columbus). He said the ongoing pandemic requires unprecedented action.

"This bill gives desperately needed personal protective equipment to those health care workers and first responders on the frontlines of combatting this crisis, supports our small businesses through additional loans and grants to make payroll, and takes care of families in Ohio and across the nation with direct payments and unemployment insurance," he said.

"Over the last few weeks, we've seen the best of humanity. Ohioans are looking out for their neighbors and finding new and creative ways to support their communities; everyone is stepping up to do their part," he added. "In passing this bill, Congress is doing our part, and I was proud to vote in favor of it."

U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) said the legislation "will save lives and our economy."

She also said the pandemic has made clear that America can no longer rely on foreign manufacturers of medical supplies.

"We must do everything to rebuild our strategic medical stockpile through American manufacturing ingenuity," Rep. Kaptur said. "American lives are at stake now and in the future. We make America great again by healing her people and rebuilding her domestic medical production! I fully support today's bipartisan response package."

U.S. Rep. Troy Balderson (R-Zanesville) said the moment is "full of uncertainty and fear for the future."

Ohioans are worried about their jobs, families, neighbors, and businesses. Their needs are my top priority," he said. "This package delivers necessary reassurance and relief and protects our country's people through this public health and economic emergency. It's a fitting symbol that we will make it through this crisis together."

More than three million Americans have filed jobless claims, U.S. Rep. Bob Latta (R-Bowling Green) noted.

"The bill we passed today isn't perfect. There are provisions I would have liked to see left out, but American families, workers, and businesses are in challenging situations through no fault of their own," he said. "The House of Representatives acted to
deliver American families, workers, small business, and industries resources that will save lives, stabilize our economy, and protect people in every community against this invisible threat."

U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Cleveland) also said the bill is not perfect and called for more congressional action.

"Many Americans were already struggling to make ends when the crisis hit," she said. "Further measures, from providing student borrowers with debt relief and protecting renters and borrowers of federally-backed mortgage loans, to expanding access to critical nutrition assistance and ensuring workers who lose their private insurance do not go unprotected, will be necessary to prevent low- and middle-income Americans from financial ruin resulting from the public health emergency."


"This will be to provide the state and local government entities additional resources to deal with the effects of the coronavirus," he said.

The bill was the third package of relief for the coronavirus crisis passed by Congress recently.

There is likely to be a fourth, and Policy Matters Ohio on Friday released a brief in which it argues that should contain support for free tax preparation services.

"These programs perform a vital service for people who have low incomes," PMO Director Kalitha Williams said in a statement. "For-profit tax prep services often gouge clients with high fees and predatory products. Now, many working people who were paid low wages are suddenly without a job due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They will need help preparing their taxes to get the stimulus plan's crucial cash support."

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