



Capital Eye

Volume 8, No. 2 ~ January 18, 2008

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Hurry up and Wait

By Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcaq.org

The first full week of the session is yawning to a close and most of the news is good. Several of our bills have been officially introduced and assigned to committees. Others are still being shopped around for additional sponsors. Each session has its unique flow but in general goes from molasses slow at the beginning to dizzyingly fast at the finish. Imagine a snowball rolling down a mountainside, growing bigger & rolling faster until it abruptly stops by crashing into the clock at midnight the last night of the session.

At our WV United Coalition meeting last week several bills of note were discussed that deserve the support of citizen activists. WV United is a group which includes most all of the progressive players in the state including the AFL-CIO, Social Workers, Council of Churches, Association for Justice (trial lawyers), WV-FREE, WV for Affordable Health Care and many others too numerous for listing in this short article. See inside for a short summary of the most notable of these - we'll keep them on our bill list so you can follow them, too. From time to time as they make their way through the meat grinder (oops, I mean the committees) we'll include these critical consumer, labor and civil justice bills so you can help them out from your home or office.

The problem isn't which ones to list but which ones to leave off. As of today, 721 bills have been introduced in the House and 250 in the Senate. About 90% of these are "carryover" bills that are automatically re-introduced since we are in the mid-point of the 78th legislature, which is marked by the two-year terms of House of Delegates members. If you are a real legislative junkie, you can log on to www.legis.state.wv.us to look up any bill's status or actually set up your very own, password protected, on-line bill tracking list that will give you a daily readout of which committee a bill is in and what legislative actions have been taken on it so far. Click on "Bill Tracking" under the heading of "Bill Status."

This brings up another critical issue. From now until January 26, candidates are filing to run for political office at all levels of government. If you've been thinking, "I could do a better job than those (fill in choice of explicative) in office", now is the time to act. We need good candidates at all levels of government but especially for the state legislature. Many seats in both the House and Senate are now "open" because the incumbent is not going to run or is running for a different office. See the Secretary of State's webpage at

www.wvsos.com for all you need to file and become part of the solution to reforming our government. If you have any questions or need some encouragement, give me a call right away!

Congress also reconvened this week and is gearing up for major battles with Bush over Children's Health Insurance (CHIP) and Wiretapping. Bush vetoed a major expansion of health insurance for the children of low-income working families not once, but twice last year. Another attempt will be made next week in the US House to override the veto but needs a 2/3 majority to pass. Rep. Capito actually broke ranks with Bush on this one (unlike her joined-at-the-hip votes on Bush's war policy) and voted last time to override his veto along with our other WV Congresspeople. We need her vote again so give her a call using the number on page three.

I just received a call from the national ACLU urging me to call Senator Byrd with the message, "No immunity for telecom companies when they violate our privacy by letting the government listen in on our phone conversations and read our e-mail without a warrant." A bill called FISA will be voted on in the next several days that would give telecoms just this type of immunity for their past transgressions of our privacy rights. Senator Byrd's WV office number is 304-264-4626 or 304-342-5855 (in Charleston) in case you want to weigh in on this one.

Speaking of running for office...

(thanks to Sally Shepherd for the following info...)

Beginning this election year, landowners of at least 3 acres can now run on the nonpartisan primary ballot for Supervisors of the state's 14 Conservation Districts to make decisions concerning soil, water, and energy conservation issues at the local level.

Over \$11 million is spent each year and those serving on the local Conservation District Board help determine that these monies, as well as the work of the USDA soil technicians and other conservation professionals, are optimally directed. Supervisors attend monthly and other meetings at the District level, and can attend state and national meetings, depending on their level of interest and time available for involvement, and are paid only for mileage and per diem expenses.

This is an opportunity to get a coterie of good progressive citizens around the state onto the ballot, elected at the local level, and then perhaps on to other and higher offices, though it could be said there's nothing "higher", or more important, than work at the "grassroots."

The filing period is January 14 – 28. Go to www.wvagriculture.org, click "Conservation" on left side of page, or call Sally Shepherd 988-1717, who served a number of years on the Capitol Conservation District and who plans to file. You will need \$10 and proof of identity to file. The positions will be on the November ballot.

Your Diet Impacts Environment More Than Your

Car: 13 percent = The percentage of greenhouse gases created by all trucks, SUVs, cars, airplanes, trains and other transportation. 18 percent = the amount of greenhouse gases created by livestock production.

Source: United Nations. Moral of the story: If you are an average U.S. meat eater, reducing your meat consumption to 2 ounces per day is roughly equivalent to doubling your vehicle's fuel efficiency, in terms of greenhouse gas reduction.

Clean Elections Update

By Carol Warren, Citizens For Clean Elections

Our Public Campaign Financing Act was introduced this week as HB 4050 and SB 240. Please thank our sponsors: Delegates Doyle (lead), Brown, Hatfield, Marshall, Browning, Ellem, Lane, Moore, Fleischauer, Perdue, and Klempa. Delegates Caputo, DeLong, and Campbell were also willing to sign on, and are very supportive, but do not appear as sponsors because of the number limit. Our Senate sponsors are Kessler (lead), Edgell, Foster, Guills, Hunter, Jenkins, Love, McCabe, Plymale, Sprouse, Unger, Wells, and White. The bill has been referred to Judiciary and then Finance in both Chambers.

We have been promised a meeting with Judiciary Chair Carrie Webster very soon, and hope to discuss our plans to work the bill in the House. We are also working to set up a meeting with Treasurer John Perdue to discuss funding for clean elections. If your Delegate is on the Judiciary Committee, please contact him or her and ask that they support the bill. A list of members can be found at <http://www.legis.state.wv.us>. You can also send an email directly from the site.

A very special event is being planned for February 28! Senator Jon Hunter, a dedicated Clean Elections supporter who unfortunately has decided not to run again this year, has agreed to join us for a reception honoring him and his work! The event will be held at the **Charleston Woman's Club, on the corner of Virginia and Elizabeth Streets from 6:00 to 8:00 PM**. Mark your calendar now and plan to attend! The event will be a fundraiser in support of our new Challenge Grant.

We have been given the opportunity to receive a one-to-one match if we can raise \$15,000 by March 1, 2008. These challenge grants are the main source of funding for our clean elections work, so meeting the goal is extremely important. **Your help would be greatly appreciated!** If you're unable to attend this exciting event, contributions may be sent to OVEC (P.O. Box 6753, Huntington, WV 25773) or WV Citizen Action (1500 Dixie St., Charleston, WV 25311).

The lead article in the *Herald-Dispatch* on Wednesday, "Maynard trip raising more questions," gave us a terrific opportunity to talk about clean elections. Public financing can help us ensure that candidates are responsible to the voters, not the special interests. It can also free candidates from spending time fundraising, and from any appearance of impropriety and undue influence by campaign contributors.

Read the bill and stay informed at www.wvoter-owned.org!

Insurance Bills Aim to Protect Consumers

By Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

Three new bills are in the works to protect consumers from abuse from the insurance industry. At the top of the list is the creation of an independent insurance Consumer Advocate (CA) with similar powers to the office in the Public Service Commission (PSC). For 22 years, Billy Jack Gregg, the PSC's CA, questioned utility rate increases and negotiated rate rollbacks when

justified, and fielded complaints. When Billy Jack retired last year, his post was filled by Byron Harris who continues defending consumer's interests at the PSC. WV-CAG is proud this office has done so much to save WV residents millions of dollars on their utility bills and helped them out with utility problems. The job was created after lobbying efforts from our first Executive Director, David Grubb years ago.

The current position of Insurance Consumer Advocate is a slave of the Insurance Commissioner, Jane Cline. Ms Cline is rarely known to oppose an insurance lobbyist proposal and keeps her advocate on a short leash. Consumers beware! To put it simply, we need someone like Billy Jack Gregg or Byron Harris in the Insurance Commission who will look out for consumers. No bill number yet – watch for one next week.

Did you know your credit score could jack up your car or homeowner's insurance premium? It's true. Divorce, identity theft, large credit card balances or a number of other smudges on your credit rating can cost you increased insurance premiums. WV-CAG fought to stop this from being allowed and we are now aligned with the WV Association for Justice working to get it reversed. HB 2167 & SB 107 will do the trick. Both bills are in Banking & Insurance committees. Contact their chairs: Delegate Kominar (340-3117) and Senator Minard (357-7904) and ask them to pass the bills.

Even shopping around for the best insurance rate can put a blimp on your credit score that could jack up your current premium (excessive inquiries on your credit is a no-no). The "Good Shopper" bill (HB2880) would also prohibit this abuse. Looks like Banking and Insurance committees will be busy.

Contact Your Legislators and the Governor!

WV Senators and Delegates:

The Honorable _____
West Virginia Senate/House of Delegates
Building 1
State Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305
Call toll-free: 1-877-565-3447
On the web: www.legis.state.wv.us

The Governor's office:

The Honorable Governor Joe Manchin
1900 Kanawha Blvd East
Charleston, WV 25305
Call toll-free: 1-888-438-2731
e-mail: governor@wvgov.org



Save the Date!

By Linda Frame, linda@wvcaq.org

On February 5, John Ferrari, President of NexCycle in California, will discuss Container Deposit Laws in the House Chambers at 3PM. Legislators, citizens, and others are encouraged to attend.

Last year this same company sent a representative from Maine to talk with our legislators and the media. Having an expert from a state that has had a bottle bill for years was invaluable and we are thankful to have this opportunity again this year. NexCycle is a subsidiary of Strategic Materials, which is the largest glass recycler in the U.S. One of their most reliable streams of post-consumer glass supply is from deposit states.

Please plan to attend. Come early if you can to visit your legislators and let them know you support passing a Container Deposit Law in West Virginia so we can enjoy the same benefits of reduced litter and increased recycling that the 11 Bottle Bill states have had for decades.

John will also be stopping in Tennessee where local activists have started a Bottle Bill campaign and have introduced legislation.

More in next week's *Capital Eye!*

Another Chance To Support Kids' Health Care

Call Congress today to voice support for SCHIP

The U.S. House is expected to vote on January 23 on a bill to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program to a total of 10 million kids. President Bush twice vetoed such efforts late last year. **Please call your representative toll-free, at 866-544-7573** to register your support for this vital legislation. All WV members of the House of Representatives voted last October to override the president's first SCHIP veto. We need to keep them all together again for this vote!

The number will be open continuously until the vote on Wednesday, January 23. When you call, a virtual switchboard will find your representative's office and give you some suggested discussion points before connecting you.

In December, Congress passed – and President Bush accepted – a plan to keep SCHIP afloat at current funding levels until March 2009. But the current plan provides care for **4 million fewer children** than could be covered under the bill that the House will vote on next week.

With an economic recession looming, we need the strongest possible national leadership in support of quality, affordable health care for all. Jobs – and with them, employer-provided health care plans – are at serious risk for many working Americans. **Why should working Americans and their children suffer a special burden for a weakening economy?**

With the Bush administration in its final year and the 110th Congress already halfway over, **it's past time for our leaders to stand up for us and fight for America's real priorities.** Call today to urge your representative to do the right thing by supporting the SCHIP expansion.

Winning in Iraq? – Myth Busters

By Robin Wilson, WV-CAG

The media and political establishment would lead us to believe the US is winning the Iraq war. However, looking at the facts will bust these myths:

1. This illegal, immoral, unnecessary, and endless war is also unwinnable – Iraqi citizens to not want to be occupied, US citizens to not want our young people to be occupiers in the name of oil, world citizens do not want us there.
2. Iraq neighborhoods have been ethnically cleansed – one out of eight Iraqi's have been forced to leave their homes.
3. In Iraq local militia have been bribed into temporary complicity – like trying to solve crime in South Central LA by allying with the Crips.
4. Unsustainable military over reach is bankrupting us and weakening us by:
 - Letting our infrastructure erode – think bridges falling down.
 - Ignoring our slipping status as a nation in educating our children – creating a less flexible and skilled populous at a time when big problems demand complex solutions.
 - Exacerbating the growing gap between rich and poor – aside from the social injustice of the rich wallowing in wealth as the middle class and poor go down, it is a recipe for social instability.
 - Making unaffordable serious transitioning to a post carbon economy – the book *Collapse* makes it clear that cultures can rise to new challenges or fall by their own inflexibility.
 - Thumbing our nose at world opinion – the best parts of our traditions like democratic participation and compassionate support for the underdog are being eclipsed by a raw power grab for Iraqi oil.

Historically the record is littered with examples of fallen nations that succumbed to the disease of military overreach. See Paul Kennedy's [*The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*](#), which documents how nation after nation have fallen victim to military overreach.

Action steps:

1. Go to the CAG website and read the anti war resolution for our state legislators and local city councils.
2. Research on cost of Iraq War at both National Priorities Project <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/> and AFSC <http://www.afsc.org/cost/>
3. Visit <http://aei-brookings.org/iraqcosts/> to manipulate the cynical logic of staying in Iraq with death tolls and length of stay graphed in ever increasing debt.
4. Listen carefully to what the presidential candidates are saying on the Iraq War issue.

WV Citizen Action
1500 Dixie Street
Charleston, WV 25311

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Mark Your Calendars for these WV Surface Owners' Rights Events

Jan. 26 or Feb. 2, 2008

**WV-SORO Regional Meeting in
Danville/Chapmanville area**

More info will be available in next week's Eye

January 31, 2008

**WV-SORO Regional Meeting in Spencer
6PM to 8PM
Heritage Park Community Center
110 Church Street**

February 6, 2008

**WV-SORO Day at the Legislature
State Capitol, Charleston
8AM to 11AM ~ Gather in Governor's
Press Conference Room**

*(located in the Secretary of State's Office, Room
157-K; coffee & danish provided)*

**10AM ~ Press Conference on Surface
Owners' Bill of Rights**

**11AM to 3PM ~ Lobbying, Meetings with
Legislators**

Over the next few weeks we will play around with the format of the *Capital Eye*. We hope to make it easy on the eyes, while at the same time providing our members with lots of important updates. Feel free to comment or request the on-line version at linda@wvcag.org.

THANKS!



More than 100 people attend WV-SORO meeting in Weston in December 2007



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

Please renew your membership or send a donation.

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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 -
THANKS!

Donate quickly & securely at www.wvcag.org!

