

Ohio Marine Trades Association
and Government Advantage Group

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

| FEBRUARY 2023



2023 Legislative Leadership Elected

On January 3, 2023, the 135th General Assembly convened to swear in their members and elect their leadership teams. The Senate vote went according to plan, with President Matt Huffman being reelected Senate President and Senator Nickie Antonio being elected Minority Leader. However, in the House, Representative Jason Stephens earned a surprise victory over the other contender, Derek Merrin, after all 32 Democrats joined 22 Republicans in voting for him. Although Derek Merrin had won the informal caucus vote for Speaker in November after striking a deal with the third potential candidate Phil Plummer, Stephens continued to push for votes in the last few weeks and ended up negotiating a deal with Democrats to give them some “priority bills” and other concessions in order to earn their votes.

With 43 Republicans voting for Merrin and only 22 for Stephens, the new Speaker will preside over a very divided Republican caucus without majority support from his own members. We will see how these new dynamics play out, including the pledged working relationship with Democrats, as work begins in this General Assembly. House Democrat Minority Leader Allison Russo retained her post.

The rest of the leadership posts are as follows:

Senate

Matt Huffman – President
Kirk Schuring – President Pro-Tem
Rob McColley – Majority Floor Leader
Theresa Gavarone – Majority Whip

Nickie Antonio – Minority Leader
Hearcel Craig – Ass’t Minority Leader
Kent Smith – Minority Whip
Paula Hicks-Hudson – Ass’t Minority Whip

House

Jason Stephens – Speaker
Scott Oelslager – Speaker Pro-Tem
Bill Setiz – Majority Floor Leader
Jon Cross – Ass’t Majority Floor Leader
Jim Hoops – Majority Whip
Sharon Ray – Ass’t Majority Whip

Allison Russo – Minority Leader
Dontavius Jarrells – Ass’t Minority Leader
Jessica Miranda – Minority Whip
Tavia Galonski – Ass’t Minority Whip

Committee Announcements

Committees in both the House and Senate have also begun to take shape. Below are key appointments to committees of most interest to LEMTA. The legislature will spend the bulk of the first 6 months of the General

Assembly debating the biennial operating budget and the transportation budget. Those respectively need to be passed and signed by June 30th and March 31st of this year.

House Finance – Jay Edwards (Chair); Jeff LaRe (Vice Chair); Bride Rose Sweeney (Ranking Member)
House Finance Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee – Don Jones (Chair); Dan Troy (Ranking Minority Member)
House Energy and Natural Resources – Darrell Kick (Chair); Beth Lear (Vice Chair); Elgin Rogers (Ranking Minority Member)
House Transportation – Riordan McClain (Chair); Ron Ferguson (Vice Chair); Michele Grim (Ranking Minority Member)

Senate Finance – Matt Dolan (Chair); Jerry Cirino (Vice Chair); Vernon Sykes (Ranking Minority Member)
Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources – Tim Schaffer (Chair); Al Landis (Vice Chair); Paula Hicks-Hudson (Ranking Minority Member)
Senate Transportation – Stephanie Kunze (Chair); Bill Reineke (Vice Chair); Nickie Antonio (Ranking Minority Member)

New Cabinet Directors

As Governor Mike DeWine has been sworn in to his second term, there have been some changes in his cabinet. A number of agency Directors have resigned and/or retired, and their replacements have been appointed. These will need to be confirmed by the Ohio Senate. They are as follows:

Ohio Department of Agriculture – Representative Brian Baldrige replaces Dorothy Pelanda
Ohio EPA – DeWine’s policy advisor Anne Vogel replaces Laurie Stevenson
Tax Commissioner – BWC COO Patricia Harris replaces Jeff McClain
Ohio Department of Public Safety – DeWine’s policy advisor Andy Wilson replaces Tom Stickrath

Governor’s State of the State

On January 31, 2023, Governor DeWine delivered his state of the state address. He used this opportunity to begin unveiling the framework of his biennial budget proposal. The legislative activity in the first half of 2023 will be nominated by the budget deliberations. In his remarks, DeWine highlighted a continued commitment to the H2Ohio funds and programs to improve Ohio’s water quality. A part of his budget proposal will include a new focus on the health of Ohio’s rivers. More information on the Governor’s budget proposal will be released soon

Under the Influence of Marijuana Bill

Senator Nathan Manning (R) has re-introduced legislation, Senate Bill 26, to make changes to the offense of operating a vehicle or watercraft under the influence of marijuana. The bill would change THC thresholds from a hard standard to instead “evidentiary standard” to be considered by courts. According to the sponsor testimony given on the proposal in 2021, this change would allow impairment to be judged more fairly. Under the medical marijuana program, how the state currently measures marijuana/THC in the system, could mean those with a medical marijuana card could almost never operate a vehicle as the component measured in the current OVI laws can stay in a person’s system for up to a month.

Boating Safety Legislation Re-Introduced

Senator Kirk Schuring (R) has re-introduced LEMTA supported legislation, Senate Bill 7. This legislation does two important things.

1. Designates April as "Powerboat Safety Month". Promotion of this month would focus on the dangers of carbon monoxide poison.
2. Increases the maximum boating safety education grants administered by ODNR from \$30,000 to \$60,000.

This legislation is pending in the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee.