



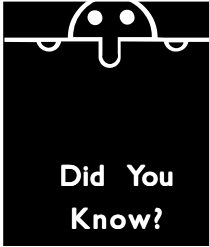
Some Thoughts As We Watch It All Begin Again

by Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org

Conventional wisdom states that the legislature doesn't address things of great controversy in an election year. Since every other year is an election year in this state, you get the picture of why very few progressive ideas and programs leap out of the political ooze.

WV-CAG's two main legislative objectives this year, **Clean Elections and the Bottle Bill**, are likely to make some real progress. Senator Jeff Kessler, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has publicly stated his support of the Clean Elections bill. We were also encouraged by news that the governor seriously considered including the Bottle Bill in his State of the State proposals but, in the end, decided against it because legislative leaders asked him not to do it. Why? You probably guessed it – it's an election year. Manchin says he likes the concept and eventually would like to see it as a component of his solid waste and litter programs. That news, coupled with the revelation that the Department of Environmental Protection also likes the bill, gives us some much-needed optimism for the bill's eventual passage.

Health care cost issues were a major part of the State of the State speech. I must admit, though, that my eyes glazed over at the various bills proposed as solutions. I wanted to scream out: Quit nipping around the edges! Confront the fact that we need a state or national universal health care plan like the rest of the civilized world offers its citizens! I really believe that eventually the conservative business world will forsake its insurance and health care industry allies and take the lead on universal health care. Don't look for this to happen anytime soon but we need to ratchet up the outrage now. Maybe former CAG staffer Perry Bryant's new group, **West Virginians for Quality and Affordable Health Care**, will become the driving force of that outrage. To contact Perry, call 344-1673.



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

CapitalEye
published
by West Virginia
Citizen Action Group
(WV-CAG)
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Charleston WV
25311

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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.



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Election Reforms Abound

by Julie Archer, julie@wvcag.org

Several campaign finance and election reform measures are an important part of WV-CAG's 2006 legislative agenda. Here is a summary on some of the bills we'll be following:

Clean Elections (SB 124) – As it has for every legislative session since 2002, WV-CAG will work with Citizens for Clean Elections members to advance the “WV Public Campaign Financing Act,” which would create an alternative public financing option for state Senate and House of Delegates candidates. Unlike, last year's proposal – a pilot project that applied to only a handful of districts – SB 124 would make public financing available to qualified candidates in all Senate and single-member Delegate districts beginning in 2010, with candidates in the remaining House districts becoming eligible to participate in 2012. For more info, visit www.wvoter-owned.org.

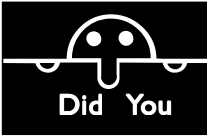
Precinct Counting – WV-CAG supports a yet-to-be-introduced proposal from the Secretary of State's office giving county election officials the option to tally votes at the precinct level at the close of the polls on Election Day. Over the past year as counties were deciding which voting systems to purchase you may recall that WV-CAG strongly recommended the optical scan system (over touch screen voting machines) as the most transparent, reliable and auditable system. For those counties that chose optical scan, having the option to count votes at the precinct will save time without sacrificing security of the vote. Precinct counters **do not** reveal the vote count during the day so the election cannot be affected by a running total. West Virginia is perhaps the lone hold-out to allow precinct counting. In many jurisdictions a central count is also done to provide an extra check on the count's reliability. Some jurisdictions using precinct counters also post the totals at the precinct after the election, adding to the election's transparency.

Maintaining Campaign Records and Receipts (SB 42) – Although candidates have long been required to file campaign finance reports with the Secretary of State's office and the Secretary has had the authority to audit these

(continued on page 7 - see Election reforms)

Capito's Last Chance To Get It Right on Scrooge Budget

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org



The Medicaid program provides health and long-term care coverage for 297,800 people in West Virginia, including children, their parents, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The House budget bill allows families to be charged new fees and reduces covered services, both of which would increase the ranks of the uninsured and the underinsured.

In the wee hours of December 19, the Grinches in the US House of Representatives passed a Budget Reconciliation that shortchanges critical social services by **\$40 billion**. Medicaid, student loans (see page 4), child support enforcement, and nursing home care for the elderly are all hit hard. This 800-page tribute to Scrooge requires Medicaid applicants to produce a passport or birth certificate and allows states to drop Medicaid coverage of family planning services. The complete damage in this bill is too much to mention here. See the Fair Taxation section on our web page at www.wvcag.org for the ten worst provisions of this legislation.

Excuses that this is a necessary belt-tightening because of the huge war and natural disaster driven deficit is baloney. Next on the Congressional agenda are \$70 BILLION in additional tax cuts benefiting mainly the wealthiest Americans. Scrooge would be proud!

Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito is the only WV Representative to vote FOR these damaging cuts to needy families, elderly, and students. However, since the Senate tweaked the measure and sent it back, she will get another chance to vote up or down and could be the deciding vote! (Last time it passed by only one or two votes).

Actions:

Call Capito's Washington office using this toll-free number: 1-800-426-8073. Ask her to vote 'NO' on the Budget Reconciliation that cuts needed services for middle and low families in order to pay for Tax Breaks for the Rich (you'll have to be the ghost of Marley on this one).

Attend the Town Hall meeting on Budget Cuts, Thursday Jan 19th at University of Charleston, 6PM at the Appalachian room in the Geary Student Union Bldg. For more information, please call Marge or Ted at 304-346-5891. See you there!

College Students, Parents Hit in Wallets

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcaq.org

While college students return to classes after holiday break, Congress is taking drastic steps to significantly cut their financial aid. Under the guise of “budget reconciliation,” this bill would increase interest rates on college loans for students and parents.

This bill cuts nearly \$13 billion from the federal student loan programs, representing the largest cut to student aid in the programs’ history. The average student borrower, who has almost \$18,000 in loans, will now spend thousands more to repay his or her loans. The current interest rate for students out of school is 5.3% on Stafford Loans. This bill increases the interest rate to a fixed rate of 6.8%. The interest of Parent Loans for Undergraduate Students (PLUS) is also increased from today’s 6.1% rate to 8.5% starting in July 2006.

While some members of Congress have been saying that these cuts will provide “significant new benefits” to students by lowering fees and simplifying the application process, what they don’t tell students and parents, most of whom are struggling to make ends meet, is that they will end up paying thousands more in higher interest rates.

This is of particular importance in West Virginia where over 49,000 college students receive federal financial aid. It’s also important to recognize that public college costs have increased by 46% since 1992, with states cutting back public funding to colleges – forcing them to raise tuitions and fees.

Ironically, these costs are rising just as Governor Manchin is telling West Virginians that college or specialized training after high school is the key to our state’s future.

Clearly, this bill to slash student loans and place additional barriers in the way of low and moderate income West Virginia students who crave access to higher education is inconsistent with our state’s priorities and values. This bill is scheduled to receive its final vote in the US House of Representatives during the first week of February.



**If you want
to help stop
this “raid on
student aid”
please join us
for a Town
Hall forum at
the
University of
Charleston
on January
19, 2006 at
6:00pm. For
more info,
call us at
346-5891.**

Committee Takes Up Bottle Bill

by Linda Frame, linda@wvcag.org

If you think your phone calls and e-mails to legislators are a waste of your time, please think again. Just when we thought the interims would come and go and the Bottle Bill would be ignored, the interim committee assigned the bill took it up in the waning hours of the 2005 interims. This is truly a testament to the endlessly applied pressure you placed on legislators, in particular Committee Chair Senator Mike Oliverio, to give the bill its turn on the agenda. CAG staff has heard from the folks who take the calls and field the e-mails that the Bottle Bill is supported by West Virginians and these contacts urged that the bill finally be placed on the agenda.

On Sunday night, lead sponsor Senator Brooks McCabe, South Charleston Mayor Richie Robb and I spoke about the wide range of benefits a Bottle Bill would bring to West Virginia. It was our first chance to address a committee on this legislation and it gave us momentum as we enter the 2006 Legislative Session. **Special thanks go out to both Senator McCabe and Mayor Robb!**

This week **SB 136 and HB 2330** were introduced and referred to Senate and House Judiciary Committees. We will lobby this bill as we have in the past, buoyed by the behind-the-scenes support of Governor Manchin and the Department of Environmental Protection. We'll keep you posted and, in the meantime, keep those calls and e-mails coming!

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.

Paper or Electronic?

If you prefer not to receive this paper version of the *Capital Eye*, please e-mail linda@wvcag.org with your e-mail address and we'll add you to our e-list!

Weekly Vigils Continue

WV Patriots for Peace Vigils every Friday from noon to 1:00 p.m. at the office of Rep. Shelley Moore Capito, located at the corner of 49th Street and MacCorkle Avenue in Kanawha City. Help hold the Wall of Remembrance, which is nearly a football field in length. According to the National Priorities Project, www.nationalpriorities.org, the dollar cost to West Virginia for the war in Iraq is over \$710 million. For more info, please visit www.wvpatriotsforpeace.org.

Women's Health Policy Conference Events

Tuesday, January 17th at 5:50pm — Opening Reception for the Women's Health Policy Conference in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Rev. Roslyn Satchel, Executive Director of the National Center for Human Rights speaking on "Health Care as a Human Right." at the Charleston Marriott. **Free.** Sponsored by the WV Attorney General's Office and the WV Human Rights Commission.

Wednesday, January 18th — Women's Health Policy Conference at the Charleston Marriott. Speakers include: Gayle Manchin, Dr. Marilyn Gaston, former US Assistant Surgeon General, offering her international perspective; Dr. Sharonne Hayes, Director of the Mayo Clinic Women's Heart Clinic and Jill Morrison of the National Women's Law Center. Registration is \$99. Scholarships are available. For more info contact www.wvwomenspolicy.org or 304-346-0300.

WVEC Annual Legislative Kick-Off Blast!

The West Virginia Environmental Council will hold their annual "Legislative Kick-Off Blast" benefit on **Wednesday, January 18th** from 6:00 PM till 10:00 PM at the Perfater Law Office, 1311 Virginia St East, Charleston. Featuring the music of The VooDoo Katz ! Light refreshments with a cash donation-bar available. Suggested donation: \$8.00/person or \$15.00/couple. Come on out and help WVEC start the session with a blast proceeds support the 2006 WVEC lobbying effort.

Buffalo Creek Films

Wednesday, January 25 at 7PM at the Cultural Center in Charleston, Mimi Pickering from Appalshop will show her two films on the Buffalo Creek Disaster and discuss the theme: Do Social Documentaries Influence Anyone? Her film "Buffalo Creek - An Act of Man" was recently selected by the Library of Congress for inclusion in its National Film Registry and was described as a "powerful documentary" that "represents the finest in regional filmmaking, providing important understanding of the environmental and cultural history of the Appalachian region."

(Election Reforms - continued from page 2)

reports, until recently there was no requirement for candidates to keep any campaign related records, such as bank statements or receipts for campaign related expenses. The “527 reform” passed during September’s special session requires candidates to keep such record for six months. While this was a positive step, we support the Secretary of State Betty Ireland’s effort, sponsored by Senator Jon Blair Hunter, to require campaign related financial records be kept for two years.

Post Election Canvass – Over the past couple of months we have had an ongoing dialog with Secretary Ireland and her staff relating to the voter-verifiable paper ballot requirement passed last year by the legislature. We have learned that there may be some movement afoot, at the behest of some of the county clerks, to do away with the required post-election canvass. This canvass, which requires a manual recount of 5% of randomly selected precincts, is an important check on the original count’s validity. It is more important than ever given our increasing reliance on computers, specifically touch screen voting machines, to conduct elections. At a time when voter confidence is possibly at an all-time low, whether a result of vote buying scandals in Southern West Virginia or bribery scandals involving Congress, now is **not** the time to dismantle laws intended to give voters more confidence in our electoral process. Keep in mind that most counties will be using new technologies for the first time in the upcoming elections. Although, there hasn’t been a proposal introduced, rest assured, should the voter verified paper ballot requirement or the canvass be challenged, we will object strongly and publicly.



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!