ECONOMY

We faced a range of hurdles in 2015. China experienced a significant slowdown, U.S. exports weakened and corporate profits fell. As a result, our economy saw only sluggish growth. This is keeping with what we said last year, “In total, the economy should grow in the coming year. Unfortunately, with the heavy tax and regulatory burdens facing businesses, our economic growth will remain below capacity.”

Consumers account for more than two-thirds of our economy, and they are taking on added importance in 2016. Financially, consumers have lowered their debt burden relative to income to the lowest levels in about 25 years (Chart 1: Consumer Fairly Healthy). In addition, the job picture has improved. Unemployment levels are down, wages are starting to rise and hours have been expanding. Still, more than 100 million Americans are not working and household net worth is not growing like it should. Consumers seem cautious, and that is reflected in less-than-expected retail sales and a low turnover of money in the economy.

Manufacturing ranks as our chief concern. The Federal Reserve reports new orders are mostly negative. Industrial production and capital goods orders have also fallen off this year. The strength of the dollar has caused a downturn in exports and sales for some firms. In fact, S&P 500 firms have now experienced two consecutive quarters of negative earnings growth. Washington, D.C., has offered few pro-business policies and no relief with the exorbitant U.S. tax rates. Meanwhile, Washington continues to increase spending, which is rarely as beneficial as politicians hope. As the chart (Chart 2: Beware Washington Help) shows, spending cuts have led to higher-than-normal U.S. economic growth, while spending increases do not appear as helpful.

The economy and certain sectors will benefit from sustained low energy and commodity prices. Import prices should remain low, helping those who look to pass along discounts to their customers and representing potential for improved margins.

We expect manufacturing to have a tough time in 2016. The consumer is healthy, but people remain cautious, which is why we do not expect to see a major pick-up here. China is having an impact on our trade, and further troubles will cross over to our economy, as well. During the election year, we cannot expect Washington to come up with meaningful legislation to spur growth. Therefore, we expect lower-than-normal growth and even a negative quarter or two.

STOCKS

After six years of generally rising prices, the rally in the S&P 500 slowed in 2015. The stock market is likely to begin a correction in 2016, as lame-duck years tend to produce the “gift” of falling stock prices for the next president.

One of the most reliable long-term valuation measures, the market value of U.S. Equities/U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is close to all-time highs (Chart 3: U.S. Stocks Richly Priced). Margin debt — when investors borrow money to leverage their investments — had reached an all-time high but has now started to decline. Historically, this signals an early warning (Chart 4: Too Much Optimism).

The market is likely to undergo style rotation. We believe value stocks will outperform growth stocks as profit margins fall. The types of stocks we favor in this environment are those that should benefit from a stronger U.S. dollar and lower U.S. energy costs. Active management will be important to take advantage of market volatility — and lower prices would offer excellent buying opportunities.

Continued on page 2
IN 2016, EXPECT ACTION ON KEY POLICY MATTERS – JUST NOT IMMEDIATELY

QUICK GLANCE

Legislative year will begin slowly
Biennial capital budget on agenda
292 candidates filed for 116 seats

When the Ohio Legislature wrapped up its legislative activity in mid-December and departed the capital city for the holidays, it left several key employer priorities incomplete heading into the New Year. But 2015 was not without some important, pro-business successes.

Early in the year, Ohio enacted common-sense legislation that preserves the attorney general’s ability to contract with outside attorneys while ensuring the maximum benefit to taxpayers. Senate Bill 38 caps contingency fees awarded to these attorneys, ensuring that litigation brought on behalf of the state is motivated by the public good — not by anything else. Another bill that is now a law, House Bill 3, makes it cheaper to start a new business in Ohio by reducing business filing fees by 21 percent. Last fall, the legislature also passed Senate Bill 208 and prevented an unintended tax hike on small businesses.

But perhaps the most significant triumph this year was one delivered by the voters, not the legislature. On Election Day, voters resounding defeated State Issue 3 and its attempt to legalize marijuana for recreational and medicinal use in Ohio and create a marijuana monopoly.

Still, there is much more work ahead to make Ohio a better place to do business and keep our state moving in the right direction. Of course, 2016 is an election year, which always makes it tricky to forecast how productive the Ohio General Assembly will be. But one certainty is that the legislative year will begin slowly, with only a few session days scheduled before the March 15 primary. Ohio voters will fill 99 House seats and 17 of the 32 Senate seats this year and there is no shortage of candidates. A total of 292 individuals filed to run for these 116 seats. The March ballot will include 12 Republican and three Democratic presidential candidates, including Ohio Gov. John Kasich. Kasich is the first sitting governor of Ohio to run for president since then-Gov. James Cox served as the Democratic nominee in 1920.

While the pre-primary legislative calendar may be light, we can expect a comparatively busy April and May. One item on lawmakers’ agenda is a biennial capital budget, which provides appropriations for the repair, reconstruction and construction of the state’s educational and public service infrastructure, as well as local or regional community building projects.

Less clear is whether there will be another mid-biennium review, or MBR. Created by the Kasich administration, MBRs passed in 2012 and 2014 and included dozens of significant policy reforms and budget adjustments. Most prior administrations waited the usual two years between budgets to propose such changes. But Kasich has been challenging the status quo since his first day in office — and despite the demands of a presidential campaign — is said to be preparing an MBR for introduction in the first quarter of the year.

While the MBR package may look different than in previous years — for starters, the administration may propose multiple bills, rather than one comprehensive bill — some further tax reform ideas will undoubtedly be included. This should set off alarm bells for the business community, as both of the governor’s previous MBRs and his past two budget proposals have included plans to pay for personal income tax cuts by raising taxes on Ohio employers. And it’s unlikely Kasich is going to abandon his ongoing pursuit of lower personal income tax rates. Fostering a more competitive business environment that encourages business investment is a worthy goal, but not if it is accompanied by further tax shifting.

In addition, a major tax MBR would fly in the face of the new Ohio 2020 Tax Policy Study Commission, which has just begun its work. The commission was established to allow the legislature sufficient time to take a longer-term and more comprehensive approach to tax policy and tax reform. Meetings are planned throughout 2016, and the commission has until Oct. 31, 2017, to publish its findings and recommendations for how to modernize Ohio’s tax competitiveness.

The General Assembly is currently scheduled to finish its work for the first half of the year no later than June 15. In a typical election year, the legislature wouldn’t return until after the November general election.

Among the top issues are unemployment compensation system reform, repeal of the sales tax on employment services, employment law uniformity legislation and extension of the freeze on Ohio’s energy mandates.

We expect a slow start but a busy spring, extended interruptions for both the March primary and November general election, and a crazy, post-election finish to the two-year legislative session for 2016. For Ohio employers, it may be best to look up the upcoming year with the attitude of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who once said, “I’m extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.”

By Rich Thompson, Director, Political Programs

FILING DEADLINE BEGINS THE RACE FOR 2016 CANDIDATES

With December’s filing deadline for candidates in Ohio, there came a new slate of candidates for races throughout the state. Below is an analysis of the top primary races for the Ohio General Assembly.

Ohio House

HD42 – Incompliant Democrat Rep. John Barnes Jr. has long frustrated his caucus and constituents with his penchant for independent thinking. Thus, Barnes finds himself in a three-way primary. His opponents are Jill Miller-Zimon, a former Pepper Pike City councilwoman and Realtor, and Bob Boggs, a regional director at Ben Lindy, a regional director at the United Food and Commercial Workers Union who once said, “I’m extraordinarily patient, provided I get my own way in the end.”

By Keith Lake, Vice President, Government Affairs

Continued on page 3
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Teach for America; and Dr. Paul Soh, a dentist.

HD47 – A four-way Republican primary for the term-limited state Rep. Barbara Sears’ district is under way. The district consists of portions of western Lucas County, including Sylvania and Monclova Township. The candidates for the seat are former Sylvania Township Trustee Kevin Haddad, former Waterville Mayor Derek Merrin, Monclova Township Trustee Barbara Lang and Sylvania school board member Vicki Donovan Kyle.

HD51 – Despite pledging that he would not seek re-election without the Butler GOP primary endorsement, incumbent Wes Rutherford will try to retain his seat. Rutherford was against former state Rep. Courtney Combs, who previously served in the seat from 2004 to 2012.

HD57 – Another four-way Republican primary has emerged for term-limited Rep. Terry Bose’s seat. The district consists of Huron County and portions of Lorain County. The candidates are Rochester Mayor Kathy Fronhaugh, small business owner Tim Opstickle of Avon, small business owner Dick Stein of Norwalk and Lee Charles of Wadsworth.

HD62 – Warren County is a difficult area of the state in which to handicap political races. The four-way primary is indicative of the factions at play within the GOP in the region. The seat is currently vacated by Rep. Ron Maag due to term limits and covers portions of Warren County. The candidates for the seat are Jake Forman of Carlisle, businessman Scott Lipp of Franklin, Steve Muterspaw of Lebanon and Warren County GOP Chairman Ray Vina.

HD63 – A three-way Democratic primary has emerged in light of Rep. Sean O’Brien’s announcement that he will seek re-election.立法者Calafaro的25th众议院选区。Converse of western Lucas County, including Sylvania and Monclova Township. The candidates for the seat are former Sylvania Township Trustee Kevin Haddad, former Waterville Mayor Derek Merrin, Monclova Township Trustee Barbara Lang and Sylvania school board member Vicki Donovan Kyle. Rutherford was against former state Rep. Courtney Combs, who previously served in the seat from 2004 to 2012.

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Many Ohio Chamber members tell us that their companies have difficulty finding trained, reliable employees. Companies both large and small around the state face similar issues when trying to fill job openings.

One avenue many of our members take is to contract with staffing firms to find qualified workers who fit their company’s needs. Employment service companies have the ability to recruit, hire and train workers in high-demand fields.

“Staffing firms have greater and different access to employees than employers,” says Larry Kidd, president and CEO of Reliable Staffing Services.

Hiring temporary workers through staffing firms gives the employer and the employee time to see if the job is the right fit. “In using third-party staffing firms often relieves companies of having to retrain or rehire workers. Employment service companies provide a valuable service to enhance the overall workforce of the state of Ohio,” Kidd says.

The Ohio Chamber has been working with policymakers to provide a pathway for companies to address their employment needs. One barrier we have identified is that Ohio is taxing companies that use staffing services to find qualified temporary personnel. The Ohio Chamber strongly supports House Bill 343, which would repeal the sales tax on employment services. This legislation has already been in the works for four hearings in a House committee.

The employment services tax has impeded the growth of Ohio’s economy by increasing the cost of job creation. That’s because the tax charges an Ohio company an additional 6 to 8 percent when it hires a worker through an employment service contract. By increasing the cost of hiring, the employment services tax prevents smaller businesses from paying higher, more competitive wages and larger companies from hiring more workers. Thus, imposing the tax has led to fewer new jobs and less economic growth in Ohio.

“The sales tax the state of Ohio is charging is a tax on employee wages. It is a penalty for hiring people to work in Ohio when using a third party to do so,” says Tia Ramlow, president of Great Work! Employment Services.

Opponents of HB 343 claim that hiring temporary workers is bad for Ohio. They argue that employment service companies are inadequately servicing disenfranchised workers and, in effect, are forcing their employees onto public assistance by not providing competitive wages.

Tom Erh, president of Tallam Resources, refuted this misleading claim, saying, “While it is true that half the employees we place are in unskilled or semi-skilled positions, we are one of the state’s best resources for helping individuals off of public assistance. Our industry provides a bridge to full-time employment that many would otherwise struggle to obtain. We help many individuals with employment challenges, including inconsistent work histories, criminal backgrounds, disabilities, lack of experience, even homelessness.”

Many of our member companies, whether they are staffing firms or companies that use staffing firms to help with employment, want to see the employment services tax repealed. That’s because the tax puts Ohio businesses at a competitive disadvantage, particularly when competing with companies in surrounding states.

“Ohio businesses will be better positioned to compete with competitors located in states where the purchase of employment services is not taxable. Ohio taxing these services adds several hundred thousand dollars or even more to our bottom line,” says Don Brown, of Caregill.

It also prevents some companies from doing business in Ohio.

“Some employers I have worked with have had to make tough decisions as to whether to invest in projects in Ohio utilizing temporary labor, and some of those decisions not to invest here were affected by the existence of this tax. There is no question that employer wages have been negatively impacted and fewer jobs have been created,” says Daniel Schivitz, president of Lincoln Tyler Management.

It’s obvious that this tax deters companies from locating temporary projects in Ohio and prevents companies from hiring more workers through employment service companies. It is time, then, that the General Assembly repeals the sales tax on employment services that is hindering the ability of Ohio companies to hire a qualified workforce and inhibiting economic growth. The Ohio Chamber is advocating on behalf of our members to make sure the state creates a more business-friendly tax climate, which will help businesses grow and attract new companies to Ohio. Repealing this egregious penalty on Ohio employers is a step in the right direction.

To follow the progress of HB 343 in the Ohio General Assembly, please read our Legislative Update, as well as our blog and social media updates.
For business owners, investors and all residents of our great state, the 2015 Ohio tax filing season will be unlike any other. The changes you'll see this year are significant and far-reaching. They include new tax cuts for most individuals and small business income taxpayers as well as major modifications to our primary income tax forms, which we believe will simplify the tax filing process. I would like to share some highlights with you that I hope will be helpful when filing your 2015 Ohio income tax return.

**TAX CUTS**

For individuals, the 2015 tax rates reflect a 6.3 percent income tax cut from the 2014 tax year. This reduction drops Ohio's top rate to just below 5 percent, the lowest level in more than 30 years. In addition, since many business owners and investors will not only benefit from that reduction, they will enjoy a maximum tax rate of 3 percent on business income exceeding $41,700. This, along with the business income deduction (previously named the small business deduction) that allows taxpayers to once again deduct 75 percent of the first $250,000 of net pass-through business income, will free up additional funds to further strengthen Ohio and Ohio businesses.

**TAX FORMS**

The Ohio Department of Taxation is continuously looking for ways to simplify the income tax filing process. This year, several tax forms have been revamped to make the process easier and more efficient. Most prominently, the IT 1040, IT 1040 EZ and amended IT 1040X forms have been consolidated into one Universal IT 1040 tax return. Combining these forms will allow amended returns to be filed electronically, rather than on a paper form as previously required. It will also enable refunds from amended returns to be directly deposited, rather than issuing paper checks — as was done in the past. This will speed up processing and the delivery of refunds. Taxpayers will also benefit by seeing all of the tax credits in one place (see page 4 of this report), making it easier to identify those credits for which they are eligible. Similarly, the SD 100 and amended SD 100X school district forms have been merged into the Universal SD 100 tax return. The Universal forms and new schedules should benefit our 2015 tax return, space has been added to Schedule J to capture the dependent “relationship” for each dependent being claimed on an Ohio income tax return, which will help deter fraud with these exemptions.

**SCHEDULE OF CREDITS AND OTHER SCHEDULE CHANGES**

All nonrefundable and refundable credits have been combined into the new Ohio Schedule of Credits. The Schedule of Credits includes line items that were previously individual line items on the IT 1040, such as the joint filing credit and personal/dependent credit. Additionally, the schedule has all lines/credits previously reported on Schedules B, C, D and E, so these forms are not available for 2015 personal income tax filing. The Schedule E is still available for pass-through entity filings. Please also be aware that, beginning with the 2015 tax return, space has been added to Schedule J to capture the dependent “relationship” for each dependent being claimed on an Ohio income tax return, which will help deter fraud with these exemptions.

**TAX FRAUD**

Last year, the department intercepted a record number of fraudulent returns, and we expect no let-up in this illegal activity. More than $533 million in fraudulent income tax refund claims have been stopped since 2014. We are committed to combating tax fraud and ensuring that tax refunds are paid only to legitimate filers. We believe we’re among the leaders in the country in aggressively combating these fraud schemes. Last year, the Identity Confirmation Quiz was instrumental in that fight, and we will be utilizing it again this year. After listening to taxpayer feedback, we made a few modifications to the types of questions asked. We’re confident that those changes will improve the process and provide a better experience for taxpayers who take the quiz. Plus, with further improvements to our tax return analysis this year, we expect significantly fewer taxpayers will be asked to take the quiz.

**MORE INFORMATION SHARING = MORE SECURITY**

Behind the scenes, there were some important agreements made last year that will support much more information sharing between the IRS, state tax departments and public and private sector tax groups. The goal is to help us all quickly identify and respond to new and emerging tax-related schemes. Unfortunately but unavoidably, safeguarding taxpayer dollars from tax fraud theft can slow the processing of returns and issuing of refunds. We truly appreciate the understanding and patience shown by Ohio taxpayers.

**TECHNOLOGY TOOLS**

We continue to invest in technology to help improve customer service. We invite you to follow us on Twitter via @OhioTaxation for the latest news and updates. We’ve also expanded our presence on YouTube with a number of instructional videos. If you’d like to check on your refund or sales tax rates around the state, download the OhioMeansJobs OhioTax app through Apple or Android. Finally, visit our website — tax.ohio.gov — if you’d like additional information on the topics covered in this article or to sign up for our Tax Alerts and receive Ohio tax news year-round.

Thanks for your time and attention. Have a great year.
IN COMPLIANCE?

Be prepared! FLSA rule changes and OSHA penalty increases will happen in 2016

Two seemingly unrelated developments at the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) will affect employers in 2016. The first is in regard to the Fair Labor Standards Act. Under FLSA, the threshold for salaries that qualify for “salaried exempt” status will increase more than 100 percent. The second involves congressionally mandated increases in Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) penalties at a minimum of 80 percent, which will be implemented by Aug. 1, 2016.

FAIR LABOR STANDARDS ACT CHANGES

In March 2014, President Barack Obama directed the DOL to update and expand overtime regulations.1 On July 6, 2015, the DOL issued the proposed regulation changes and published those changes with additional requests for comment in the Federal Register.2 It has been reported that the proposed changes generated around 270,000 comments, which is the most comments received for a proposed regulation in recent history.3 The DOL’s solicitor general4 also recently reported that the new regulations might not go into effect until late 2016 due to the number of comments received, as well as the complexity of implementation.

Certain employees must be paid overtime at one and a half times their rate for any hours over 40 worked in a given week.5 The proposed regulatory changes apply to executive, administrative, computer and professional employees who are covered under the FLSA’s minimum wage and overtime protections. If an employee qualifies, the current salary threshold for exemption is $455 per week, or $23,660 per year. The proposed regulations reset the salary level at 40 percent of weekly earnings for full-time salaried workers, either $921/week or $47,892 annually based on 2013 data (and $50,440 based on 2016 data). The proposed regulations also increase the total annual compensation required for highly compensated employees to qualify for exemption—$100,000 to 90 percent of weekly earnings of full-time salaried workers, or $122,148 annually based on 2013 data. Finally, the proposed regulations establish a mechanism for automatically updating the salary and compensation levels going forward to ensure they will continue to provide an “accurate test” for exemption. The DOL has suggested either updating the thresholds based on a fixed percentile of earnings for full-time salaried workers or updating the thresholds based on changes in the Consumer Price Index. Regardless of how thresholds are automatically updated, the DOL has proposed publishing the revised

salary and compensation levels annually using the most recent data as determined and published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It would publish a notice with the new salary levels in the Federal Register, as well as on the Wage and Hour Division’s website at least 60 days prior to the updated rates taking effect.

The DOL’s goal is to minimize the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be misclassified based solely on their salaries.

OSHA PENALTY INCREASES

On Nov. 2, 2015, Obama signed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 into law.6 Not widely publicized but included in that act is Section 701, “Federal Civil Penalties Inflation Adjustment Act Improvements Act of 2015,” which requires OSHA to increase its civil penalties for the first time since 1990. Presently, the maximum penalty OSHA can assign to the following violations are: Other-Than-Serious – $7,000; Serious – $70,000 and Willful – $700,000. The proposed change mandates a one-time catch-up adjustment to take place in 2016, with penalties increasing from 80 percent to 150 percent.

OSHA must increase the penalties through an interim final rulemaking no later than Aug. 1, 2016. Assuming there is a maximum 80 percent increase, the maximum penalties will be as follows: Other-Than-Serious – $12,600; Serious – $12,600. Repeat – $126,000 and Willful – $126,000. The revised penalties are expected to reflect the present inflation rate, but they will continue to keep pace with rate changes.

Assistant Secretary for OSHA David Michaels, Ph.D., has stated that OSHA is very pleased with the increase because OSHA penalties have been too low to have the necessary impact.7 OSHA is currently waiting on the Office of Management and Budget to issue guidance on implementing the new penalty authority, but the process will need to be accelerated before the August 2016 deadline.

CONCLUSION

With the Republican House and Senate’s approval of the 80 to 150 percent increase in OSHA penalties, the first increase since 1990 (the OSHA act became law in 1970), and the “catch-up” of more than 100 percent to salary thresholds for exempt employees, employers will face significant cost increases by the end of 2016, and with significant bipartisan support.

At this time, employers need to self-audit their occupational safety and health programs and wage and hour programs to ensure compliance in the new, higher-dollar regulatory atmosphere.

By William J. Wahoff, Esq. and Nelva J. Smith, Esq., Steptoe and Johnson PLLC

3 The solicitor general’s comments are available online at 4 http://www.natlawreview.com/ article/osha-gets-authorization-to-adjust-federal-overtime-penalties
4 The DOL’s goal is to minimize the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be misclassified based solely on their salaries.
5 OSHA’s goal is to minimize the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be misclassified based solely on their salaries.

7 OSHA’s goal is to minimize the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be misclassified based solely on their salaries.

13 The DOL’s goal is to minimize the risk that employees legally entitled to overtime will be misclassified based solely on their salaries.
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In 1995, Tara Abraham was working for the world’s number one personal care retailer. As part of her job as an associate product manager, she was responsible for finding contract packaging solutions for the chain’s line of personal and home fragrances. However, after a months-long search for a contract packaging partner that could perform all of the required functions – sorting products, shrink wrapping, packaging engineering and many other services – Abraham was at a loss.

“Every packaging company I visited failed to meet our standards, and by a pretty wide margin,” she says.

The search process uncovered the need for a full-service contract packaging solutions provider. To meet that need, that year, Abraham co-founded Accel Inc. with her now-husband David. Abraham L Brands was the company’s first client. Accel’s first client was the parent company of Abraham’s retail employer.

“When I left, I told them that they were losing a team member but gaining a contract packaging company,” she says. “They are still a huge client of ours to this day.”

Today, Accel counts 15 Fortune 500 companies among its clients and can deliver full-service solutions for multibillion-dollar retail companies, due in large part to how it is positioned — as the centerpiece of a large office park in New Albany, Ohio.

Eight packaging manufacturers in the personal care, health and beauty space occupy the easternmost portion of the New Albany Business Park — and Accel is the final assembly point for all of the manufactured components. This arrangement allows the companies to collaborate, communicate and scale production with maximum efficiency.

“That is important because the way we do business, we look to go deep with each client,” Abraham says. “We’re not looking to do business on a project-by-project basis. We want to develop strategic partnerships that will allow us to maintain relationships for the long run.”

This approach works because Accel’s market differentiator isn’t volume — it’s brainpower.

“We’re extremely innovative,” Abraham says. “Our value is in our human talent, our ability to engineer solutions. That’s why, throughout the industry, we’ve looked at as problem-solvers. We can solve a packaging or assembly issue through innovation.”

An example of that innovation is Accel’s decision to partner with LGS Staffing, a staffing services firm that provides the company with on-demand talent, allowing it to scale quickly when demand rises. At peak business times, Accel employs more than 1,100 temporary and permanent employees.

And that ability to scale will continue to increase in the coming years. Accel recently became ISO 9001:2008 certified, opening the door for it to expand beyond the retail space into more regulated industries.

“It will allow us to explore more opportunities in industries where ISO certification is needed, such as automotive and pharmaceutical,” Abraham says. “Regulatory standards are critical in those industries and in many others. You need certification if you’re going to work in them.”

Because regulatory compliance is an important issue for Accel, the company has also looked to the Ohio Chamber of Commerce as an educational and strategic resource. Abraham says the chamber has provided guidance and information on key laws and regulations as well as other business and labor topics to help the company.

“The Ohio Chamber has been a fantastic resource for us and an advocate for businesses statewide,” Abraham says. “They’re working with companies like ours to make sure we can thrive as the world of business gets more and more complicated. I’m from Ohio, I love it here and I’m all for anything that our business community can do to strengthen itself, strengthen our economy and create jobs.”

“Our value is in our human talent, our ability to engineer solutions.”

- Tara Abraham
co-founder, Accel Inc.

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NEW PENALTIES HIGHLIGHT THE NEED TO CALL 811 BEFORE DIGGING

Starting in January, a new law puts teeth into the long-standing requirement to call 811 at least two days prior to digging. Whether you are a professional excavator or a homeowner, you could face a fine for ignoring this important safety requirement.

“Homeowners often think they know where their gas lines are, and many contractors believe someone else is responsible for calling 811,” says Dan Creekmur, president of Columbia Gas of Ohio. “The reality is that digging in any form near underground utilities without having them properly marked can be extremely hazardous to people, property, and the environment.”

Calling 811 is free. Representatives from Columbia Gas of Ohio and other utilities will then come out to locate and mark their underground lines so that you can proceed to dig safely.

Ohioans put themselves and others at risk when they fail to have underground utilities located before beginning projects that involve digging. Since 2012, there have been more than 1,000 gas lines damaged in the state because people did not call 811.

If you’re a homeowner doing your own digging in your back yard, you must call 811. And if you’ve hired a professional excavator, make sure he or she has called 811 before digging begins. An excavator is “the person or persons responsible for making the actual excavation.” Even if someone else has already had a site marked, the person doing the digging must call 811. You must also call 811 at least two days — but not more than 10 days — before you dig.

Columbia Gas expanded its “Call 811 Before You Dig” campaign on Aug. 11 — 811 Day. The campaign focuses on educating homeowners, excavators and anyone involved in digging about calling 811. The company also talks to public officials and emergency responders about their special role in ensuring that communities are aware of their responsibilities when it comes to safe digging.

In addition, Columbia Gas is taking its safety messages to highways and neighborhoods around the state. Many of the company’s vehicles now carry signs reminding customers to call 811 and to “Smell and Tell” — or call Columbia Gas and 811 if you smell natural gas.

Even though natural gas is invisible, there are several signs that can indicate its presence. Columbia Gas of Ohio encourages the public to be aware of the following warning signs of natural gas:

1) If you smell rotten eggs
2) If you see dead vegetation, blowing dirt or bubbles in standing water
3) If you hear a hissing sound
4) If you detect natural gas, leave the area immediately and call 911 and Columbia Gas of Ohio at (800) 344-4077. Wait for Columbia’s crew to arrive to make the situation safe.

For more information on safe digging and natural gas safety, visit https://www.columbiagasohio.com/stay-safe/stay-safe.

PACKAGED UP

Accel Inc. delivers full-service contract packaging solutions to meet its clients’ high standards

WWW.OHIOCHAMBER.COM
As we move into 2016, one thing is certain: The national political spotlight will once again be on Ohio. In real estate, the saying is “Location, location, location.” In a presidential race it’s “Ohio, Ohio, Ohio.”

Simply Google “Battleground states 2016” to see the plethora of maps that show Ohio and its 18 electoral votes (the seventh most of all states) as a toss-up. Politically, 270toWin, PoliticalTrendline.com, and other publications will all list Ohio as a battleground state. Even the United Kingdom’s Daily Mail shows Ohio as neither blue nor red.

The importance of our state in this year’s presidential election was a major reason that the Republican Party selected Ohio to host this year’s national convention in Cleveland July 18-21. It’s a great unknown as to why the majority of Ohioans voted for the Democratic candidate in the last presidential race. In real estate, the saying is “Location, location.” In a presidential race it’s “Ohio, Ohio, Ohio.”

Every four years we have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) You have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.) As we move into 2016, one thing is certain: The national political spotlight will once again be on Ohio. In real estate, the saying is “Location, location, location.” In a presidential race it’s “Ohio, Ohio, Ohio.”

In Ohio, it is led by a Republican governor and has Republican majorities in the House and Senate, with 11 (former U.S. House Speaker John Boehner’s seat is currently open) of 16 Ohio members of Congress being helped by a Republican. Whichever Republican candidate is selected in July, he or she might as well take up residence here in Ohio, as it will certainly pay off. Ohioans have voted for the presidential winner in every election cycle since 1960.

With Ohio’s primary election moved up from May to March 15, 2016, Ohioans will start hearing and seeing presidential candidates sooner than usual this year. The date of the primary is also important, as it is a winner-takes-all scenario. This means that the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates who receive the most votes in the Ohio primary will secure all of the Ohio delegates going into their respective conventions.

In addition, many political pundits are watching our U.S. Senate race as Democrats — former Gov. Ted Strickland and former Cincinnati City Councilman P.G. Sittenfeld — battle it out in the primary before moving on to go up against Sen. Rob Portman in the general election. Again, expect to see a lot of attention on this race as Republicans try to protect their majority, while the Democrats try to pick up a seat. In the U.S. House, besides fulfilling an open seat, Ohio’s Congressional delegation is expected to stay at the 12-4 Republican to Democrat split.

We have some important in-state elections, as well. Due to age restrictions in the Ohio Supreme Court, two seats held by incumbents — Justices Judith Lanzinger and Paul Pfeifer — will be on the ballot. Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor is running for re-election. The Ohio Chamber will be very active in these three races as we strive to preserve fairness on the state’s highest court.

In the Ohio House, all 99 seats are up. There are also 16 Senate seats opening up, some of which have primary races. (See Rich Thompson’s article on page 2.)

To keep track of the political happenings, you can view election information on our website at www.ohiochamber.com by clicking on “2016 Election” under the Politics tab. It’s going to be another interesting political year here in Ohio.