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Ohio Statehouse Update: Just As In Business, Relationships Paramount When Working With Legislators

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Just like the students who head back to school in August and the birds that start their journey south for the winter, legislators began their migration to Columbus in September. And your U. S. senators and congressmen are back at work in Washington.

Committees are meeting, but no official actions are anticipated in Ohio until October because both the Senate and House cancelled voting sessions for September. But that does not mean legislative activity stopped. In Washington over the coming weeks, we will monitor developments around the debt ceiling and budget negotiations, and the impact of a potential impasse and government shutdown, both locally and nationally.

In the Ohio General Assembly, special committees continued to meet during the summer recess, some travelling the state to gather information for possible legislation later this year. These included the House Higher Education Reform Study Committee; the House Prescription Drug Addiction and Health Care Reform Study Committee; and the House Tax Reform Study Committee.

Dozens of bills were introduced over the summer break and will begin working their way through the legislature this fall. The tally so far: 194 bills in the Senate and another 272 in the House.

If history is any barometer, only around 20% of those bills will become law. One of our strengths at Vorys Advisors and Vorys is helping you sort through the maze of legislation so you can decide where to focus your attention.

So what were legislators doing over the summer break? Most legislators use this time in their districts, meeting with constituents and participating in local activities. As a former legislator, I can assure you time management in the district is much more difficult than when you are in Columbus. When you are home, you must make appointments to see everyone. In Columbus, everyone comes to see you.

During the first week in September, 70 of the 132 state legislators participated in the 2013 Policy Conference at Salt Fork State Park sponsored by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. Since 1989, it has been a signature event during the first year of each two-year General Assembly session. And while there are sessions to discuss various issues and trends, the major attraction for many legislators is the ability to socialize with members from both parties from the Senate and House.

Strange as it may seem, legislators do not have many opportunities to socialize with one another in Columbus. This makes it difficult for members to get to know one another and develop relationships. This is especially true for building working relationships between Senate and House members, not to mention between Republicans and Democrats.

One side effect of this is a more partisan atmosphere. Personal relationships help break down barriers.

Relationships are key to many successful businesses, and they certainly are for legislators. The sharing of information and ideas leads to more substantive discussions on key issues.

Members of the Vorys Advisors team and the Vorys law firm work hard to develop relationships with legislators so we can be more effective in representing you. We can be even more effective if you also have personal relationships with your respective senator and representative. It is much easier to communicate your support for or opposition to a piece of legislation if you already have a relationship with the person representing you in Columbus or Washington.

Some think you must host or attend a fundraiser for legislators to get their attention. While that certainly helps, there are other options. Most legislators attend chamber of commerce, school and community functions. These present good opportunities for you to introduce yourself and talk about your business.

Don't be afraid to approach them in what you think is a social setting. They expect and encourage it.

You can also invite legislators to your business to show them the jobs you provide and the impact you have on the local community. It is a chance to tell them how the issues that they will be debating – such as taxes or regulations – affect you. It is especially attractive to legislators if the visit involves a short meeting with a group of employees.

You never know when you might feel the need to contact your senator or representative. When that day comes, it can be very helpful to start that communication with, "You may not remember me, but we ...". You will get their attention.

And remember, we are here to help you as well, both in Columbus and Washington. It is never too early to start building those relationships.

For more information about Vorys Advisors, visit vorysadvisors.com.