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Taxes and Budget

N.J. Supreme Court hands Christie big win on pensions (NJ.com) – The state Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a landmark 2011 law freezing cost-of-living adjustments for retired government workers, a decision that will slowly erode the value of pensions paid to 800,000 current and former public employees. The 6-1 ruling is a major legal victory for Gov. Chris Christie's administration, which warned that restoring the annual increases would hurl a pension system already underfunded by \$59 billion closer to insolvency. "State taxpayers have won another huge victory," Christie said. "One that spares them from the burden of unaffordable benefit increases for public employee unions."

Gov. Nikki Haley praises budget, but issues \$41M in vetoes (WYFF) - Gov. Nikki Haley says South Carolina's latest spending plan will help the state's students, health services, and law enforcement agencies. Haley says the budget begins to address the new realities of the state's pension system while bolstering mental health programs and efforts to combat substance abuse and domestic violence. But Haley has problems with other parts of the budget and issued 51 vetoes targeting a total of \$41,145,000 in spending. In a letter to House Speaker Jay Lucas, Haley says some items in the budget "represent the worst kind of legislative deal-making—pork, pet projects, earmarks and micromanagement of state agencies." "These items," Haley wrote, "do not serve our citizens of South Carolina but rather serve the entrenched few who believe tax dollars exist to bring home pork projects."

Energy and Environment

(Idaho) State to adopt water sustainability policy (The Idaho Mountain Express) – At the request of Gov. Butch Otter, the Idaho Water Resource Board has developed a draft water sustainability policy. Following public meetings, the policy will be finalized and presented to the 2017 Legislature as an addition to the State Water Plan, according to a news release from the board. The draft water sustainability policy is three pages long, beginning with a policy statement, implementation strategies and key milestones moving forward in water planning and management. The policy emphasizes private property rights, wise use of water to meet a multiplicity of interests and accommodating growth.

Martinez Announces \$1.8 Million Water Infrastructure Investment (KRWG) - Governor Susana Martinez announced the New Mexico Economic Development Department will invest \$1.8 million in Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) funds to build a well serving the area around the booming borderplex in Santa Teresa. "When we put our dollars into critical infrastructure projects throughout the state, they help put more New Mexicans to work immediately and lay a stronger foundation for long-term economic growth," Governor Martinez said. "The booming borderplex in Santa Teresa continues to serve as a strong example of the power of investing in infrastructure projects to help our communities continue to harness their potential."

Economic Development

Alabama creates new Office of Minority Affairs (The Birmingham Business Journal) – Gov. Robert Bentley officially established the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs today after signing legislation permanently creating a new cabinet-level office. Directed by Nichelle Williams Nix, the office will advise the governor on issues concerning women and minorities in Alabama. The goal of the recently formed office is to promote the wellbeing and quality of life of these groups, and will focus on areas including education, health, political participation, housing, civil rights, criminal justice and race relations. The office will offer policy recommendations to the governor as part of his Great State 2019 Plan.

Arizona job growth among fastest in the country (KTAR) - 2016 is shaping up to be a good year when it comes to jobs in the Grand Canyon state. Kiplinger's magazine said Arizona is growing jobs at the second fastest rate in the country, with 2016 job growth at 3.2 percent. Only Idaho is growing jobs faster, at 3.5 percent. Arizona is expected to create 84,380 jobs this year, up from 66,380 new jobs a year ago. "We're promoting the state, we're starting to see people come back to the state, and we've got the right policies on place," said Arizona Governor Doug Ducey. "This is a good place for businesses." The magazine said the state's sunny climate and low taxes are a big part of Arizona's job growth. Ducey said that low taxes are

very important to businesses.

GE to open digital ops center in Atlanta ([The Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)) - General Electric plans a 250-person digital operations center in Atlanta, officials announced Thursday. The company will make a \$3 million investment in the new center, which will employ a range of engineers, techies, operations and service desk staff, according to statements by state and GE officials. The new center is part of the company's efforts to centralize "digital capabilities from across GE in a single organization," the announcement said. "These new positions will join the growing IT organization within GE Digital that is helping GE become the premier digital industrial company," said Chris Drumgoole, vice president and chief technology officer of GE.

Public Safety

Greater access to heroin overdose antidote will save lives, Alabama officials say ([AP](#)) - Alabama public health officials are praising a newly enacted law that is meant to expand access to a drug that can reverse opioid overdoses. Alabama Department of Public Health officials said in a statement Thursday that the legislation allows pharmacists to distribute naloxone and unlimited refills to people who may be called for help during an overdose and people who may be at risk of having an overdose. "This action will help prevent deaths from opioid overdoses," State Health Officer Dr. Tom Miller said. "Naloxone blocks opioid receptors and reverses the effects of a potential overdose from drugs including heroin, morphine and oxycodone. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the drug may be used in the form of a nasal spray or as an injection. Officials say expanded access to the drug could help first responders save lives during emergencies.

Governor Snyder To Sign 'Shooter Alert' Package Into Law ([WEMU](#)) - Police in Michigan would be allowed to send cell phone alerts to warn the public of mass shooting incidents under a package of legislation sent to Governor Rick Snyder. The state House and Senate gave final approval Thursday to bills that were introduced following the February 20th random slayings of six people and wounding of two others in the Kalamazoo area.

Education

(Oklahoma) Governor signs measure recognizing outstanding high school grads ([The Shawnee News-Star](#)) - Legislation to reward and recognize outstanding high school graduates has now been signed into law. Gov. Mary Fallin added her signature to Senate Bill 929 on Monday. The measure creates the 2016 Workforce Oklahoma Academic High School Diploma Recognition Act. Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, school districts will be authorized to implement graduation recognitions on standard diplomas for students who have met academic excellence if a district chooses to do so. The recognition may also be included on the student's high school transcript. Sharp explained the three tiered diploma places emphasis on academic performance where it belongs—on the student.

Healthcare

Scott seeks \$1.1 billion in federal funding to combat Zika ([ABC 10](#)) - Governor Rick Scott, who declared Zika a public health emergency three months ago, Thursday ramped up the call for federal funding. He appeared at Roundtable talks with local officials in Tampa and then in Miami at the headquarters of the Miami-Dade Health Department. "We all send our tax dollars to Washington. We expect them to do their job," Scott said. "This is a national issue." Florida's current efforts to combat Zika include educating the public about mosquito protection practices, and targeting mosquito control in areas where people test positive for the Zika virus. Florida lawmakers are jointly backing the U.S. Senates bill for more \$1.1 billion in Zika funding. A House bill offers about a third of that. Florida Sen. Bill Nelson filed a bill Thursday to earmark an annual \$130 million for local mosquito control and for Zika testing at public health laboratories.

(Texas) Doctors, Telemedicine Companies Meet to Plot New Course ([The Texas Tribune](#)) - Though many expected a messy fight over Texas' telemedicine rules next year, medical and industry groups are coming together to try to hammer out a compromise over how health care can be provided remotely. The question is whether the coalition can keep the peace between doctors, telemedicine companies and health insurers until state lawmakers convene and take up the issue in 2017 — all while a federal lawsuit challenges the state's existing rules governing long-distance health care. Texas, home to both a business-friendly climate and an influential physician lobby, has long grappled with the practice of telemedicine, in which remote, sometimes out-of-state doctors can make diagnoses and write prescriptions after consulting with patients by phone or on the Internet.

States Attack a Severe Doctor Shortage ([Pew Stateline](#)) - Earlier this month, dignitaries gathered at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro to cut the ribbon on a new medical school, only the second in a state with a dire shortage of doctors. The school will greet an incoming class of 115 students in August, but it will not belong to the state university. The university will work with the private New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine, which will train future doctors in a leased building on campus. The arrangement is built on the premise that the best way Arkansas can attract and retain doctors in a state that has among the fewest physicians per capita and among the unhealthiest residents is to educate and train them in-state. The Arkansas initiative is one of several that states are undertaking to address a doctor shortage that is going to get worse in much of the nation, especially in states with large rural areas or high concentrations of minorities. States such as Georgia and Texas are increasing their number of medical residencies under the same premise as Arkansas:

the idea that doctors are more likely to remain in the states where they train.