

Crain's editorial: Diving in

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There has been considerable debate of late about what role, if any, companies and business leaders should take in the political process.

We won't wade into national politics here, other than to note we find much of the discussion on the topic disingenuous, given that companies for many years have been politically engaged through donations to candidates and causes. It's nonsensical to argue that corporate money is OK, but executives speaking out about issues is excessively "political."

Business executives will be most effective, though, by focusing their

political efforts on projects that not only serve company interests, but offer broad public benefits.

Ohio has a good example of that with the new [Ohio Water Partnership](#), a new business advocacy group formed to focus on water quality issues.

The organization is funded by grants from the Gund Foundation, the Cleveland Foundation and Joyce Foundation, and it says it has 50 members, as large as Eaton Corp. and as small as the Winking Lizard restaurant chain. It was launched to supporting funding for [H2Ohio](#), the water initiative Gov. Mike DeWine created in 2019 to address problems such as harmful algal blooms on Lake Erie caused by phosphorus runoff from farm fertilizer; aging infrastructure for drinking water, wastewater and home sewage treatment systems; and lead contamination from old water pipes and fixtures.

The H2Ohio program has been funded at about \$85 million per year. DeWine and Democrats have pushed to raise that to about \$120 million per year, but Republicans in the state Legislature have objected.

The program is working on projects [all over the state](#), and given that clean water is vital to making Ohio an attractive place to live and work, the additional expenditure is justified. The water partnership says it's looking to create a "consensus-driven" model "to ensure a consistent, effective, fair approach to protecting and preserving Ohio's natural water resources, and ensuring the state has high-quality water infrastructure." If a business-focused group can make that happen, everyone wins.

Gov. Mike DeWine, portrayed by opponents as an ideologue but in our

mind always much more of a pragmatist, might be ready to make a major pivot.

The governor said last week that he's considering a change in the metric Ohio would use to end COVID-related public health orders, to vaccination levels from case levels. The vax standard is one used by neighboring Kentucky, where Gov. Andy Beshear [said](#) that once 2.5 million Kentuckians (out of nearly 4.5 million residents) get at least their first shot, he will lift most restrictions, including capacity limits on bars and restaurants.

DeWine surely has a few things in mind. First, Ohio still isn't close to the standard — 50 cases per 100,000 residents statewide — he has set for the health orders to go away. As of last Thursday, April 22, the state was at about 186 cases per 100,000, better than the previous week's number but a long way from 50. And second, there are clear signs that vaccine takeup is slowing, statewide and [nationally](#). The Cincinnati Enquirer, noted, for instance, that the state reported distributing nearly 30,000 vaccine doses on Wednesday, April 21, compared with more than 100,000 doses on March 31. Nearly 40% of Ohioans have received at least one vaccine dose, but many more Ohioans need to get vaccines to achieve herd immunity, which is likely to be achieved at 70% to 90% of the population.

Also looming: the effective date in late June of Senate Bill 22, which DeWine had vetoed, only to have the veto overridden by the Legislature. The law will let lawmakers reject or modify any state health order as soon as it's given.

All the health data so far indicate that the COVID vaccines are proving to be highly effective at preventing hospitalization and mortality. There

is, as DeWine noted, a close relationship between vaccination levels and new cases.

"If you hit a certain level of vaccines, you're going to hit that level of 50," he said, adding, "Where that is, I don't think anyone knows exactly." Until we do, the state's efforts are best concentrated on convincing more residents to get vaccinated. Fast.

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