

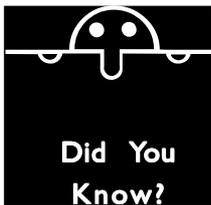


Inside This Week's Issue:

It's Not Too Early To Start Making Those Calls!

Clean Elections Day - February 1!

Special Insert: Bottle Bill Gets Gazette Endorsement



Did You Know?

Capital Eye comes out weekly during the Legislative Session and bi-monthly throughout the rest of the year. If you have questions or comments about its content, please contact us. If you'd rather receive the *Eye* on-line, e-mail linda@wvcag.org

CAN Campaign Moving Forward

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcag.org

On Wednesday, the US House approved a bill (HR 5) that will dramatically help students who receive financial aid. Every member of West Virginia's delegation voted to lower the student loan rate from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent in stages over the next five years. The final roll call vote was 356-71, including 124 Republicans. As you may know, cutting the interest rate of student loans has been a high priority for CAG over the last two years. In February, CAG campaigned hard to stop Congress (not to mention Rep. Capito) from passing the so-called Deficit Reduction Act of 2007 which increased the interest rate to a fixed 6.8 percent and cut \$12 billion from the student loan program.

Tuition and fees at our nation's public universities have shot up by 41 percent after inflation since 2000, and tuition and fees at private universities have soared by 17 percent after inflation. With the average student borrower graduating from college with \$17,500 in debt, 88 percent of the American public supports reducing student loan interest rates — which have jumped by almost 2 percentage points over the last five years.

According to the Public Research Interest Group cutting the fixed rate of 6.8% in half would save the current typical student borrower \$2,280 over the lifetime of his or her loan and save the beginning college student \$4,420 when fully phased in. In a place like West Virginia this means a great deal because many of our college-bound students come from middle and lower-income families, and therefore rely more heavily on financial aid. Lowering the interest rates would reduce their financial burden and give our state a workforce that grows our economy for all.

(continued on page 7 - see "Moving Forward")

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W V - C A G
was founded in 1974
as a non-profit
membership
organization
dedicated to
increasing citizen
participation
in economic and
political decision-
making.

Our members work
for progressive
changes in federal,
state, and local policies
by educating people
about key public
interest issues ranging
from environmental
protection and
consumer rights to
good government &
health care reform.



To become a
member or to
send comments
and suggestions,
visit
www.wvcag.org,
call us at
304-346-5891,
or e-mail us at
linda@wvcag.org

Defense

by *Norm Steenstra*, norm@wvcag.org

One of the things that WV-CAG has to do at the legislative session each year is stop bad bills from becoming law. It takes tremendous time and effort to defend good public policy and that will be the case again. Two issues that CAG played leading roles in passing are under assault.

Two years ago we led the successful effort to mandate a "paper trail" for all voting machines used in the state. WV became one of the first states to do so after the fiasco of Florida (2000) and Ohio (2004). Now a group of county clerks, too lazy to do their jobs, are pushing to do away with the verified voter paper trail. The paper trail is the ONLY way an accurate recount of votes can be made.

Sixteen years ago we basically wrote the comprehensive Solid Waste Act which, in effect, stopped WV from becoming the repository for millions of tons of out of state garbage. The law was carefully crafted to survive cost challenges by placing "caps" (maximums) on the size of landfills. Very soon a bill will be introduced allowing McDowell County to be exempt from current "caps" and be allowed to take 100,000 tons of garbage a month. Currently, the largest landfill in the state is 30,000 tons.

For the next six weeks we will be working to stop both of these ill-conceived proposals. If you would like to help with either or both of these issues, give me a call at 1-866-WVB-FAIR or e-mail me at norm@wvcag.org.

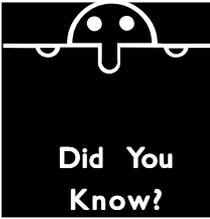
Dear Reader:

Sometimes things just don't go our way and this was certainly the case last week with our copy machine. Many of you received crooked copies of the *Eye* due to some serious jamming on the part of our copier. We apologize for this! To keep costs down we print the *Eye* in-house and sometimes it really shows!

Thanks for your patience and support!

Welcome Change

by Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org
for the Clean Elections Coalition



Legislators tell us the best way to reach them is by phone or mail. While e-mail is a great tool, sometimes they don't have time to keep up during the busy session. A phone call is the most effective way to reach them! Please see page 5 for contact info.

What a change in atmosphere at the House of Delegates! I can't think of a different way of saying it but for the past 10 years it was like a small gang of bullies keeping everybody – Delegates, the public and lobbyists under very tight control. Speaker Thompson is accessible, the staff more friendly and the leadership is visible and open to discussion. Already there have been several procedural changes voted on that make the whole legislative process more open and fair to all sides.

Gary Zuckett and I met with the new speaker on Wednesday and discussed the prospects of getting the Clean Elections Bill passed in the House. The Speaker was impressed by the diverse coalition that supports the bill and promised he would soon be meeting with his leadership to gauge its prospects. Coalition members will meet again with the Speaker on Monday.

I'm guardedly optimistic about our chances. Both the Majority Whip Mike Caputo and the Majority leader Joe Delong are sponsors of the bill and Judiciary Chair Carrie Webster is a dream to work with. That being said, we – you – us can create the momentum needed to pass Clean Elections this year by ratcheting up the calls, letters and visits to any and all House members. An opportunity is here and now. Help be a part making history in West Virginia!

Please refer to House Bill 2371 and Senate Bill 118, the WV Public Campaign Financing Act, when talking to your legislators about the Clean Elections bill. You can read the bill and much more by visiting www.wvoter-owned.org.

Mark Your Calendar for Clean Elections Day, February 1. More info on page 6.



Kanawha State Forest Coalition Revisited

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

In the part of
this universe
that we
know there
is great
injustice, and
often the
good suffer,
and often the
wicked
prosper, and
one hardly
knows which
of those is
the more
annoying.

-Bertrand
Russell

An eclectic group of Kanawha State Forest (KSF) users has come together to revive the KSF Coalition to protect the popular park near Charleston from yet another abuse.

Ten years ago, Citizen Action helped lead a coalition to protect the forest by passing legislation prohibiting logging in the forest. The recent boom in oil and gas drilling has produced a new threat. The forest has been the scene of severe disruption by drillers who have built roads improperly and even in the wrong places. They have cut swaths of trees three times the width of the misplaced roads to let the sun in to supposedly dry out the mud their bulldozers churn up dragging the drilling equipment up the steep terrain.

A bill will soon be introduced to shine some sunlight on the drilling process, require proper reclamation, and allow public comment before drilling permits are issued.

A special fund has been set up to cover expenses for this effort. KSF users are encouraged to send donations and volunteering offers to:

Kanawha State Forest Coalition
c/o 1525 Hampton Rd.
Charleston, WV 25314

Watch the *Eye* for updates and action items on this issue.

Meet With Legislators!

The Roane Chamber of Commerce and Roane Committee on Aging are sponsoring a legislative luncheon tomorrow (Saturday, January 20) from noon to 2 p.m. at the Committee on Aging building on Madison Avenue. The county's representatives including Delegate Bob Ashley (R-Roane) and Senators Donna Boley (R-Pleasants), Frank Deem (R-Wood), Karen Facemyer (R-Jackson) and Mike Hall (R-Putnam) have been invited to attend and talk about items expected to be on the agenda for the legislative session. There will also be time to ask questions or make suggestions about legislation. Lunch will be provided.



Just In Time For the Session!

by Linda Frame, linda@wvcag.org

“To reduce litter immediately, city and state leaders should push for an expanded bottle bill...It’s possible, if leaders have the courage to take on the powerful bottlers’ lobby.”
—Editorial, July 2002 New York Times

Today the *Charleston Gazette* endorsed the West Virginia Bottle Bill (please see insert). It joins the *Beckley Register-Herald* and many other organizations statewide. Since we hope the bill will be introduced in both the House and Senate next week, this is a great time to make those calls to your legislators (see contact info below)!

For talking points, please see today’s insert or check out www.wvbottlebill.org where you can also see letters to the editor from others. You can also go to our news section and click on the link to write a quick letter to the editor. It’s easy! We need to rebut all of industry’s tired arguments which they don’t bother to back up with any kind of data.

Thank you for your support!

Stay In Touch!

The legislative website is a great resource where you can find legislators’ contact info and committee assignments, and track bills. Add it to your favorites at

www.legis.state.wv.us

Call your delegates and senators toll-free at: 1-877-565-3447 or write to them at West Virginia Senate/House of Delegates, Building 1, State Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305.

Contact Governor Manchin toll-free at 1-888-438-2731 or e-mail at Governor@WVGov.org.

Tell Us How You Want It

Please let us know if you would like to receive the *Capital Eye* on paper or via e-mail or both. Please e-mail linda@wvcag.org or call us at 346-5891!

Correction on front page article: Rep. Capito **did** vote for HR 6.

Important Events

Weekly Vigils Continue

WV Patriots for Peace Vigils every Friday from noon to 1:00 p.m. across from the Tidewater Restaurant at the Town Center Mall in Charleston. Help hold the Wall of Remembrance. For more info, please visit www.wvpatriotsforpeace.org.

The Ground Truth in Iraq

February 13, 2007, 7:00 p.m. West Virginia State University Union in Institute. Sponsored by Seneca 2 and Political Science Department at WVSU, WV Council of Churches and WV Patriots for Peace. More info: www.dahrjamailliraq.com.

In late 2003, weary of the overall failure of the US media to accurately report on the realities of the war in Iraq, Jamail, a fourth-generation Lebanese American who grew up in Houston, decided he could sit at home, depressed and angry, or he could take action. He bought a laptop computer, a digital camera, and a plane ticket and went to Iraq to report on the war himself. He is unimbedded and out of the Green Zone. His dispatches were quickly recognized as an important media resource. He is now writing for the Inter Press Service, The Asia Times and many other outlets. His reports have also been published with The Nation, The Sunday Herald, Islam Online, the Guardian and the Independent to name just a few. Dahr's dispatches and hard news stories have been translated into French, Polish, German, Dutch, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese, Arabic and Turkish. On radio as well as television, Dahr reports for Democracy Now!, the BBC, and numerous other stations around the globe. Dahr is also special correspondent for Flashpoints.

Clean Elections Day at the Capitol

February 1, 2007: Tired of the Fat Cat special interests calling the shots in West Virginia? Learn how public financing of elections can improve your quality of life.

8:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m. Breakfast and lobby training at **Temple Israel located at 2312 Kanawha Blvd, East, Charleston.** (Turn left onto Chesapeake to get to the parking lot.) . **10:30 a.m.-11 a.m.** Press conference in the Governor's conference room (inside the Secretary of State's office on the ground floor of the State Capitol). **1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.** Attend committee meetings; meet with legislators.

Call ahead to make an appointment with your Delegate or Senator at the toll free number: 1-877-565-3447. Check us out on the Internet: www.wvoter-owned.org

Please RSVP Janet at 304-522-0246 or e-mail at mountainwild49@yahoo.com

("Moving Forward" - continued from front page)

On Thursday night, the US House passed HR 6 which would close loopholes and end giveaways in the tax code for the big oil industry and would create a Strategic Renewable Energy Reserve to invest in clean, renewable energy resources, promoting new emerging technologies, developing greater efficiency and improving energy conservation. This bill passed by a 264-163, including 36 Republicans. Everyone in West Virginia's delegation voted for the bill except Rep. Capito.

This latest victory for middle class families comes on the heels of legislation put forward by Speaker Pelosi to increase the federal minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour; to slash the interest rates on subsidized student loans in half; and to require Medicare to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices with the pharmaceutical industry – each passing with bipartisan support.

Thanks for calling your members of the U.S. House of Representatives and asking them to vote for these measures which will all help the citizens of West Virginia, instead of big-business interests. Your calls really do make a difference!



**We Need Your Support!
We can't do it without you !**

Please renew your membership or send a donation.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Here's my donation of ___\$15 ___\$25 ___\$50 ___\$100 Other \$_____

Clip and mail with your check to West Virginia Citizen Action Group, 1500 Dixie St., Charleston, WV 25311

Donate safely and securely on-line at www.wvcag.org!!!!

THANKS!