Good Afternoon GPNP Members,

Below is a summary of key public policy issues impacting the Pittsburgh region’s nonprofit sector. The main stories since our last update include:

**It's the last chance to sign up for the 2014 GPNP annual meeting on November 24. Click [here](#) to learn more and register.**

**Congressional News**

- Nancy Pelosi was re-elected as House Minority Leader for the 114th Congress.

**Pennsylvania News**

- The Independent Fiscal Office announced the state is facing a $1.85 billion deficit next fiscal year.
- The Pennsylvania House and Senate used taxpayers’ dollars for 73,890 expenses worth $13.8 million in 2013 spending.

**Aging**

- The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania announced the creation of the Office of Elder Justice to protect seniors from abuse and financial exploitation through reforms to court-appointed guardianships.

**Additional Local News**

- City Councilman Corey O’Connor is expected to introduce legislation mandating that the city hire more people with disabilities and establish a task force to reform employment practices to foster inclusiveness.

**Environment**

- The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* highlighted the “Solarize Allegheny” campaign that aims to grow Pittsburgh neighborhoods and county municipalities’ solar energy infrastructure.
Congressional News


“House Democrats on Tuesday elected Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and her top four lieutenants to remain atop the party in the 114th Congress. The move was hardly a surprise, as none of the current leaders — including Pelosi, Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (Md.), Assistant Leader Jim Clyburn (S.C.), Caucus Chairman Xavier Becerra (Calif.) and Vice Chairman Joe Crowley (N.Y.) — faced challengers in their bids to lead the party for the next two years. But the leadership votes came amid some grumbling from rank-and-file members that the Democrats need a new direction after failing to take the House majority in three straight election cycles. In two of those cycles, 2010 and 2014, they were clobbered.”

Pennsylvania News


“Treasurer Rob McCord says Gov. Tom Corbett’s administration again dipped into a line of credit to boost a flagging general fund. ‘We see a deteriorating financial scenario that casts serious doubt on Pennsylvania’s ability to balance its budget this year,’ McCord said Thursday. ‘The state’s fiscal health remains precarious.’ That was the jab. The Independent Fiscal Office brought the right-hook when it announced the state is facing a $1.85 billion shortfall next fiscal year — an immediate challenge for Gov.-elect Tom Wolf, who will probably face policy roadblocks in a Republican Legislature, too.”


“After being elected to Lehigh County Court in November 2011, Doug Reichley resigned from his job as a Republican state representative. But, unbeknownst to Reichley, his old employer — the Pennsylvania House of Representatives — kept his expense accounts open. On May 14, 2013, $9,648 was transferred into or out of Reichley’s two old accounts and there’s no trace of where the money ended up, according to House financial records obtained by The Morning Call under the Right-to-Know Law. One thing is certain: Reichley said, he didn’t receive or spend the money and he has no idea why his accounts were not closed when he submitted his resignation, effective Dec. 31, 2011, to the House speaker’s office.”

“After warnings from his team about Pennsylvania’s nearly $2 billion projected shortfall, governor-elect Tom Wolf says he still plans to push to increase education funding next year, but the newly elected Democrat acknowledges the end result will depend on negotiations with the General Assembly, which even larger Republican majorities will control in January. ‘The key is that we have a $29 billion budget, and with that amount of money, part of what any governor needs to do is look at priorities,’ Mr. Wolf said in a telephone interview Thursday. ‘There’s still plenty of money to make sure that our commonwealth is spending whatever dollars it has intelligently and that we establish the right priorities.’ ‘Education has to be a priority,’ he said. ‘We’re going to have to find the funds.’”


‘The next state House speaker won't consider more taxes on Pennsylvania natural gas drilling until fellow lawmakers take another look at his plan to privatize liquor stores. ‘If the discussion is about more revenue, that has to be the first place anybody looks.’ Rep. Mike Turzai, R-Bradford Woods, said in Washington County on Friday, two days after fellow House Republicans voted to name him speaker next year.”


“NewsWorks Tonight Host Dave Heller speaks with the new Pa. House Majority Leader, Representative David Reed (R) of Indiana County, whose statewide poverty tour has yielded a report on how to best combat the issue across the state.”


“It’s not suicide. That’s the stance of two Pennsylvanian legislators who recently entered bills into the state House and Senate (explore below) proposing a law similar to Oregon’s Death with Dignity Act, which permits terminally ill adult Oregonians to obtain from their doctor and self-administer a lethal dose of medication. It allowed Brittany Maynard -- a vibrant, outspoken 29-year-old with terminal brain cancer -- to die Nov. 1 in her home.”


“While Pennsylvania gains no tax revenue from expanding pipelines, that’s not the case across the river in New Jersey. The Allentown Morning-Call reports on how the proposed Penn East
pipeline is expected to generate $54,000 for Delaware Township, New Jersey, and $329,000 each year to the local county and school district. But on the Pennsylvania side of the river, the towns, counties and school districts hosting new pipelines get zero tax dollars from the project. That's because Pennsylvania charges no property tax on oil and gas operations, which includes an exemption for pipelines."


"Philadelphia is making some progress on collecting back taxes. That's the word from Philadelphia Revenue Commissioner Clarena Tolson who told City Council her office is doing its best to collect every dollar that is available in back taxes. 'We are collecting more, more aggressively going after all of those properties.' she said. "There are no smoke and mirrors in this.' Changes in legislation and more money for collections have resulted in $16 million more for the School District of Philadelphia, but Tolson said millions more remain uncollected."


"Gov.-elect Tom Wolf has already asked his transition team to sign a code of conduct prohibiting members from accepting gifts, and he plans to implement a similar ban for the executive branch when he takes office Jan. 20. Wolf's Fresh Start policy plan indicates the rule will be simple: "Just say no thanks." For now, the General Assembly has said no thanks to a gift ban of its own -- wrapping up the current session without implementing the ban despite an embarrassing scandal in Philadelphia -- but that may change."


"The state’s Department of Revenue is “cleaning out the queue” of old tax debts and is filing liens at an accelerated pace, thanks to the ongoing installation of a new tax software system. The result has been an autumn spike in business lien filings at county courthouses across Pennsylvania. Lien filings are up about 50 percent over the last few months, compared to the same period a year ago. That works out to thousands of extra filings a month."

Nonprofit Sector News

“When I was in college, I was intimidated by speaking with professors during their office hours. It wasn’t their personalities that scared me; rather, it was their positions of authority. The thought of having to interact with them one on one and the pressure to sound like I knew what I was talking about was terrifying. Then in graduate school, when I was invited to address my professors by their first name, I came to see them more as thought partners than judges of my intellectual worth. Thinking back, part of what allowed that shift in attitude to happen was feeling less pressure to produce great grades and more freedom to focus on learning.”


“The inaugural round of grants from the federally funded pay-for-success program is already spurring growth of performance-based contracting nationwide, according to a recently published report. ‘It is a little like throwing a match on some dry kindling,’ said Patrick Lester, director of the Social Innovation Research Center and the report’s author. In October, the program, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, announced $12-million for eight grant recipients. They included the Harvard Kennedy School Social Impact Bond Technical Assistance Lab, Third Sector Capital Partners, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing. The grantees play a critical intermediary role in performance-based contracting, identifying communities in need and making subgrants to government agencies and direct service providers.”


Pittsburgh and Local Budgets


“If a proposed $65 per unit landlord registration fee passes Pittsburgh City Council, the city stands to gain a new source of revenue -- and contact information for landowners whose property attracts complaints. An ordinance requiring landlords to register their properties with the city was submitted to council on Nov. 10, the same day Mayor Bill Peduto unveiled his proposed 2015 budget. But '[w]e've discussed this in council for the past few years,' said City Councilor Natalia Rudiak. When a rental property becomes a blight on the neighborhood, 'it can take us months to track down the people who are responsible.'”

Additional Local News

“City Councilman Corey O’Connor wants Pittsburgh to serve as an example when it comes to employing people with disabilities. Mr. O’Connor is expected to introduce legislation Tuesday calling the city to hire more people with disabilities and establish a task force to recommend ways to ‘ameliorate employment practices within the city of Pittsburgh to achieve openness and inclusiveness in the work place.’”

Aging


“Compared to older adults of other races, African-American senior citizens in Allegheny County are poorer, unhealthier, more isolated, in worse housing and are more dependent on others for services. And, of course, they’re happier. You read that right. The paradox of African-Americans’ positive attitudes is one curious highlight of a 121-page report from the University Center for Social and Urban Research taking stock of Allegheny County’s older adults. The researchers based at the University of Pittsburgh analyzed a wide range of objective, factual data from government sources and added a survey to obtain seniors’ subjective impressions of their lives.”


“The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania will create a state Office of Elder Justice to protect seniors from abuse and financial exploitation, primarily through proposed reforms to court-appointed guardianships. The new office was recommended by a 38-member Elder Law Task Force, which released its report today after 18 months of research. When the elderly in Pennsylvania can no longer handle their personal or financial affairs, a judge can appoint a guardian to make decisions for them. Often, guardianship can be a lifeline to a senior whose life or estate could be in jeopardy.”

Health Care

"More than half of calls to U.S. poison control centers about energy drinks like Red Bull and Monster are for children younger than 6, some suffering seizures and heart problems. The study bolsters the idea that energy drinks aren’t safe for children and should carry explicit risk warnings, said Steven Lipshultz, chairman of pediatrics at Wayne State University in Detroit. People of all ages with underlying health conditions should be vigilant about the heavily caffeinated beverages, he said. The data were presented Sunday at the American Heart Association’s annual meeting in Chicago."


“Health researchers at Drexel University are working to uncover new and more sophisticated ways to pinpoint who is most at risk for diabetes and heart disease. Some of the work is focused on Philadelphia, which holds the unfortunate No. 1 spot among the largest cities in the U.S. for the proportion of residents with diabetes. … Internist Ana Núñez and her team study health disparities related to cardiovascular disease, but she said may people don't realize the link to diabetes.Philadelphia has a large population of African-Americans, and doctors have known for some time that black Americans have an increased risk for diabetes. But Núñez, associate dean for urban health equity education and research at the Drexel College of Medicine, said when she and other doctors are counting up risk factors, it may be important to note more than an individual's race.”

Commentary: “Cleaning Up the Health-Care Mess.” Professor at University of Texas Medical School Herbert L. Fred. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. November 16, 2014.


Human Services


“Since 2010, the Half in Ten campaign has tracked its progress toward achieving its goal of cutting poverty in half in 10 years by examining 21 different indicators of economic security and opportunity. We began this project in the immediate aftermath of the Great Recession, which
technically ended in June 2009. Monitoring our indicators since then we have seen evidence of a slowly recovering economy with improving unemployment rates, yet far too many indicators have remained virtually stagnant for years. Between 2012 and 2013, the percentage of Americans with incomes below the poverty line—a mere $18,552 per year for a family of three—declined slightly, from 15 percent to 14.5 percent."


“Right now, ground zero in the debate about policies affecting the homeless isn’t a large, bustling metropolis like New York or Chicago, but Fort Lauderdale, Florida, a small beach city of about 170,000. On the one hand, there’s Arnold Abbott, a 90-year-old World War II vet and chef who has been feeding the homeless in the city’s parks and beaches for decades—and who says he has no intention of stopping, despite a new ordinance passed last month restricting feeding in public places. Efforts to stop him, including three citations in the past couple weeks, have drawn a national spotlight.”


“In an economy still short on jobs, it can be hard to know what fields will need enough workers to justify training a lot of people. In some cases, the demand is pretty reliable. Community College of Allegheny County runs an auto mechanics program that works with local dealerships. Students spend a semester in the on-site college laboratory learning about car repair, then go to dealerships for real-world experience before returning to the classrooms. Students in the union apprenticeship programs are trained at the college while working for plumbers, carpenters and iron workers unions, making novice wages but eventually working their way to journeyman wages.”


“Maybe it was Tony Stanley’s furrowed brow that was keeping him from getting a job. Or maybe it was his work history in many fields instead of just one. Or maybe it was that he was aiming too high, or maybe too low. The 50-year-old Norwalk resident has worked in a mental health center and as a security company employee, but has been unemployed for almost a year, nearly six months longer than what the federal government defines as “long-term unemployment.” Imposing, athletic and impeccably dressed, Stanley picks up pocket change by refereeing high school basketball games, but he doesn’t have a full-time job.”

Education


“At Pittsburgh Sunnyside PreK-8 in Stanton Heights, 76 percent of black third-graders are proficient or advanced in reading -- the critical point for future learning success -- but only 17 percent are at Arlington PreK-8. At Obama 6-12 in East Liberty, all eighth-graders took algebra -- a gateway to high-level math learning -- but at five schools, eighth-grade algebra wasn’t offered. In its 10th anniversary report to the community released Monday, A+ Schools provided a wealth of data that point to a wide range of results among students and among schools. The report covers 56 district schools and seven charter schools.”


“A new study by Research for Action has found that Pennsylvania’s cyber-charter sector continues to yield subpar results on the state’s standardized tests. Using the state’s recently released school performance profile data for 2013-14, RFA found the average School Performance Profile score for the cyber-charter sector was 48.9 – well below the averages for the state’s brick and mortar charters and traditional public schools. To date, no cyber charter has earned a SPP of 70 or higher, the state Department of Education’s quality threshold. The department is now reviewing three applications for new cyber charters. Last year the department – which hasn't approved a new cyber charter since 2013 – rejected eight applicants.”


“During the 2013-14 legislative session, Gov. Tom Corbett and the legislature eliminated the state’s 50 percent pension reimbursement to charter schools, putting an end to what many called the pension "double dip." The elimination of the double dip marked the first time since the charter law was enacted in 1997 and the cyber charter law was adopted in 2002 that any reforms to those laws have been adopted. ‘We’ve learned a lot in those 17/18 years about things that can be operated more efficiently, ways to do things better and a lot of that has been in a number of bills. Every year, in every session there has been a charter reform bill that has come up and every year it has failed for slightly different reasons in each case. Probably 85 percent of what is in the bill everyone agrees with and it is that 15 percent that has caused all the conflict and has stopped the passage of the bill,’ stated Robert Fayich, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools.”

“An uncomfortable fact: Pittsburgh Public Schools has as much as a 27-point racial achievement gap in its schools, with white students overall scoring significantly better than black students in many institutions. To try to address the problem, the district is asking teachers, administrators and staff to make themselves uncomfortable by examining their own racial histories and attitudes, including using words that can be emotionally charged, such as ‘whiteness,’ which refers to someone of any race after the social norms of the dominant culture, and ‘white privilege,’ which refers to societal benefits whites receive beyond what others receive.”


“Redshirting — a term borrowed from college sports where athletes are kept on the bench for a year until they're bigger and more skilled — has fueled a fierce national debate among parents, educators, psychologists and researchers as kindergarten curriculums have grown from mostly play to more demanding academic lessons once taught at higher grade levels. Advocates say redshirting gives children a chance to grow up, benefiting them in the long term and enabling them to begin school on a positive note. Critics say the practice unfairly labels children as being ‘behind’ at the start of their school years. Studies of redshirted students have produced evidence bolstering both sides.”


“Our nation is currently experiencing growing levels of income and wealth inequality, which are contributing to longstanding racial and ethnic gaps in education outcomes and other areas. These large gaps, in combination with the significant demographic changes already underway, are threatening the economic future of our country. Thus, closing racial and ethnic gaps is not only key to fulfilling the potential of people of color; it is also crucial to the well-being of our nation. This report quantifies the economic benefits of closing one of the most harmful racial and ethnic gaps: the educational achievement gap that exists between black and Hispanic children and native-born white children.”


“Students like Palakkode put CMU on the list of the 25 U.S. universities with the largest number of international students. Although CMU ranks 25th — it has 5,501 international students in a student body of 13,258 — international enrollment accounts for 41 percent of its students. By that measure, the school Andrew Carnegie founded to train the children of mill workers may be among the most international in the nation. … The numbers, detailed Monday in the new Institute of International Education’s Open Doors survey, show international enrollment at U.S. universities increased from 819,644 last year to 886,052, nearly double the number 20 years
ago. China, by far, sends the most students.”


“Revenue that U.S. colleges and universities collect from tuition is growing at the slowest rate in a decade, according to Moody’s Investors Service. Public universities expect a 1.9 percent increase in net tuition revenue while private nonprofit schools are forecasting average growth of 2.7 percent this academic year, Moody’s said today in an annual report. The sluggish growth is the result of smaller freshmen classes combined with the public’s greater scrutiny of the cost of going to college, Moody’s said. ‘A significant and growing number of public and private universities are experiencing notable challenges,’ Moody’s wrote.”


“With college application season upon them, a lot of stressed-out high school students appear to be following the same path Ms. Verola did: Faced with an increasingly competitive landscape, they have begun applying to more colleges than anyone would previously have thought possible. For members of the Class of 2015 who are looking at more competitive colleges, their overtaxed counselors say, 10 applications is now commonplace; 20 is taking on a familiar ring; even 30 is not beyond imagining. And why stop there?”


Environment


“For solar power advocates, this part of the state has been a relatively dark and gloomy place. Allegheny County is home to fewer than 3 percent of the more than 7,000 total solar-powered generators registered statewide. Including Allegheny, the nine counties that make up
southwestern Pennsylvania have just 6 percent of the state’s solar installations. Meanwhile, the eight counties surrounding suburban Philadelphia have more than half. ‘Western Pennsylvania is very far behind,’ said Sharon Pillar, vice president of SmartPower, a nonprofit marketing firm in Washington, D.C., that promotes alternative energy.”


“Some places that rarely have earthquakes are having them now, and officials have linked some of them to fracking or related activities. While Marcellus Shale drilling has meant billions of dollars for Pennsylvania, across the state line in Ohio it’s also meant some shaking, according to state experts. ‘There was a huge boom. This big crashing boom,’ That’s how Valerie Dearing describes one of the larger quakes. She happens to be an anti-fracking activist, but others in Eastern Ohio felt it, too.”


“The election of a new governor combined with delays caused by a legal settlement might imperil plans by Gov. Tom Corbett and the legislature to raise $95 million by signing new natural gas leases on public lands this fiscal year. Gov.-elect Tom Wolf, a Democrat, campaigned on a pledge to reinstate the ban on new oil and gas leases in state parks and forests that was in place from October 2010 through this May. His inauguration is Jan. 20.”


“As the vegetation management coordinator at Duquesne Light, Ms. Arkett supervises a department that scours thousands of miles of power lines searching for any type of tree, plant or shrub that might compromise power service. Sometimes that means pruning limbs. Other times that means removing a perfectly healthy, beautiful tree. ‘Any tree that's lovely and healthy and has to go either because of a new power line or an existing one, it is painful,’ she said.”


“A rehashed report from Common Cause PA and Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania assert that Marcellus Shale drillers spent $8 million on campaign contributions and $41 million on lobbying in Pennsylvania since 2007. But is that a lot? When compared to government unions, it's a drop in the bucket. In terms of campaign expenditures, just a handful of the largest state government unions spent nearly 4 times what Marcellus shale drillers did.”

“Let’s take a moment to meet the new leadership of our state’s legislature. And to check out a few numbers that could portend a rough time for the guy who will be the next governor. The first number? Try $49 million, the amount of money spent by the energy industry on lobbying and political contributions in Pennsylvania between 2007 and 2014. That figure comes from a new site, Marcellusmoney.org, and a just-completed study by the site’s operator, Common Cause PA, the non-partisan group that promotes integrity in government. The new majority leadership in the state House and Senate reflects two shifts – an ideological one towards the right, led by baseball bat-wielding garbage guy Sen. Scott Wagner, and a geographic one, from suburban Philly to the central and western portions of the state – in other words, shale country.”


Corrections System and Public Safety


“Corrections officers today warned members of the House Judiciary Committee that continued understaffing at state prisons is dangerous to staff and inmates, and costly to the state. Tim Walsh, executive vice president of the Pennsylvania State Corrections Officers Association (PSCOA), the union representing corrections officers across the state, told the committee that every state correctional institution (SCI) in the commonwealth is currently operating at staffing levels below the Department of Correction’s own projected level of need. The Department operated under a two-month hiring freeze from May through July.”


“In some cities, disabled drivers trying to find handicap-accessible parking spaces are often out of luck, because many of those spots are taken by able-bodied people who use disabled parking placards to get a choice spot or save a few bucks. The misuse of these permits, which usually hang on rearview mirrors or sit on dashboards, is a growing problem. It is especially acute in large cities, where parking is expensive and availability is limited.”
Consumer Protection


“It’s a good news/bad news situation for depositors at Pittsburgh-area banks. On the upside, people looking for free checking accounts have plenty of choices. On the downside, anyone counting on a decent return on their money will surely be disappointed. Overall, seven of the region’s top 10 banks offer free checking accounts with no minimum balance requirement and no maintenance fees, according to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s annual bank fee survey. That’s unchanged from last year and just one less institution offering free checking than two years ago.”

Arts


“Here is the paradox of public broadcasting: buoyed by programs such as ‘Downton Abbey’ and Ken Burns’ “The Roosevelts: An Intimate History,” PBS has never been more popular. On the other hand, some industry insiders claim adhering to the 60-year-old model of over-the-air TV spells doom. ‘The key programming for public television [has been] all disappearing into cable, and then the satellite universe,’said Kenneth Tiven, a former executive for WQEX Pittsburgh, which was a non-commercial, sister station of WQED. PBS is a nonprofit owned and operated by member stations like WQED.”


“WQED Multimedia has spent much of 2014 celebrating its 60-year history, but as winter approaches, there are divergent ideas about its future. In October, the public broadcasting enterprise eliminated four jobs, while reducing work hours for five staffers including Chris Moore, one of its most recognizable personalities. In a statement, WQED spokesman George Hazimanolis said the reductions (from a reported staff of 80) were prompted by declining government support and ‘a fast-changing media and technological landscape.’”

