



Capital Eye

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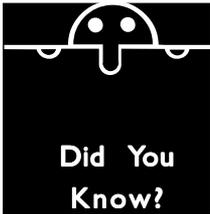
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Did You Know?

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

Clean Elections on Track

by Julie Archer, julie@wvcag.org

We had hoped to report that the Senate Judiciary Committee had passed the "WV Public Campaign Financing Act" (SB 124) but due to unexpected delays the bill was not taken up. Despite the delay **your calls have been getting through to Senators, the bill is on track and we are optimistic it will clear its first 2006 legislative hurdle this coming week.** Thanks to everyone who called Judiciary Committee members (especially our swing voters) about this much needed reform! With that said – additional calls of support can only help our cause, so if you haven't contacted your Senator there's still time. A list of Judiciary Committee members is available at www.legis.state.wv.us/committees/senate/judiciary/sencomJUD.cfm.

State Treasurer John Perdue, a Clean Elections supporter, has agreed to provide \$1 million from the sale of unclaimed property to help fund the program. This will provide the "seed money" to get West Virginia's program started and will likely be enough to provide public financing to those candidates who opt for and qualify for funds during the program's first year. This is great news and we are extremely appreciative of the Treasurer's support of our efforts to change the way campaigns are financed in the Mountain State.

Finally, HB 4251, companion to SB 124, was introduced this week. Sponsors are Delegates Jon Amores (D-Kanawha), John Doyle (D-Jefferson), Mike Caputo (D-Marion), Bonnie Brown (D-Kanawha), Patrick Lane (R-Kanawha), Rick Staton (D-Wyoming), John Ellem (R-Wood), Don Perdue (D-Wayne), Richard Browning (D-Wyoming) and Cliff Moore (D-McDowell). If the Senate version maintains momentum it's unlikely HB 4251 will be taken up, but it never hurts to thank our sponsors.

We hope to have more good news next week. Thanks again for your calls! Check www.wvoter-owned.org for more info or call or e-mail me at julie@wvcag.org if you have questions.

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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
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Farm Bureau Members?

by Linda Frame, linda@wvcag.org

WV-CAG, WVEC and the WV Farm Bureau have lobbied for a WV Bottle Bill for the past several legislative sessions. **If you are a member of the WV Farm Bureau please call us.** Your membership in both organizations can help us increase support for SB 136 and HB 2330. Please contact me at linda@wvcag.org or 346-5891 or toll-free at 1-866-WVB-FAIR and I'll let you know some easy ways you can help.

WV-CAG, WVEC, the WV Farm Bureau and the WV Council of Churches met this week with other Bottle Bill "stakeholders." While the goal was to bring the group closer to some kind of consensus, the beverage industry appeared unwilling to move toward even the slightest compromise.

The American Beverage Association flew in an "expert" from MA who proposed a Comprehensive Litter Plan aimed at all roadside trash, not just beverage containers, to clean up our trash. He left out some key points, however, like the plan doesn't actually clean up litter in states that have it, like in NJ where their litter is above the national average. He told us that beverage containers make up just 9% of litter. This number just doesn't jive with litter surveys showing that Bottle Bills reduce overall litter by 40-60%. Take your own informal survey. Stroll down any WV road and see for yourself what causes the most litter. Ask a farmer, ask an Adopt-A-Highway volunteer or, since some in the room thought the problem is already taken care of by their free labor, ask our felons.

Probably the most interesting argument presented was that litter could best be reduced by public education campaigns. For instance, if litterbugs just understood that open container laws do not apply to beer in their cars, they would not throw those bottles out the window to avoid the police. I'd like to see what advertising firm signs on to handle that campaign.

"Next time you drink and drive, keep those empties right inside – It's Legal!" (Don't try this yourself, please!)

We anticipate that the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, chaired by Senator Randy White, will take up SB 136 this week.

And please plan to attend **Deposit Day and E-Day** on **February 14!** More info at www.wvbottlebill.org.

Senate Thumbs Down on Universal Health Care

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

After a fast start in the House, Senate leadership gutted HB 4021 – a bill setting up a Commission to explore options for providing health care to all West Virginians. In a manner I've never seen in my ten years of lobbying, rather than letting the bill go through the standard committee process, it was amended from the Senate president's podium with no debate from the floor, a slap in the face to the House Committees who worked hard on this ambitious project.

The House bill set up a timeline to have a Commission on Health Care Reform outline a plan to implement Universal Health Care in our state over the next five years. In addition, incremental steps to expand coverage and access would take place in the interim. The Senate deleted all this. It amended into the bill the governor's proposals of a pilot project allowing clinics to sell primary and preventative care for a set fee and another to allow insurance companies to sell limited primary and preventative policies - small steps in the right direction, the key word being small.

The Senate expected the bill to go to a conference committee but the House upped the ante and referred it back to the House Health and Human Resources Committee. Stay tuned.

State of Our Values

by Carol Warren, *WV Council of Churches*

The faces are serious, attentive. Everyone's eyes are on the TV set. "Congress did not pass my Social Security plan this year..." The room erupts in laughter and applause.

There were a few moments of comic relief during the 2006 State of the Union address, but most of the messages were sobering to the people gathered for the State of our Values event. The evening was sponsored by the West Virginia Council of Churches' Justice & Peace/Government Concerns Program, WV Citizen Action, Justice & Life Office, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship and others.

The first discussion question was "What's one thing you would like to hear the President say tonight?" Predictably, there was a range of responses from "I resign" to "I'm starting a new War on Poverty." But beyond the expected responses were more serious food for thought. We'd like to hear that the United States is going to start behaving as a real member of the world community again... with the emphasis on Member. We want to move beyond the "Me first" attitude so prevalent in our society to a "You first" stance in which we take care of each other. We want real relationships, in the best sense of the word, with our fellow citizens and with

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Why Unions Matter

Ted Boettner, by ted@wvcag.org

Only a fool would try to deprive working men and working women of their right to join the union of their choice.
-Dwight D. Eisenhower



Median weekly wages for women union workers are 34 percent higher than nonunion women.

With only 12.5 percent (15.7 million) of wage and salary workers in unions, a lot of people might ask whether unions are still relevant and important today. Despite the great role unions have played in making life better for so many workers, over the last 50 years unions have not been able to amass the same political influence they had in the 1930s and 40s. For instance, unions funneled tens of millions of dollars - not to mention volunteer hours - into John Kerry's recent bid for president, and yet I don't remember in any of the three debates one word about the importance of joining a union. You'd think unions commanded enough respect and power to get Senator Kerry to say something about why unions matter.

It often seems the media pay little attention to unions. While most television news programs always tell viewers how well the stock market is doing, we rarely see a report of how well workers are doing. It might be because roughly 90% of stocks are held by 10% of the population; with the richest one-half percent holding 40%. As for workers, the wages for about two-thirds of them have either stagnated or declined - not to mention that working hours have gotten longer, benefits are shrinking, and both husband and wife have to work to just put food on the table.

The answer to whether unions matters is a resounding YES.

As you may know, union workers make a much higher wage than non-union workers do. They have better benefits, especially health care and pensions, and longer vacations and sick leave. Unions mean that employers can no longer treat workers in an arbitrary manner. Unions mean that workers gain a lot more respect and dignity on the job and control over their lives, on the job and off.

On a national scale, unions, especially when there's a movement, can accomplish better legislation for workers. Especially in terms of their security, like social security, occupational safety and health, and unemployment compensation. Also, union members are more attuned to the law. They know more about their rights, and they're more likely to use those rights for their own benefit.

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Asbestos/Silica Bill Toxic For Those Exposed

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

West Virginians for Fairness (I love these names. Remember “For the Sake of the Kids?”), a “coalition” of chemical industries, glass manufacturers, mining and other members of the Chamber of Commerce, has introduced House and Senate companion bills to save our “clogged” court system from an overabundance of claims from victims of Asbestos and Silica – two naturally occurring substances that slowly kill their victims over a 10 to 20 year period. This legislation, if passed, will also save these same companies from paying out millions of dollars to workers exposed to these killers in the workplace.

Clothed in the language of concern for getting “impaired” victims speedy compensation, this legislation would show the majority of those exposed (but who may show no immediate signs of these diseases) the exit. The latency period between exposure and clinical symptoms can be decades.

Silica dust was the killer of hundreds of workers who built the Hawk’s Nest Tunnel, a hydroelectric project built on the New River in Fayette County during the Great Depression. Workers were buried in local cornfields after area cemeteries ran out of room. Critics of this bill to “help” current victims are of the opinion that even the Hawk’s Nest victims would not have qualified for compensation under this proposal.

SB 474 and HB 4348 are not the answer to decades of industry lies and cover-ups of workers’ exposure to these killers. Don’t let their fluffy language fool you; **the only things these bills protect are the guilty corporations’ profits.**

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Unions also mean a lot of good things for society as a whole. For example, unions bring about greater income equality, a big issue in West Virginia and the United States where the gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened over the last 20-30 years.

One way you can tell union membership is more important and relevant than ever is how strongly employers fight against them whenever workers try to form unions.

In brief, the reason we have a middle-class in America is because of unions and the active role they’ve played throughout history.

With the middle-class and the American dream slipping away, we need unions more than ever.

Capito's Three Challengers

by Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org

Although the WV-CAG Board will not make candidate endorsements until April, it is already faced with a dilemma. The Board would like your input on the Second Congressional District Democratic Primary. Even if you do not live in the Second District, you, and every progressive West Virginian should care about this race.

Incumbent Republican Shelley Moore Capito has been terrible on CAG issues throughout her political career. Charleston attorneys Mark Hunt and Mike Callaghan and South Charleston Mayor Richie Robb are competing for the privilege of unseating her. Mark Hunt has a mixed record on our issues as a House of Delegate member but has almost unlimited money to spend on the campaign. Mike Callaghan is a former US attorney, Division of Environmental Protection Director and past Democratic Party State Chairman. He deserves a lot of credit for uniting the Party in 2004 and some in the environmental community were pleased with his DEP leadership.

And then there is Richie Robb! We were surprised by his announcement last week that he is also running for Congress. He is a WV CAG member, South Charleston Mayor for more than 30 years and an outspoken supporter of our bottle bill and Clean Elections bill. Each of these candidates would be a big improvement over the incumbent in advancing progressive issues in Washington. Please e-mail or call me with your thoughts on whom the board should endorse.

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others around the world.

Those present recognized that our values seem rather different from those being put forth in Washington these days. We value each human person and believe that no one is "ineligible." We cannot forget that many of us live in poverty and despair. Everyone has innate, God-given dignity. People's work should be respected and valued, no matter how great or how small. People deserve decent wages for their labor, with which to support themselves and their families. We are always more important than profits, and so is keeping the planet habitable for our grandchildren.

There was also discussion of the qualities of leadership. A leader must have moral courage, accept responsibility, admit mistakes, and endeavor to correct them. He or she should be first and foremost a servant of the people, and lead by setting an example of that service. A leader should be creative, consult widely with people, and listen to all points of view, especially those of persons who disagree. A good leader would be able to find ways to unite our people, ending the increasing division and polarization. A truly compassionate leader would be one who makes it easier for people to obtain what they need to live a decent life.

A tall order, no doubt about it. But it is critical for our society to have its dreams and its dreamers. They make the impossible appear possible. Every person at the gathering will continue to work his or her hardest to realize those dreams. And as the saying goes, if you can dream it, you can do it.

Important Events

Weekly Vigils Continue

WV Patriots for Peace Vigils every Friday from noon to 1:00 p.m. at the Town Center Mall, across from Chili's. Help hold the Wall of Remembrance, which is nearly a football field long. For more info, visit www.wvpatriotsforpeace.org.

WVEC's Annual E-Day

February 14: WV Environmental Council's E-Day at the Capitol ~ your chance to 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 info at www.wvecouncil.org

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.



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

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

THANKS!