

Ohio Politics Explained: Future of gay marriage, the business of legal marijuana

Haley BeMiller

Columbus Dispatch

There's a legal fight over how to teach reading in Ohio, and House Democrats want to get rid of the state's gay marriage ban.

We broke down those issues and more on this week's episode of Ohio Politics Explained, a podcast from the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau to catch you up on the state's political news in 15 minutes or less.

This week, Haley BeMiller was joined by bureau chief Anthony Shoemaker.

Hooked on phonics? Not so much

Ohio now requires schools to use phonics to teach children how to read, and one Worthington-based group isn't happy about it.

Reading Recovery Council of North America filed a lawsuit this week to block the changes, which were included in the state's latest two-year budget. The organization's programs would be prohibited under the new rules, and its attorneys argue the law is unconstitutional and vague.

A spokesman for Gov. Mike DeWine, who advocated for the phonics requirement, said the governor is "very passionate that this moves forward."

Issue 2 could boost marijuana companies bankrolling campaign

The effort to legalize recreational marijuana in Ohio is bankrolled by some of the state's biggest players in cannabis. And starting next year – if Issue 2 passes – those companies could end up with the lion's share of licenses to sell adult-use products.

The proposed law awards licenses to existing medical marijuana operators, along with participants in a social equity program. Backers say the equity initiative is proof enough that they don't want to monopolize the adult-use market.

But others in the industry are skeptical. Large growers would get more dispensaries than their smaller counterparts, and standalone processors wouldn't get any dispensary licenses. After the initial round of licenses, regulators couldn't issue more for another two years.

House Democrats want to scrap gay marriage ban

The Ohio Constitution and Ohio Revised Code recognize marriage only as a union between one man and one woman. Democrats want to change that.

House lawmakers, joined by Jim Obergefell, unveiled plans to introduce legislation that would codify protections for same-sex and interracial marriage in Ohio. Those rights are guaranteed under Obergefell's U.S. Supreme Court case and *Loving v. Virginia*, which means Ohio's gay marriage ban isn't in effect right now. But Democrats fear the U.S. Supreme Court, which overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year, could someday undo those rulings.

Complicating matters: The state Constitution trumps the Ohio Revised Code. That means even if lawmakers change state law, someone would need to place a new amendment before voters to remove the constitutional ban.

Frank LaRose trails in U.S. Senate fundraising

The latest fundraising numbers for Ohio's U.S. Senate race are in – and they don't look great for Secretary of State Frank LaRose.

LaRose raised nearly \$792,000 in the third quarter and first fundraising period of his campaign, according to Federal Election Commission filings. He also loaned his campaign \$250,000. He entered the GOP primary in July, making him the last Republican to join the fray.

Also seeking the nomination are Cleveland businessman Bernie Moreno and state Sen. Matt Dolan, R-Chagrin Fall, who raised roughly the same amount of money last quarter. They also each invested \$3 million of their personal wealth. That leaves LaRose with far less cash on hand than Moreno and Dolan heading into the fourth quarter.

None of the Republicans are close to catching U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, who raised over \$5.5 million in the third quarter.

Listen and subscribe to Ohio Politics Explained on Spotify, Apple, Google Podcasts and TuneIn Radio.