**Agricultural Mid-Biennium Review Bill Withers In Senate**

**Provided by BAO**

A wide-ranging bill the House loaded with contentious provisions on telecommunications regulation, the Great Lakes Compact, fracking chemicals, sewers and farming practices officially died in the Senate Tuesday. Senate President Keith Faber (R-Celina) issued a statement saying he decided the chamber would not take action on the mid-biennium review measure (HB 490) before the chamber adjourns for the year.

"We simply need more time to consider the substantive issues contained in the 264-page document, and time is not our ally in a lame duck session. Our colleagues in the House had the benefit of eight months to consider the bill between its introduction and passage; we've had it in the Senate for less than three weeks," he said. "I came to this decision reluctantly, as I know many people have worked long hours to move House Bill 490 through the legislative process.

We are absolutely committed to renewing the debate on these important issues at the outset of the new General Assembly in January," Sen. Faber added. Sen. Faber told reporters that his caucus's review of the bill turned up nothing that absolutely had to pass before the end of the year.

Earlier in the day, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Sen. Cliff Hite (R-Findlay) said the bill was "hanging on by threads."

No one testified on the bill during Tuesday's hearing, but the committee heard dozens of witnesses speak last week, most of them opposing a variety of provisions the House added to what was previously one of several relatively non-controversial bills split out from Gov. John Kasich's original MBR proposal (HB 472).

An amendment that would start the process of allowing incumbent telephone companies to withdraw basic local service prompted a torrent of opposition, along with a veto threat from Gov. Kasich. Many witnesses voiced concern that the proposal would leave poor, elderly and rural Ohioans without a viable alternative. (See Gongwer Ohio Report, November 13, 2014)

Numerous environmental groups have warned that a proposed amendment to the state's Great Lakes Compact implementing law would significantly increase the amount of water permitted to be taken from the basin, including withdrawals from small, ecologically sensitive streams. (See Gongwer Ohio Report, November 13, 2014)

Changes to the way oil and gas companies report information about chemicals stored onsite have also drawn opposition from environmentalists, who say the plan could slow the transmission of critical data to emergency responders in the event of another well pad fire.

Witnesses have also criticized the House's move to ease Gov. Kasich's proposed penalties on environmental violations. (See Gongwer Ohio Report, November 14, 2014)

Local governments are fighting a proposal in the MBR to let homeowners opt out of hooking into privately constructed sewer lines, noting that they generally get turned over to a public entity after construction of a subdivision or commercial development. (See Gongwer Ohio Report, November 28, 2014)

Other provisions designed to address toxic algal blooms in Lake Erie have gotten more positive reviews by witnesses, including some major agricultural groups, like the Ohio Farm Bureau.

However, some farmers are quietly voicing concerns about the plan to restrict manure and fertilizer application on frozen ground in the western basin. (See Gongwer Ohio Report, November 17, 2014)

While members have discussed the possibility of adding some of the less contentious aspects of the MBR into a separate proposal to ban the sale of powdered alcohol (HB 594) that is pending in the Senate Agriculture Committee, Chairman Hite said he has not yet seen any such amendment.