



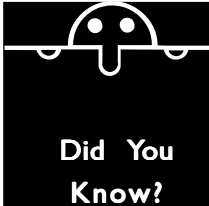
Inside This Week's Issue:

Shelley's Chair Stays Empty

PayDay Lending Back?

Federal Budget Bad For WV

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



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

Help These Bills Move!

ATTENTION WV-CAG Members in Monongalia, Putnam, Pocahontas and Randolph Counties: Clean Elections, SB 124, Needs Your Help!

Senate Judiciary could take up SB 124 as early as next week. Votes critical to its passage need to come from:

Senator Mike Oliverio, (D-Monongalia) – 357-7919, Senator Charles Lanham, (R-Mason and Putnam) – 357-7880, Senator Clark Barnes, (R-Randolph and Pocahontas) – 357-7373. Calls of support to these Senators could make the difference in what is anticipated to be a close vote. Please call and urge their support of SB 124, the “WV Public Campaign Financing Act.” If you need talking points call the WV-CAG office, e-mail julie@wvcag.org, or visit www.wvoter-owned.org. Senators can also be reached toll free at 1-877-565-2447.

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS: Bottle Bill, SB 136, Needs Your Calls

Senate Judiciary Committee took up the WV Bottle Bill, SB 136, in its first meeting of the 2006 Legislative Session, the first time the bill has been heard by a full committee. SB 136 was referred to a subcommittee composed of Senators Randy White, Jon Blair Hunter and Frank Deem which will hopefully send the bill back to the full committee quickly.

Please contact Senate Judiciary committee members and ask them to vote for SB 136. Committee members are: Senators Kessler (Chair), Oliverio (Vice Chair), Carruth, Foster, Barnes, Deem, Hunter, White, Harrison, Lanham, McKenzie, Weeks, Minard, Jenkins, Fanning, Dempsey and Chafin. Link to their e-mail addresses at www.legis.state.wv.us/committees/senate/judiciary/sencomJUD.cfm or call them toll-free at 1-877-565-3447. In your message, ask them to support SB 136 to reduce litter and increase recycling in West Virginia. You can also thank Chairman Kessler for taking up the bill. THANKS!

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

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WV-CAG
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
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The World Wonders

by Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org

Being in a sea of confusion at the legislature is not a new experience for me. Conflicting values, changing political trends and a noxious blend of special interests makes confusion inevitable. But this year it is even weirder. People, parties and leaders are just not acting like I expected them to.

Speaker Bob Kiss, who twice has been sued by WV-CAG to clean up the Budget Digest (pork process) suddenly introduced a bill that would eliminate it.

House Finance Chairman Harold Michael is proposing a plan for "universal health care" for all West Virginians by the year 2010. Michael, an insurance agent from Moorefield, has always sided with the big insurance industry in his legislative career.

These are things that WV-CAG has advocated for years but it doesn't jive with the history of the sponsors. Also adding to my confusion is that the Republicans at the legislature are making more sense this year than usual. They have grabbed a couple of popular issues like repeal of the food tax, abolishing the Turnpike Authority and changing the state's law on eminent domain to make it harder for cities to seize private property. These apparent reversals of values and past positions are likely all about election year posturing and positioning for who will be the next Speaker of the House, but it sure makes for an interesting session.

The positive progress we expect on the "bottle bill" and the "clean elections" bill, coupled with the "anti Wal-Mart bill" and the possibility of raising the minimum wage this year, bode well for a lively session. We may actually see some real debate on the fundamental problems that are facing the state. Stay tuned! The session has only just begun.

On a personal note: WV-CAG's Federal Issues Coordinator Ted Boettner has filed to run for the House of Delegates in the 30th district (Kanawha County). This district is the state's largest and is represented by 7 delegates. The WV-CAG board has NOT yet made legislative endorsements but we at WV-CAG have grown to love, admire and depend on this 27-year-old staff member and wish him luck.

Capito Asked to Oppose Program Reductions

by Gary Zuckett, gary@wvcag.org

About 100 students, faculty and community members attended the Town Hall Forum at the University of Charleston on Thursday night. Sponsored by Pi Gamma Mu, (UC's Social Science Honorary Society) and The FACES Coalition (Families and Children Educate the State) the discussion centered on the reductions in social services funding in the Federal Budget now being finalized in the US House of Representatives.

"The Budget is a moral document," claimed Rick Wilson from the AFSC's Economic Justice Project. "It reveals where our values are as a nation." He went on to explain how six years ago the CBO was estimating a six billion dollar surplus for this year. Now with huge tax cuts that mainly benefit the wealthy and war spending we face the biggest deficit in our history. The answer to this is not to reduce needed spending on social programs that benefit the poor and middle class.

The speakers hammered home the injustice of cutting beneficial programs with the excuse of dealing with the deficit and then turning around and giving up all those savings and more to push through an additional \$70 billion in tax breaks.

A new report was released at the event that outlines some of the costs to West Virginia. These include: allowing reductions in health services to children enrolled in Medicaid; restricting eligibility for seniors who need long term care; increasing costs of student loans; cutting child support enforcement; allowing Medicaid to drop family planning services and on and on. Overall the new budget cuts nearly half a billion dollars out of WV programs.

"There are two wars going on," remarked Larry Matheney, Secretary Treasurer of AFL-CIO. "There is the war overseas and back home, the War on the Poor. We must say no more!"

Other speakers at the event were: Evelyn Dortch & Marcus Boyd, Direct Action Welfare Group; Ted Boettner, WV Citizen Action; Nancy Guthrie, Woman's Advocate; and Rev. Jim Lewis, Community Activist who moderated the discussion.

Even though Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito declined our invitation to attend, we saved a chair for her next to the other speakers.



Did You Know?

Your calls DO make a difference! Call Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito's office toll-free at 800-426-8073 and ask her to vote no on the Budget Reconciliation Bill.

Payday Lenders Putting on Push?

by Julie Archer, julie@wvcaq.org



Myth: Payday lending fills an unmet need.

Truth: According to payday lending industry studies, ONLY 6% of their customers have no alternative loan source.

You may recall the 2004 effort by payday lenders to convince the Legislature to pass a bill that would have led to a tenfold expansion of their industry in West Virginia. That year, WV-CAG, AARP, the WV Council of Churches, the National Association of Social Workers and other organizations were part of an ad-hoc coalition, led by Legal Aid attorney and WV-CAG member Dave McMahon, that opposed the industry bill. The coalition supported a measure aimed at eliminating the major abuse used by the payday lending outlets – taking personal checks as loan collateral.

Here's how payday lending works: A worker goes to a lender and writes the lender a personal check dated in the future – usually the worker's next payday. On his/her payday the "loan" comes due. If the loan is not repaid immediately, the lender deposits the worker's personal check, bouncing other outstanding checks. Once a person realizes what has happened, he/she is already trapped deeper in debt, making a potentially bad economic situation even worse. The lending companies also charge an exorbitant interest rate, sometimes as much as 400% APR.

Although neither side saw its bill passed in 2004, several newspapers in the state are reporting that payday lenders are once again planning to put on a big push to get their bill passed this session. Prior to the 2004 legislative session, the WV-People's Election Reform Coalition (PERC-WV), a joint project of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, WV-CAG and our sister organization the Mountain State Education and Research Foundation, revealed that executives of payday lending companies contributed \$8,000 to key legislative campaigns in 2002.

A look at more recent campaign finance records showed that payday lenders contributed \$14,000 to legislators and Governor Joe Manchin in 2004, and the industry's lobbyist contributed over \$8,000 more. Are these contributions indicative of what the legislative session holds? Industry expansion (HB 2529 and SB 56) and consumer protection (HB 2665) bills have both been introduced. Stay tuned.

Legislature May Increase Minimum Wage

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcag.org

Every once in a while there's a bright spot among the darkness that tends to loom over the gold dome in Charleston. Over the last two weeks, both the House (HB 4023) and Senate (SB 146) have introduced bills that would directly benefit the more than 20,000 West Virginians who earned a minimum wage in 2004. Both bills are proposing to increase the state minimum wage from its anemic rate of \$5.15 to \$5.85 by June 30, 2006, \$6.55 by June 2007, and \$7.25 by June 2008.

Minimum wage employees working full time, year around, earn only \$10,700 a year - \$5,000 below the official poverty line for a family of three. Sixteen states now set a minimum wage greater than the federal level of \$5.15 and "living wage" ordinances have been set in 123 cities and counties. For instance, Santa Fe, New Mexico has the highest minimum wage in the country set at \$9.50 an hour.

States, plus District of Columbia, with minimum wages set above federal level of \$5.15: Alaska - \$7.15; California - \$6.75; Connecticut - \$7.40; Delaware - \$6.15; District of Columbia - \$ 7.00; Florida - \$6.40; Hawaii - \$6.75; Illinois - \$6.50; Maine - \$6.50; Massachusetts - \$6.75; Minnesota - \$6.15; New Jersey - \$6.15; New York - \$6.75; Oregon - \$7.50; Rhode Island - \$6.75; Vermont - \$7.25; Washington \$7.63; Wisconsin - \$5.70.

House Judiciary is scheduled to take up HB 4023 on Monday, January 23rd. More to come soon...

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 the *Capital Eye* on paper, please e-mail linda@wvcag.org with your e-mail address and we'll add you to our e-list!

Important Events

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.

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."

State of Our Values Discussion

January 31, 8:00 PM - Justice & Peace/Government Concerns Program of the West Virginia Council of Churches "State of Our Values" discussion. Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 520 Kanawha Blvd, W. Charleston WV. Light refreshments and discussion of the how U.S. government policy can better reflect our values, and what we expect to hear from the State of the Union address. We will watch the address together at 9:00 PM, and then have a brief wrap-up session afterward. For more information, contact Carol Warren at 343-3360 or Jeff Allen at 342-0029.

WVEC's Annual E-Day

February 14: West Virginia Environmental Council's E-Day at the Capitol. This annual event is your chance join others from across the state to lobby legislators on environmental issues. There will be booths from statewide and local organizations and a special award ceremony. WV-CAG will also hold its 3rd annual **Deposit Day** where we'll "refund" you 10-cents for each container you bring to our booth. More details in next week's issue at www.wvecouncil.org.

WV Families Devastated by Proposed Budget Cuts

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcag.org

According to a new Coalition on Human Needs report, the budget reconciliation bill, if enacted, would:

- ◆ Permit West Virginia to reduce benefits for nearly all of its 183,000 children who receive Medicaid.
- ◆ Put elderly 30,000 Medicaid recipients at risk of losing eligibility for long-term care services
- ◆ Cut federal funding for West Virginia's enforcement activities to collect child support by \$41 million, meaning West Virginia's children will lose at least \$70 million in child support over 10 years.
- ◆ Force students to pay more for a higher education because of the \$12.7 billion net five-year cut to the student loan programs - the largest federal cut in the programs' history. Students will pay more, though even now more than 39 percent of college students graduate with unmanageable debt. Nationwide, the average student borrower in school in 2003-2004 had federal loans of more than \$17,000.
- ◆ Make disabled beneficiaries wait much longer to collect what they are owed. Part of the "savings" in the bill comes from the expectation that some seriously disabled people will die before they receive their full benefits. In West Virginia, 76,000 received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) in December 2004.



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!