

From: RGPPC <[RGPPC@rgppc.org](mailto:RGPPC@rgppc.org)>  
To: [RGPPCRGPPC@rgppc.org](mailto:RGPPCRGPPC@rgppc.org)  
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# REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS

## PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Republican Governors Public Policy Committee  
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### Taxes and Budget

Ricketts signs state budget bills with no vetoes ([The Lincoln Journal-Star](#)) – Gov. Pete Ricketts wasn't happy with all that he saw in the state budget handed over from the Legislature last week. But neither was he unhappy enough to veto any items in the \$8.6 million, two-year budget. He signed the mainline budget adjustments (LB956) for the 2015-17 budget and the cash transfers bill (LB957) as presented to him Wednesday afternoon. Ricketts said he was concerned about several items, including a \$1 million increase in aid to community colleges. The mid-two year budget adjustment should be used to address issues that couldn't be managed within the budget, he said. Ricketts said he decided not to veto those items in a spirit of give and take with the Legislature and recognizing very few days are left in the session, with a lot left to do, including addressing property tax decreases.

### Transportation and Infrastructure

Governor Pence to sign Regional Cities bill at Goshen Theater ([The Goshen News](#)) - Indiana Gov. Mike Pence will be at the Goshen Theater next week for a ceremonial bill signing regarding the state's \$126 million Regional Cities grant initiative. The overall goal of the grant program is to leverage private and local government investment into economic development and quality of life projects. In order to be considered for the grant funding, each participating region was required to compile a regional development plan complete with the top economic development and quality of life projects they would like to pursue should they be selected as a grant recipient. The regional development plan for the Regional Cities of Northern Indiana consortium includes 39 projects totaling more than \$700 million in investment for the region.

Deadly Railroad Crossings Challenge States ([Pew Stateline](#)) – Sarah Feinberg, who heads the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), recently urged state transportation chiefs to accompany railroad inspectors during their required monthly checks of lights and gates at railroad crossings. A top priority, Feinberg said, should be to verify that the traffic lights and crossing lights are properly sequenced, and that there is enough time for traffic to clear a nearby intersection before a train enters a crossing. More than 22,000 people were killed at U.S. railroad crossings in the last 40 years, according to Operation Lifesaver, a nonprofit focused on railroad crossing safety. But railroad crossings have become safer over time, thanks to the installation of gates and lights at more crossings, more timed traffic signals and public education efforts.

### Energy and Environment

(Texas) Lawmakers Mull Tweaks to Eminent Domain Law to Favor Landowners ([The Texas Tribune](#)) – State lawmakers next session may renew an age-old clash between two intrinsically Texan values: property rights and energy interests. The Senate Committee on State Affairs heard testimony Tuesday on whether to tighten eminent domain laws to benefit landowners battling pipeline companies, electric utilities, public agencies or other entities seeking to condemn land their land for public use. Ahead of the 2017 legislative session, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick charged lawmakers with studying whether landowners were being fairly compensated for lost property.

Truth or consequences in energy policy ([The Hill](#)) - The CPP was originally introduced in August 2015 by the EPA and the president and was called "historic" in terms of reducing carbon pollution from power plants. The Supreme Court recently stayed the implementation pending further judicial review. President Obama recently told Democratic supporters to not "despair" over the Supreme Court ruling to stay the CPP, as he saw "strong legal footing." He said that "the centerpiece of our climate plan involves ... reducing [states'] carbon emissions." The stay also surprised and delighted many Republicans and encouraged pushback on regulations and specifically the implementation of the plan.

### Veterans Initiatives

Ricketts: Home will Take Care of Veterans who Took Care of Us ([NTV](#)) – Calling it a new chapter of respect for veterans, state and local leaders officially break ground for the new Central Nebraska Veterans Home. Governor Pete Ricketts said it's about honoring those who served. "We owe them a debt of gratitude we can never fully repay," he told the large crowd gathered in Kearney. Ricketts said Nebraskans can be proud of the new home. Officials say members will have the dignity of private rooms with modern features. John Hilgert, state director of veterans homes said, "It has smaller units, you don't have long corridors, so you have neighborhood of sorts with a number of veterans, so it's more of a home-style, home feel to it." Jim Cada, chairman of the Veterans Home Board said, "We're going to have the best home in the country, probably in the world for veterans and I'm very proud to be a part of that."

#### Government Efficiency

(Illinois) Governor Touts New Improvements Within Government ([Fox Illinois](#)) – Governor Rauner and agency heads were in Springfield on Wednesday to tout progress being made on updating the state's IT structure. Gov. Rauner started the Department of Innovation and Technology about 60 days ago. Wednesday, Leaders from the Department of Corrections talked about how they have started using an online-based system to monitor offenders reducing paperwork. The Department of Financial and Professional Regulation has also moved to processing licenses online.

#### Public Safety

Md. House committee approves repeal of some mandatory minimums ([WaPo](#)) – A Maryland House committee on Wednesday made significant changes to a criminal justice bill that is making its way through the General Assembly, eliminating mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and increasing penalties for leaders of gangs and organized crime. The House Judiciary Committee voted 17-3 to make those changes and others to the bill, which is aimed at reducing the state's prison population and costs and alleviating sentencing disparities that have disproportionately affected African American men. The bill passed by the House committee is vastly different from the one the Senate approved last week.

Governor Christie Boosts Homeless Aid In New Jersey ([CBS Philly](#)) - New Jersey Governor Chris Christie traveled to South Jersey to announce expansion of a program to combat homelessness in the Garden State. Christie's proposed budget for the next fiscal year contains an extra 5.4 million dollars to pay for 500 rental vouchers for chronically homeless families and veterans. "This is not about anything other than serving families who need it," Christie said, "and I know that New Jersey is filled with compassionate citizens who believe this is part of the role of government to play." The Governor credits a move to centralize services paired with taking advice from social service experts in the field with bringing down homelessness 41% statewide over eight years, including a 25% reduction for families with children in the last year alone.

#### Education

Snyder signs bill sending \$48.7 million to DPS ([The Detroit Free Press](#)) – Gov. Rick Snyder signed a bill this morning that will send \$48.7 million to the financially struggling Detroit Public Schools district to ensure that it doesn't run out of cash and be forced to shut its doors next month. The supplemental spending bill was given final approval by the Legislature last week after DPS transition manager Steven Rhodes, a retired U.S. bankruptcy judge, told lawmakers that the districts was poised to run out of cash on April 8 and force payless paydays on district employees.

Snow day waiver bill goes to Gov. Matt Bevin's desk ([The Crittenden Press](#)) - The General Assembly is sending legislation to the governor that would require the state to waive snow days that school districts are unable to make up. House Bill 111 received final passage on a vote in the House of 95-3. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Linda Belcher, D-Shepherdsville, started as a measure to require public schools to post the state's child abuse hotline number. It was amended to also include snow day provisions. School districts impacted by snow or other school calendar-altering events are required to work with the state to meet all 1,062 required annual instructional hours, if at all possible, by June 5. If the district attempts to meet all required hours and cannot, the state would be obligated under HB 111 to waive any hours that remain.

Baker push for vocational schools wins backing ([The Salem News](#)) - Advocates pushing for more resources to help move vocational students into careers are aligned with Gov. Charlie Baker as they seek budgetary increases this year and \$75 million in bond authorization to buy school equipment and pay for expansions. Rep. Alice Peisch, a Wellesley Democrat who is co-chairwoman of the Education Committee, said "there is an appreciation for the value" of vocational education and business and education can team up for a "win win." There is also a need for vigilance as public institutions partner with business so that schools don't become "a state-funded satellite of the business," she said.

#### Healthcare

Governor Daugaard Announces Mental Health Task Force ([KDLT](#)) - A grant of about \$300,000 will bolster the work of a task force proposed by the state Supreme Court's chief justice to study issues surrounding mentally ill people entering the criminal justice system. Officials on Wednesday announced the grant from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust to the state Department of Health. The state is providing more than \$100,000 through in-kind contributions to support the work. Gov. Dennis Daugaard says the group is set to analyze why and how individuals with mental illness become involved with the justice system.

Utah legalizes needle exchange programs ([AP](#)) - Utah has joined over two dozen states that have legalized needle exchange programs in the hopes of curbing the state's rise in illegal drug usage and the spread of diseases contracted through dirty needles. The state's Republican governor recently signed the proposal, which all but two lawmakers in the staunchly conservative Legislature who voted on the measure approved. "It's pretty innovative for our legislators here in this conservative state to pass something like that," Jeff Marrott, spokesman for Utah's substance abuse and mental health division, said Wednesday. The measure signed by Gov. Gary Herbert on Friday allows public and private organizations to take used needles from anyone and provide them new, sterile ones in return.