

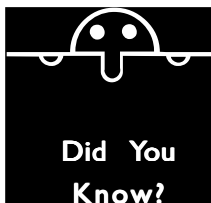


Inside This Week's Issue:

Town Hall Meetings
Coming to a
Community Near
You

Give Now and Your
Donation is
Matched!

Oil and Gas
Coalition is Back



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

Getting a Head Start

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcag.org

On May 11, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) director Rob Portman sent a letter to members of Congress suggesting that President Bush will veto "any appropriations bill that exceeds [the president's] request", referring to discretionary spending bills that are developed later in the year that derive from the limits set by the budget resolution.

With the threat of a presidential veto, votes on appropriations bills for human needs programs like affordable housing, food stamps, and student aid are more important than ever. Each vote could decide the fate of millions of Americans and thousands of West Virginians in need. The President doesn't have a line-item veto. If he vetoes an Appropriations Bill, he vetoes everyone's Appropriation Bill.

To combat this threatened veto, CAG held a press conference last week with other coalition allies at the Vista View Head Start in Charleston. Karen Williams, director of Kanawha County Head Start, gave a wonderful presentation on the importance of Head Start in our state and how cuts in federal funding decrease the number of children enrolled in the program. Other speakers at the event included Gary Zuckett (WV CAG), Ted Boettner (MSERF), Rick Wilson (AFSC), and Sam Hickman with the National Association of Social Workers.

Overall, the event was very successful. We not only received widespread media coverage (the *Charleston Gazette*, all four local TV stations, and two radio stations), but were able to prompt the *Charleston Gazette* to write an editorial on Monday (June 11) advocating against President Bush's veto threat to decrease funds for Head Start. To see the editorial, visit our home page at www.wvcag.org or www.wvgazette.com.

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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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Spring Awards Dinner

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

Our annual awards dinner in April was another in a string of successful fund and fun raisers. Since our first in 2000, we have brought together a large segment of the local progressive community for an evening of good food, great entertainment, and a chance to recognize individuals with long years of service to the causes of justice and community service.

This year our award recipients were: South Charleston Mayor Richie Robb ~ the Don Marsh Public Service award; Rev. Jim Lewis, of WV Patriots for Peace ~ the In Defense of Democracy award; and Norm Steenstra ~ the Tom Knight Excalibur award. Accomplishments of these awardees would more than fill this newsletter so I won't even begin to list them here.

In addition to the awards dinner, the silent auction drew everyone's attention. Old and new friends strived to outbid one another as the jazz band "Full Flavor" got many of us to the dance floor. Several original art pieces and photographs made this year's event one-of-a kind. We give a hearty "thanks" to the numerous artists who donated their pieces for this event.

The event filled Coonskin Park's clubhouse with the reception and auction on one side and the awards dinner on the other. There was lots of room for side conversations on the deck out back and on the grounds. In all, we believe our 150 or so guests came away with the satisfaction of being part of a great organization that is tirelessly working for the greater good of West Virginia and our nation.

For the first time, folks who couldn't attend can get into the spirit of the event at home with a full-length DVD of the awards, music and auction for a donation of \$10. Contact marge@wvcag.org or call in to 346-5891 to order a copy.

Also, check out the June 10 issue of the *Sunday Gazette-Mail's* On the Town to see photos of our fundraiser.

Thanks to our wonderful members and sponsors for making this event a success and helping us keep the lights on.

Universal Access to Retirement Security

by Ted Boettner, ted@wvcaq.org

While many future retirees will rely on personal savings and benefits earned through their work-based retirement plans, over 300,000 West Virginia workers (more than half of us), are not covered by employer-provided pensions at work. This is largely attributable to the sharp decline in personal savings and the erosion of the traditional defined benefit (DB) pension system. While defined contribution (DC) plans such as 401Ks have largely replaced DB plans, most workers with DC plans have accumulated relatively little money in their accounts. A recent study by the Federal Reserve points out that 53 percent of near retirement age workers (ages 45-54) had accumulated less than \$48,000 in financial assets. This includes assets from DC plans like 401Ks and personal savings.

National data from the Employee Benefit Research Institute show that 75 percent of employers with less than ten workers, and more the 60 percent with 10 to 24 workers, do not sponsor pension plans. This presents a particular problem for West Virginia workers, since 32 percent work in businesses with fewer than 20 employees or were sole proprietors.

Access to retirement plans is also determined by income. Only 40 percent of workers making under \$20,000 have access to a retirement plan, while three-quarters of those making above \$50,000 have access. Participation among low-wage workers is also low. Only a quarter of workers making between \$15,000 and \$20,000 participate in a retirement plan, compared with nearly three-fourths of those making more than \$50,000.

Companies that do not sponsor retirement plans tend to employ many part-time and temporary workers. In fact, 80 percent of part-time and temporary workers lack retirement coverage. Even if their companies do have a retirement plan, many part-time and temporary workers may not qualify for coverage.

Surveys show that small businesses do not provide retirement plans because of the cost, complexity and time it takes to administer them. Moreover, many employers might feel that it's something easy to put off, unlike meeting payroll, paying taxes, and figuring out health insurance. And as a result, many small businesses offer no DC plans and many workers end up with little or no retirement savings.

One way we can overcome this pension problem would be to establish a system of universal voluntary retirement accounts that would immediately give every worker in the state a low-cost DC account, to which they could contribute directly from their paycheck. This program could mirror the state's 457 program that offers DC plans and the 529-college savings program. Like the 457 program it could offer a pre-selected menu of options. It could include options for employee-only savings (work-based IRAs) and employee-employer plans (work-based 401(k)-type programs). Administration could be assigned to the

(continued on page 6 ~ see "Security")

WV Needs Oil and Gas Reform Now!

Our state has the second greatest number of producing wells in the nation, second only to Texas. There are nearly 50,000 active wells and at least another 25,000 unplugged inactive wells scattered through more than 40 counties. WV-CAG has received an increasing number of calls from upset surface owners shocked by the almost complete absence of legal rights available to land owners. Working closely with Attorney Dave McMahon of Mountain State Justice we have decided to resurrect the Oil and Gas Reform Coalition (OGRC) which successfully achieved some basic reforms in the early 80's.

More than 7,000 new well permits have been issued since 2005 and drilling permits are at near record levels. If you are vulnerable to gas and oil drilling abuses we'd love to have you join us in creating a political force to counter the strong lobby at the Capitol. One of the benefits to joining the coalition is a copy of Dave McMahon's book – "The West Virginia Surface Owners Guide to Oil and Gas." Basic membership, which includes the book, is \$30. For more information on OGRC contact Norm Steenstra at 346-5891 or norm @wvcag.org.

Bottle Bill Supporters Celebrate Earth Day

by Linda Frame, linda@wvcag.org

On April 22, teams of volunteers spanned out across the WVU campus in Morgantown to pick up trash. After less than two hours, we collected 32 bags of bottles and cans and 21 bags of trash. This means that 60% of what we picked up would be covered under West Virginia's proposed container law. Lobbyists opposing West Virginia's bill claim that beverage containers comprise **only 9%** of our state's litter problem!

Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, lead sponsor of the WV Bottle Bill (container law), was instrumental in putting this event together, along with Jim Kotcon and student activists with the Sierra Student Coalition on campus. Many other volunteers turned out as well. We wrapped up the event by collecting petition signatures and mailing empty plastic water bottles to Governor Manchin asking for his support on the Bottle Bill. **THANK YOU TO ALL WHO HELPED OUT!**

For more, please check out the *The Daily Athenaeum* (campus newspaper) story: http://www.da.wvu.edu/show_article.php?&story_id=27678. The students' and other volunteers' efforts also caught the attention of the *Morgantown Dominion Post* which ran a **front-page story** the next day, along with great photos.

Over the past few weeks we have collected surveys from over 100 more Adopt-A-Highway volunteers. Out of 939 surveys mailed, 624 were returned (66%)! 477 of those returning surveys support the WV Bottle Bill (76%), 24 do not support it (4%) and 121 (19%) were unsure. To learn more, check out our website at www.wvbottlebill.org and read letters from supporters, download information and much more.

CAG Welcomes Hannah!

Know
someone
who is
interested in
volunteering
or interning
at CAG?

Give us a
call at 346-
5891 or e-
mail
linda@wvcag.org

My name is Hannah Dalton. I am a senior at WVU-Tech in Montgomery. My major is Health Service Administration. I am also working on a minor in Marketing. I am currently interning for CAG and West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, where I am working on a summary of the first twelve pages of The Hamilton Project. One of its main topics is preventative care and how taking care of your body by eating right and exercising decreases your chances of getting sick regularly.

I have one more semester at WVU-Tech. I will graduate in December 2007. I want to walk to receive my diploma. We do not have December graduation like other colleges, so I have to wait until May 2008. I am going to stay in WV for a few more years to work and save money to move to Virginia. I will be in a part of Virginia that has my particular field and find an apartment hopefully not too far from work. I plan to work in a rehabilitation facility or clinic as an administrator. I like to read, write in my journal, write poetry, and listen to music in my spare time.

I also like to spend time with family and friends. I enjoy going to see artists like Toby Mac, Third Day, Grits, The Crabb Family, Instereo, Julian Drive, and Israel Houghton. I have been to jazz concerts like Berks Jazz Fest in Reading, PA. I think my first spring break from college was exactly the same time as Berks Jazz Fest. I was happy because I was able to go to the last three concerts of that week. It was the sax's pack, grooving for Grover Washington, Jr. and the last day was a tribute. I have seen some of my favorite jazz artists in concert like Steve Cole, Gerald Albright and Richard Elliot. I also listened to new artists like Paul Taylor, Jeff Kashiwa, Paul Brown, and Walter Beasley. All of these men play some type of saxophone, but I listened to people who play the guitar and other instruments.



(Security ~ continued from page 3)

Treasurer's Office, taking advantage of its low-cost structure, and the management of the accounts and the investments could be contracted to a private firm. Simply reducing administrative fees from the levels charged by private managers of DC accounts would increase their accumulations by a staggering 25-30 percent.

Another distinct advantage of these accounts would be their portability between West Virginia employers and the fact that workers could contribute to them immediately, with no vesting period, regardless of where they work. This would give small employers the ability to provide their workers with a decent pension with almost zero paperwork or fiduciary obligations whatsoever. While the state would create the infrastructure, it would not fund the pensions or match worker contributions. The retirement accounts would be funded through automatic payroll deductions and have options for employer contributions.

With this system in place, a low-income worker could significantly enhance retirement income. A typical twenty-five-year-old worker, who makes \$25,000 this year, and puts a little less than \$15 a week into a retirement account with an employer match, would have over \$200,000 saved by his retirement, based on a conservative five percent interest rate. That translates to a \$1500 monthly annuity, more than doubling his Social Security check! To put this in perspective, the median value of all DC accounts is only \$60,000 for people aged 55-64, which translates into a monthly annuity of \$385.

This retirement savings proposal offers a convenient, simple solution that helps provide long-term financial security for West Virginia's retirees and helps local businesses cut through the red tape while improving worker benefits.

WV United Plans Summer Town Halls

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

West Virginians United for Social and Economic Justice, a coalition that CAG helped form during the fight to save Social Security from privatization, is planning a series of Town Hall meetings over the summer months. Under the banner of "Agenda for a Shared Prosperity in WV" the meetings will address the need for Health Care Reform, Justice in the Workplace, Economic Fairness, and opposition to escalation of the Iraq War.

WV United is comprised of many major WV organizations including the National Association of Social Workers-WV, WV Council of Churches, WV AFL-CIO & other labor groups, American Friends Service Committee Economic Justice Project, West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, Mountain State Education & Research, Direct Action Welfare Group and many more.

Watch for announcements of upcoming meetings in your area. If your local civic action group would like to host an Agenda for a Shared Prosperity meeting in your area, contact Ted Boettner at ted@wvcag.org or 346-5891.

Campaign Finance Reform Needed!

by Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org

My mother used to tell me that I sounded like a broken record when I repeated myself ad nauseam. I won't resent it if you call me that, too, when I continue to talk about the role of special interest money in state politics. For those of you who only read short paragraphs, here's the facts: **special interest money corrupts the political system.** Certainly that's a no-brainer!

The good news: some states have made real progress in mitigating special interest money influence and encouraging average people to run and get elected to political office. Clean Elections works in those states but it is not an easy task to get elected officials to embrace the concept. Indeed it has taken states years and years to get their laws passed. Despite this long road they face, more states, including West Virginia, are considering emulating Maine and Arizona's legislation. Stay with us and recommit yourself to the Clean Election Campaign in West Virginia. Join with WV-CAG and OVEC and many other organizations in working toward the concept of alternative methods of financing political campaigns.

A step you can take today is to send in a contribution. We have a foundation which will match your donation dollar-for-dollar. Please see the blue insert and use the form below to send in your contribution today!



Please renew your membership or send a donation.

Name: _____

Address: _____

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

YES - please apply this to the matching grant! _____

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

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