

# Have a voice

## When employers help shape HR policy, it can make a big difference

INTERVIEWED BY MARK SCOTT

The Ohio General Assembly recently sent 33 bills to Gov. John Kasich, some of which are expected to positively impact issues affecting the HR profession in areas of workforce development and unemployment insurance.

House Bill 486, for instance, requires coordination and collaboration among Ohio's three major workforce development programs: Adult Basic Literacy Education, the Carl Perkins career technical program and the Workforce Investment Act.

The state agencies that oversee these programs are directed to work with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT) to create a single state workforce plan for a waiver from certain federal requirements. The bill also requires the OWT to review the remaining 88 workforce-related programs and organize them into a comprehensive structure.

It's now up to employers and their respective HR teams to be engaged with this effort to ensure it ultimately leads to a better pool of talent for Ohio businesses, says Tony Fiore, Of Counsel for Kegler, Brown, Hill + Ritter.

"If you're not providing feedback as experts in the HR profession to individuals writing the laws or creating public policy, at the end of the day, compliance is something you really can't complain about," Fiore says.

*Smart Business* spoke with Fiore about the importance of having a strong voice in the policies that shape the state's companies.

### What factors led to the passage of HB 486?

Ohio has training programs geared to building a stronger workforce. But for too long, they have operated in silos, making them blind to what is happening outside of their specific areas of focus. The result is programs that continue despite not

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meeting the objectives that led to their implementation.

Talk to your political representatives about your company's needs and explain which programs are helpful and which ones offer less support. Are there skills or talents absent in the existing pool of candidates that you hire from? Is this group lacking certain technical skills that community colleges, higher education institutes or workforce development institutes could easily incorporate into their curriculum? These are the people who can effect changes that benefit your employees and your business.

### What is another area of HR policy that affects employers?

The federal unemployment tax has risen over the last four years whether or not your company terminated an employee. While unemployment is down and an emphasis by Gov. Kasich and lawmakers has been placed on job creation, Ohio's unemployment insurance loan balance is still the third-highest in the nation at \$1.38 billion.

Since the economic downturn of 2007, the state has been forced to borrow these funds from the federal unemployment account to pay unemployment insurance benefits.

Federal law states that until this loan balance is paid in full, Ohio employers will pay an additional \$21 per employee each year to repay the loan. Since the state has

carried a loan balance for the last six years, employers are paying \$105 per employee for 2014 and face another \$21 add-on in 2015.

HB 329 would require the director of budget and management to make payments on the balance of amounts borrowed by the state from the federal government. But many believe a more comprehensive unemployment compensation reform package is needed to address the current loan balance and rebuild the unemployment insurance trust fund to a position of strength to weather the next downturn.

### Why should HR professionals care who wins the elections in November?

Thomas Jefferson had a great quote: 'America is not governed by the majority, but a majority of those who participate.' If you're not providing some voice to those individuals making decisions that affect your business, you waive your right to complain.

In November, Ohio electors will have the opportunity to vote for all statewide officeholders, all 99 seats in the Ohio House, 17 of the 33 seats in the Ohio Senate, all 16 U.S. Congressional seats and two Ohio Supreme Court justices. The importance of educated voters cannot be overstated and leaders need to be informed about HR issues that affect Ohio's businesses. ●