



Capital Eye

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Election Bills are Blooming

by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

Years in between elections are when lawmakers are inclined to consider election law improvements. This year is no exception. So far we are tracking the following upgrades, in addition to our Public Financing Bill:

Same Day Registration (SDR) & Early Voting – SB 462 & HB 2464 – would allow voters to register and vote on the same day during the already designated early voting period at the county courthouse. County clerks are vigorously opposing this great idea already in place in 10 states. In those states, voter participation is consistently 10 to 12 percent higher than states without SDR in Presidential Election years. Contact the Chairs of both House & Senate Judiciary Committees and ask them to pass this no-brainer.

Phase-out of Touch Screen DRE Voting – HB 2864 – also in House Judiciary, would get rid of these very unsafe and problematic machines that leave voters wondering if their votes were counted the way they wanted. Only the county clerks that have DRE voting machines are opposing this bill. We want a secure voting system that allows voters to mark a paper ballot as the official record of their vote and then let the electronics count the paper – not the other way around. Call on this one, too.

Satellite Voting – SB 314 & HB 2464 – No, this will not allow you to vote from orbit. It will allow counties to designate additional early voting locations such as libraries and even the local mall. SB 314 is awaiting action in the Senate Judiciary Committee after being approved by the Senate Government Organization Committee.

Public Financing for Supreme Court – SB 311 – would eliminate the real or perceived influence of campaign donations on judges' decisions and restore confidence in our judiciary. With *Caperton v. Massey* making headlines in papers nationwide, the timing could not be better. This one needs your help, too. Contact members of Senate Judiciary to pass it out.

A House Judiciary subcommittee met today and passed out **HB 2869** with recommendation. This bill would lengthen the time frame for filing post-primary and post-general campaign financial reports. This committee has been assigned all of these election bills and its members are Delegates Fleischauer (Chair), Brown, Caputo, Lane, Schoen, and Hutchins.

We received seven entries for the Clean Elections Video Contest. We now have the task of choosing the winners, which will be made available to the legislators for their viewing. We'll provide links to the winning entries as soon as they are decided so you can view them, too.

*Clean Elections Coalition meeting:
Thursday, March 12 at 10:30 A.M,
conference room at the office of the Catholic
Diocese, 1116 Kanawha Blvd, East. There is
parking at the rear of the building. Hope to
see you there!*

Take Action!

Looking for a way to support all of these issues but don't know where to start? Here are a **few quick actions you can do THIS WEEK** that will help us make progressive change at the state Capitol!

Call House Judiciary Chairwoman Carrie Webster's office at 304-340-3252 and tell her you support HB 2464 which would allow voter registration during early voting and HB 2864 to phase-out DRE machines.

Call Senate Judiciary Chairman Jeff Kessler's office and tell him you support SB 462 (HB 2464's companion bill) as well as SB 311 – public financing for the Supreme Court. Let him know you also support his hard work to pass public financing for legislative races, too.

Call Governor Manchin's office at 304-558-2000 and tell him that you support the increase in the tobacco tax.

Come to E-Day on March 11 – see more details on next page.

Support WV-CAG! Use the cut-out form on the back page of this newsletter to update your membership or send in a donation. We need you!

Contact Your Representatives!

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 where you can find legislators' e-mails. Or e-mail any legislator at cglagola@mail.wvnet.edu. Type the legislators' names in the subject line.

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

Open letter on Health Care Reform

We got inquiries from several members after my last article on Health Care Reform asking why we didn't mention Single Payer. Below is a note I recently sent to an Eastern Panhandle member whose local Single Payer group is hosting a public discussion with an HCAN proponent (see notice in this issue). I think it explains where we're at with this issue.

Dear Lynn,

In the spirit of full disclosure, I should say that our national Citizen Action affiliate, USAction is one of the national leaders of Health Care for America Now (HCAN) along with MoveOn, AFL-CIO, National Association of Social Workers and dozens of other labor and community-based organizations. As I mentioned your "gradualist", McVay, is an organizer for Penn Action – our sister group in PA. See www.healthcareforamericanow.org.

I really like your idea of this kind of public meeting to discuss Single Payer versus a Public/Private transitional approach that would wean us from the for-profit health coverage that is killing us. I wish I could attend your event but as the WV Legislature is in session, I need to stay in Charleston.

I recently had lunch with a CAG member and a leader of the local Physicians for a Nation Health Program chapter to discuss the goals of HCAN and where they overlap with a Single Payer approach.

The option of a Public Health Insurance Plan (that is top in the HCAN principles) I feel would lead the way toward a Single Payer type outcome. I guess this makes me a "gradualist" in my support of Single Payer.

I prefer to call myself a pragmatist. I've been a consumer/environmental/good government lobbyist now since the Clinton Plan went down in flames and I don't now see the assembled political muscle to move directly to Single Payer in one big step. However, we can begin moving in that direction by creating a Public Plan option that anyone can buy into directly (on a sliding scale) or go in 50/50 with their employer or whatever. With a real choice, consumers would flock to a Public Plan which had better coverage and lower rates. Let Big Insurance really compete with a Public Plan on a level playing field and may the best plan win! I wish this was what Clinton had proposed last time; we could have had a total transition by now.

In addition, insurance law must be changed to eliminate pre-existing conditions, initiate community rating, and require a certain level of coverage and a host of other needed protections for consumers. In other words, we must immediately tame the insurance dragon similar to the way Japan has with prudent protections of the public (visit

http://healthcare.change.org/blog/view/turning_japanese_we_could_do_a_lot_worse.

I'm not trying and talk anyone out of supporting and promoting Single Payer as the ultimate in health care reform. I would like to enjoin you and others to put at least a slice of your reform energy into building some of these foundation blocks upon which any serious reform must be based. I don't see this as a black and white – either/or debate. Congressman Conyers, sponsor of the national Single Payer bill, has also signed on to the HCAN principles of reform.

We are at a crossroads with our economy imploding and health care costs skyrocketing and this time everyone is on the healthcare reform bandwagon, including Big Insurance. Their solution is simple, have the government subsidize their over-priced bare bones policies. No thanks!

With health care now consuming about 1/6th of our nation's GDP (soon to be 1/5 then 1/4) any effort to fix our economy without fixing health care will also fail.

It is going to be an ugly fight on reform with the powers that place profits above public health, and I hope that regardless of whether we are Single Payer loyalists or Gradualists, or just plain sick and tired of a broken system, we can work together to move toward what we all want - a sane and affordable health system that covers everyone with comprehensive care.

I sense we'll find we agree on so much more than we disagree. In contrast, the opposition to any kind of meaningful reform is so powerful and well-funded that we would do serious reform a fatal disservice if we focus solely on our areas of disagreement while the real enemy, the insurance lobby, gets away with the golden ring.

Most observers agree the window is now open for reform and if we don't make major progress this year the opportunity may again pass us by for another decade. We can't afford to let that happen.

Thanks again for setting up this conversation in the Panhandle. WV-CAG will be working this end of the state (and with our national affiliate in Washington) as hard as we can...

Note: For more information on the advantages of a purely Single Payer national health care system go to Physicians for a Nation Health Program – www.pnhp.org and Universal Health Care Action Network www.uhcan.org

Capital Eye is published by WV-Citizen Action, a nonprofit membership organization founded in 1974 and 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. Learn more at www.wvcag.org.

Calls Needed to Support Surface Owners' Rights Bills

by Norm Steenstra III, norm@wvoro.org

Another week down and not much to report. On the Senate side, the Surface Owners' Protection Act (SB 478), was introduced. Based on New Mexico law, SB 478, provides additional notice for surface owners and requires a time period to allow for negotiation of a pre-drilling "Surface Use and Compensation Agreement" between the driller and surface owner, but lacks several other provisions contained in the Surface Owners' Bill of Rights. It is a good bill, but we are, of course, pushing our Surface Owners' Bill of Rights (SB 374) as it offers more protections. Definitely call the sponsors of Senate Bill 478 and thank them for their efforts, but encourage them to support SB 374.

SB 374 sponsors are Senators Larry Edgell (D-Wetzel), Randy White (D-Webster) and Jeff Kessler (D-Marshall). Senators Kessler and White are also sponsors of SB 478, along with Senators Clark Barnes (R-Randolph), Truman Chafin (D-Mingo) and Erik Wells (D-Kanawha). Both bills have been triple referenced to Energy, Industry, and Mining; then Judiciary; followed by Finance.

On the House side, we are still waiting for our bill to clear bill drafting. House leadership has responded positively and we expect our bill to only be referenced to Energy, Industry, and Labor and then to Judiciary. Please keep contacting your Senators and Delegates to keep the Surface Owners' issues in their heads. We also invite you to come and

see us at the legislature.

WV SORO Day at the Legislature is Tuesday, March 17th and we strongly encourage you to come down and show your

support for the Surface Owners' Bill of Rights. Bring your family and friends and we will help introduce you to your Senators and Delegates. This gives you the chance to make a personal appeal to the people who can do something to help us.

We will also have a table at the WV Environmental Council's E-Day on **Wednesday, March 11th**. You may be receiving phone calls to remind you the when's and where's. See you soon!



Eastern Panhandle Events

March 24, 7:30 PM, "**Healthcare Now - How? Two Perspectives.**" Margaret Flowers will present case for achieving universal healthcare through a single-payer, Medicare for all approach; Richard McVay will talk about responsibility shared by individuals, employers, and government. Byrd Legislative Studies Center Auditorium, Shepherd University. Free.

March 28, 9 AM - 5 PM, **Africa Forum** Shenandoah University Student Center, Winchester VA. Forum will bring together people from Tri-state and Washington, DC area to increase understanding of and engagement with development efforts in Africa.

Msia Clark, one of the speakers, is from Amnesty International.

March 31, 7:15 PM, **Ray McGovern**, retired CIA Senior Analyst on "**Countering Terror with Justice.**" Mr. McGovern, recipient of CIA's top award and briefer of presidents, will talk about why we should not sweep torture under the rug, why torture is not only illegal but also ineffective, why our ability to require lawful conduct from the intelligence community in the future depends on our ability to hold officials accountable now. Byrd Legislative Studies Center Auditorium, Shepherd University. Free. Reception following.

CAG Fundraiser

Mark your calendars for May 1 at the Charleston Woman's Club. WV-Citizen Action will hold its annual Spring Fundraiser with live music, great food and silent auction. Tickets are just \$30, students \$10 and are available now. Call us at 304-346-5891 or e-mail linda@wvcag.org.

"To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest citizens and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived - this is to have succeeded."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



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March 11, 2009 – E-Day at the Capitol!

Lower Rotunda - State Capitol Complex, Charleston. Environmental organizations and sustainable business exhibits from 9 AM - 3 PM. Citizen / Grassroots Lobby Day! Join WVEC for a full day of lobbying, press conference, program, and visit exhibits.

Then stick around for **E-Day! Benefit Reception Dinner & Award Presentation Ceremony.** 6:00 PM - 9:30 PM. To be held at the Woman's Club of Charleston located on the corner of Elizabeth and Virginia Street. Join us after E-Day at the Capitol to unwind, visit with friends, honor our award recipients and lobby team! Dinner will be served. Live music. \$15 suggested donation at the door.



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

Please renew your membership or send a donation.

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____

Here's my donation of: \$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!

Help Stop PATH!

E-Day! STOP PATH Rally, 5:00 PM, Charleston Woman's Club at the corner of Elizabeth Street and Virginia Street East.

PATH, if approved by regulatory agencies and constructed, would be a giant 765 Kilovolt electrical power transmission line that would run 290 miles from AEP's John Amos power plant substation near St. Albans, W.Va., to a new substation near Frederick, MD. It would include a right-of-way swath 200 feet wide through farms and forests and other public and private properties, across up to a dozen or more WV counties, and through the state's eastern panhandle into Virginia and Maryland. The apparent purpose of PATH is to transfer coal fueled electricity from the Ohio Valley to eastern cities near the Atlantic coast.

Citizens Against PATH will have a STOP PATH informational table at the Capitol on E-day, with maps, petitions against PATH and other information.

For further information or to help with the STOP PATH rally, **contact Frank Young, e-mail fyoung@mountain.net, or by telephone 304-372-3945.**