

[Main Menu](#)



[Table of Contents](#)

[95-96 Menu](#)

[1996 Calendar](#)

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LAWMAKERS, OTHERS BASK IN SPLENDOR OF RESTORED CAPITOL

Incumbent and former lawmakers and state officials turned out under sunny skies in Columbus Friday for the historic reopening of Ohio's nearly 150-year-old Statehouse. It now stands as a gleaming showplace that leaders said will stir Ohioans' pride for generations to come. Governor George V. Voinovich officially kicked off the day-long Capitol Revival ceremonies on the front lawn. The Senate and House later held the first sessions in their elegantly restored chambers since they surrendered them for work to begin on the massive, \$112 million project three years ago.

Mr. Voinovich and legislative leaders, along with scores of former members, former governors and other guests waxed eloquent and frequently nostalgic at a series of events that included a luncheon that filled both the rotunda and the atrium connecting the capitol to the Ohio Senate Building, once known as the Statehouse annex. The luncheon also was notable in that it was one of the increasingly rare occasions at which lawmakers of both parties have had an opportunity to dine en masse together.

Speaker Jo Ann Davidson (R-Reynoldsburg), in a House speech that sought to bring perspective to the glitter and fanfare, said she marveled "at the profile and character of this building." But she reminded her colleagues that the future must be their chief concern. "Our purpose should not simply to celebrate the revival - it should be to rededicate the Ohio Statehouse as a vibrant center of democratic government... and to rededicate ourselves to the principles of democracy." The speaker also cited what she termed "a need to reconnect Ohioans with their government, replacing a sense of powerlessness with a confidence that problems can be solved, and reminding people that government cannot be a substitute for individual responsibility and community action."

House Minority Leader Patrick J. Sweeney (D-Cleveland) praised the renovation but also sounded an admonition about the future. Mr. Sweeney said that while lawmakers will have the benefit of nicer surroundings, their challenges will be greater than ever. He mentioned the approach of term limits, which will require the departure of members with eight-consecutive years of service, in the year 2000. The departures will produce an Assembly-wide leadership void. "Because of term limits, we have a greater responsibility to our new members," Mr. Sweeney said.

During the ceremonial House session, which included salutes to eight former speakers and minority leaders, Rep. Rose Vesper (R-New Richmond) surrendered her seat to Governor Voinovich, who sat during the proceedings in the same spot he occupied as a House member almost 30 years ago. In a brief speech, the governor lauded the House as an institution and recalled his arrival as a freshman "with a lot of water between the ears." He named some House members who took him by the hand and taught him the ropes. "They made a difference in my life and made it possible for me to later make a difference in the lives of other Ohioans," he said.

Former Speaker Vern Riffe of Wheelersburg was unable to attend the event due to health considerations, but Ms. Davidson read a letter in which Mr. Riffe said he hopes the occasion will be "a strong reminder (to the members) that the trust and confidence given to them by voters is a tremendous responsibility." One-time Speaker William B. Saxbe also was among invited guests who could not attend, but he sent Ms. Davidson an out-sized gavel that he assured the present speaker will hold up through the most vigorous use.

Charles F. Kurfess, a Republican who served as speaker and minority leader from Perrysburg in a House career that spanned 20 years; and James Lantz of Lancaster, speaker under the late former Democratic Governor Michael, addressed the House, as did John McDonald, minority leader from Newark during the late 1960's. Mr. Lantz, in one of the best received anecdotes of the day, recalled that when he was speaker, the Legislature adopted Ohio's motto: "With God, all things are possible." He said the House resisted a tongue-in-cheek effort to amend the slogan by deleting "with" and inserting "My." Mr. Voinovich, who has met some opposition in his efforts to put the motto somewhere on the restored capitol, laughed vigorously at Mr. Lantz' comment.

Mr. Nixon, a folksy former member and close friend of fellow Southern Ohioan Vern Riffe, also added humor to the predominantly reflective proceedings. He referred to the capitol as "plum beautiful" and reiterated his long-held belief that

Ohio is "the greatest state of all 55." He then sheepishly amended his remark to "all 50."

Also recognized as the oldest former member who attended the ceremonies was Delbert Nixon, a Democrat who served from 1935-1938 when Ohio was in the midst of the Great Depression and from 1941-1942 at the beginning of World War II. He also served as Clerk of the House from 1949-50. Mr. Nixon, of Stratton, told reporters later the newly renovated Statehouse "is certainly an improvement from what it was when I was there. It's remarkable they were able to get the resources and make it the beautiful place that it is."

The other former members who attended the ceremonies included a contingent of legislative and statewide officeholder stars from the past. They included former Governors John J. Gilligan (1971-1975) and Richard F. Celeste (1983-1991), one-time Senate presidents Oliver Ocasek of Akron, Paul Gillmor of Old Fort, Harry Meshel of Youngstown and many others who recalled events, battles and personalities from the past, including some no longer living. Speaker Pro Tem William Batchelder (R-Medina) spoke sadly of the loss of former Lt. Gov. John Brown of Medina. Rep. Otto Beatty Jr. (D-Columbus) evoked the memory of the late Rep. C.J. McLin of Dayton, possibly the most powerful black legislator and best-liked lawmakers in the General Assembly's history.

The opening Senate session was considerably shorter than the House meeting and devoid of speeches by members. Senators adopted a resolution honoring four-star General Johnnie E. Wilson, commanding general of the U.S. Army Materiel Command, who acknowledged the reopening of the Statehouse. General Wilson was born in Louisiana, but was raised in Lorain and enlisted in the Army in 1961.

Senate President Stanley Aronoff (R-Cincinnati), in lieu of remarks, read a poem written for the occasion by Sue Moore, his administrative assistant, whose verse described events leading up to the Statehouse reopening. There were 26 former Senate members who returned for the reopening.

Prior to the sessions, Governor Voinovich spoke to an audience of about 450 people who assembled at the entrance to the Statehouse and called the renovated capitol "the crown jewel among the nation's 50 statehouses." He declared that once Ohio's citizens had viewed the interior it would be "impossible not to feel the convergence of the past, present and future...The wait was well worthwhile." The governor exhorted his audience to remember that it is state and local government that is

sensitive to the needs of its citizens and that "Washington has tried to substitute for the state and local governments and families."

HOT TOPIC OF E-CHECK RETURNS AS HOUSE HOLDS FIRST STATEHOUSE HEARING

Proponents and opponents of the state's enhanced automobile emissions test squared off Friday to renew debate on the issue that has produced considerable controversy but no resolution to date.

The debate came before the House Finance and Appropriations Committee which became the first committee to conduct a hearing in the renovated Statehouse. The panel is examining the financial implications of suspending the controversial program. The panel is hearing legislation (HB 575) which would completely abolish the program, which has raised the ire of constituents and the apprehensions of numerous House members.

Ironically, sponsor Rep. Ray Sines (R-Perry) and the chairman of the committee which originally heard the bill, Rep. Bill Schuck (R-Columbus), urged their colleagues on the committee to defeat the measure because its original intent had been severely distorted. The legislation, which was amended in the House Energy & Environment Committee, would have allowed local governmental units to reconsider their decision to opt in to the E-Check testing, but a floor amendment offered by Rep. Diane Grendell (R-Chesterland) changed the bill so that the program would be completely eliminated (See *Ohio Report* No. 101, Friday, May 24, 1996).

Mr. Sines rejected arguments from members who said that Ohio should simply ignore provisions of the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, while noting that "in being responsible legislators, we know we have to comply with federal law." Penalties associated with violations of the law, Mr. Sines said, could come in the form of financial sanctions, including the possible loss of federal highway funds. Any other program to control auto emissions, Mr. Sines warned, "could be more costly, more intrusive" than E-Check. "We need to go back and look at this whole program," he said.

Mr. Schuck reiterated his belief that the House ruined Mr. Sines' "responsible" bill when it misguidedly adopted Ms. Grendell's amendment and further declared that either Congress needs to change the law or the U.S. EPA needs to enforce the law differently in order to allow Ohio some leeway in making the needed changes.