



WRAP-UP

The Newsletter of the West Virginia Legislature

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Legislature's Web Site Advances a Digital State Government

by Drew Ross

With new advances in technology, the West Virginia Legislature has made a tremendous effort to modernize its ability to deliver information directly to constituents. Being able to bring the actions of the state's legislative branch into the homes and offices of all West Virginians has enabled a closer understanding of the legislative process.

After undergoing key updates and improvements, the West Virginia Legislature's Web site continues to provide an enhanced online presence targeted toward raising public awareness of legislative activities and educating citizens interested in the lawmaking process. The site serves as a hub of information for constituents, providing them with historical, educational and informational content regarding the Legislature and its actions.

The Web site is particularly helpful with constituent's general inquiries, including their representatives' contact information, but also in providing them with up-to-the-minute details on bills as they progress through the legislative process.

Many of the features designed to keep people informed of these activities continue to be strengthened, and new features have also been added to promote a digital state government.

The widely used Bill Status function of the Web site was recently redesigned to consolidate all relevant bill information onto a single page, allowing more convenient access to all information related to a particular piece of legislation. Amendments, Fiscal Notes and House Roll Call votes were added to provide a more comprehensive history of each bill.

A bill tracking system is quickly becoming a favorite feature among a growing number of users. This personalized system was added to allow users to track bills of particular interest to them, and follow their progress through the legislative session. Nearly 10,000 individuals used the Bill Tracking system during the 2007 Regular Session.

Another added feature allows all state agencies to submit legislative and annual reports to the

snippets on legislative activities - even the possible naming of an official state fossil.

An RSS Feed has been recently added to provide prompt news from the Legislature's Office of Reference & Information. This feature allows users to receive legislators' news releases, legislative newsletters, and web log entries via updates through their news reader program. West Virginia's RSS Feed was dubbed by the National Conference of State Legislatures in 2007 as one of the "25 Great Online Ideas Worth Stealing."

The newest features to the site are video welcome messages from the Speaker of the House of Delegates and the Senate President.

"It is imperative that the Legislature be as open and transparent as possible so that the citizens can be as confident in the legislative process as the people they elected to represent them," said President Earl Ray Tomblin. "Our legislative Web site allows the citizens to have access to the legislative branch 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a click of the mouse."

Speaker Richard Thompson added, "The Senate President and I want to urge the use of the Legislature's Web site - it's a valuable tool to provide quick access to legislative information that may be of interest to West Virginians and makes it convenient for constituents to contact their representatives."

In addition to these updates, citizens can locate their legislators easily with a state zip code search and by using district maps, and are also provided with members'



President's Online Video Welcome Message:
www.legis.state.wv.us/Senate1/President/president.cfm

Speaker's Online Video Welcome Message:
www.legis.state.wv.us/House/Speaker/speaker.cfm

Legislature electronically, eliminating the need for duplicate paper copies while creating a central state report information center available on the Web.

The site's new web log, Today in the Legislature, is updated throughout the day with information from the floor, scheduled committee meetings and other short



In the House

As of 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, January 30, 2008 the 22nd day of the 78th Legislature, 975 bills have been introduced in the House of Delegates. Of these, a total of 17 have passed the House and will go to the Senate for its consideration. Some of the bills passed this week include:

House Bill 2517 would require a West Virginia state bank or holding company wishing to acquire an out of state bank to file a copy of the application with both a federal regulator and the state banking commissioner. However, this would not be required if the acquisition involves a merger or establishment of branches.

House Bill 3215 would remove the administrative link between Blue Ridge Community and Technical College and Shepherd University. This would make Blue Ridge a free-standing state community & technical college.

House Bill 4019 would allow courts to dismiss cases involving multiple plaintiffs including nonresidents and residents under the doctrine of forum non conveniens. Currently, courts are not allowed to dismiss

cases under this doctrine if it involves both resident and nonresident plaintiffs and if the action arose from a single occurrence.

House Bill 4036 would give the Board of Respiratory Care the authority to issue temporary permits to respiratory students. Students would have to meet certain criteria before receiving this work permit. Students would be allowed to practice under the supervision of a licensed respiratory care therapist. If the initial permit expires before the student completes licensure requirements and the student is enrolled in at least nine semester hours, making satisfactory progress in his or her curriculum and working well during clinical rotations, then the student may apply for one six-month extension.

House Bill 4078 would eliminate the Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park Commission. The tasks and powers of this commission would be transferred to the Division of Natural Resources.

House Bill 4092 would require a person to pass an examination in order to be licensed as a forester or forestry technician and would clarify and update the board's rule-making authority. Upon a vacancy on the Board of Foresters, the Governor would appoint a new registered forestry technician, with the consent of the Senate, from the 10 nominees recommended by the West Virginia Chapter of the Society of American Foresters.

House Bill 4141 would reduce the amount of written status reports on civil actions against a state agency by requiring them to be sent only to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Delegates upon request.

House Bill 4147 would regulate the parking at the State Capitol in Charleston. It would allow the Speaker of the House and the Senate President to decide where parking would be allowed on the Capitol Complex during regular, extended, extraordinary and interim sessions or at any other necessary time.

licenses appropriate for the firearm being purchased. Profits from the sale would stay within the law enforcement agency and go towards the agencies needs.

House Bill 4159 would remove state financial aid from college students who receive two or more citations for the illegal consumption or possession of alcohol. This bill would take effect July 1, 2008.

House Bill 4162 would make leaving children unattended or unsupervised in a motor vehicle for more than 15 minutes a crime. Any person convicted of leaving a child unattended for this period of time would be guilty of a misdemeanor and fined between \$50 and \$500. However, if the child experiences great bodily harm, then the person would be guilty of a felony and sentenced for no more than five years and/or fined no more than \$500.

House Bill 4167 would require that the school principal, county superintendent, county school board president and anyone in equivalent leadership positions in religious or private schools be given the results of local school health inspections.

House Bill 4291 would require the State Election Commission to produce one or more training videos for poll workers. Poll workers would be required to be trained within 30 days of a scheduled election. County clerks also would be required to attend training every two years to review the training of poll workers and law matters.

House Bill 4301 would allow the uninsured children of state workers who make no more than \$25,000 a year to have their health insurance covered by a program of the West Virginia Children's Health Insurance Program. This program would be created by the Board and would include the child's premiums, coinsurance, co-pays and deductibles. The board must report at least four times a year to the Legislative Oversight Commission on Health and Human Resources Accountability on the development and progress of the proposed program.

House Bill 4302 would allow farmers, who have quit farming due to a physical or mental illness and have lived on the land that they farmed for the last 10 years, to continue having their property appraised as farm property.

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A Sampling of Bills Introduced In the House

House Bill 4158 would allow law enforcement agencies to sell stolen, unclaimed firearms and ammunition at public auctions to federally licensed firearms dealers with



In the Senate

As of 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, January 30, 2008, the 22nd day of the 2008 Regular Session, 505 bills have been introduced in the Senate. Of these bills, 11 bills have passed the Senate this week and will now go to the House for consideration. Some of the bills passed this week include:

Senate Bill 72 would expand the territory of the Route 2 and Interstate 68 Authority. This bill would extend the authority to include Cabell, Mason and Jackson counties, which would allow two voting members from each new county to be appointed to the authority.

Senate Bill 234 would create a Maternal Mortality Review Team. This team would be responsible for reviewing the deaths of women who die during pregnancy, at the time of birth or within one year of the child's birth. This team would help develop plans that could prevent such deaths in the future. The team's members would be appointed by the Governor and would serve five years.

Senate Bill 236 would eliminate obsolete election language relating to the role of circuit clerks in elections.

Senate Bill 238 would increase the monetary limit required to file a suit in circuit court actions from \$300 to \$1,000. This bill would also clarify original and general jurisdiction of circuit courts.

Senate Bill 257 would repeal outdated provisions of the West Virginia Code concerning the operation of the penitentiary by the Commissioner of Public Institutions. The state's correctional system is now under the authority of the Commissioner of Division of Corrections. This bill would also repeal obsolete provisions relating to the hiring of inmates as contract laborers because inmates are no longer utilized in this way.

Senate Bill 263 would update various provisions of the code relating to the Division

of Corrections. Some of these updated provisions would include specifying that all employees of the Division of Corrections are responsible for enforcing rules and laws necessary for the control and management of correctional units and clarifying that wardens and administrators of correctional facilities are subject to the direction of the commissioner.

Senate Bill 270 would eliminate provisions requiring circuit clerks to handle and disburse inmate moneys. All inmates are now housed in either a regional jail or correctional facility, not a county jail. Moneys belonging to inmates are now handled by the appropriate personnel, not by circuit clerks.

Senate Bill 337 would remove obsolete language concerning the Clerk of the Supreme Court of Appeals. This would bring the law in line with the court's current staffing policies.

Senate Bill 459 would clarify the authority of the School Building Authority to promulgate rules and would authorize rules of the School Building Authority and the Higher Education Policy Commission.

A Sampling of Bills Introduced In the Senate

Senate Bill 327 would pay for veterans' grave markers when the U.S. government denied the veteran's application. These grave markers would be paid for by the "John F. 'Jack' Bennett Fund."

Senate Bill 328 would prohibit the Division of Culture and History and the commissioner of Culture and History from selling food and drink in the West Virginia Science and Culture Center and merging the archives library with the lending library. In addition, this bill would give the Archives and History Commission oversight and administrative authority over the state historian and archivist.

Senate Bill 336 would require the pay rate of court witnesses to match the pay rate of jurors. Current pay ranging from \$10 to \$20 would be increased to a flat rate of \$40 per day and payment for mileage would increase from 15 cents to 50.5 cents. Witnesses would include persons subpoenaed to appear before the Senate, House or any legislative committee.

Senate Bill 342 would set 2 a.m. as the time to stop selling alcohol in bars in the Berkeley, Morgan, Jefferson, Hancock, Brooke and Ohio counties. All four of the racetracks would be exempted from this requirement and from the existing limitations on alcohol serving hours.

Senate Bill 462 would raise the age of consent for refusal of mental health treatment from 12 to 18 years of age.

Senate Bill 465 would eliminate the business franchise tax effective January 1, 2013.

Senate Bill 469 would increase penalties for the neglect and abuse of incapacitated adults and the elderly. A person who neglects an incapacitated adult or elderly person would be fined between \$500 and \$5,000, imprisoned between one and five years or both. A person who maliciously and intentionally causes the death of an incapacitated adult or elderly person by withholding food, shelter, clothing or medical care would be guilty of murder in the first degree.

Senate Bill 471 would change the penalty for driving without automobile insurance from a license suspension to a fine of \$100. This fine would only apply to a person whose insurance has been expired less than six months and who obtains proper insurance within five business days of a violation.

Senate Bill 475 would require the election of Supreme Court justices to be nonpartisan. The general election ballot would have clear and separate sections for listing of candidate names for nonpartisan and partisan offices.

Senate Bill 479 would create a database of DNA samples taken from arrested persons. Local, state and federal law enforcement agencies would be allowed to use this system to help identify persons in connection with criminal investigations, register sex offenders and establish a

West Virginia Legislature's Web site

Designed to strengthen your connection to West Virginia's legislators and the laws that govern this state, the West Virginia Legislature's Web site provides you with access to various resources, including contact information, legislation and educational materials. The Legislature's online Bulletin Board maintains prompt information during legislative sessions through the Legislature's Calendars, Meetings, Abstracts, Indexes and Journals. Citizens also can view the entire West Virginia Code, interactive district maps, committee agendas and membership information at: <http://www.legis.state.wv.us>

phone numbers, mailing addresses and e-mail contact information. A Helpful Links page also offers users more than 150 links to various federal and state resources.

During session, the Legislative Bulletin Board allows prompt access to daily publications, calendars and schedules; and in addition to current legislative actions, the West Virginia Code and the State Constitution are available in full.

Lastly, educational information is highlighted throughout the site, through the Citizen's Guide to the Legislature, How a Bill Becomes Law, Capitol History, and Publications pages - while the Capitol Photo Gallery brings the historical beauty of the Statehouse to users' fingertips.

A Google-based search function makes each of the Web site's features - which represent more than 120,000 files - easily available to the public.

Lawmakers, their staff and the general public have all contributed to the advancement of the site with an open

mind toward providing a complete understanding of the workings of the Legislature. Taking suggestions and using insight from individuals with a wide ranging spectrum of experiences have all contributed to the ever-evolving site.

As the Legislature continues to make strides in providing important information electronically to citizens and engaging them to become part of the legislative process, developers of the Web site welcome comments and suggestions on how to better this source of communication. In the future you may be able to take a virtual tour of the Capitol building or download information from the Web site onto your personal digital assistant (PDA).

The Legislature will always strive to provide the best possible service to the citizens of West Virginia and will continue to further bridge the communication gap between the Capitol and constituents.

For more information, and to access these features directly, please visit: www.legis.state.wv.us

missing persons DNA identification system with the following categories: unidentified persons, unidentified human remains and samples from missing persons.

Senate Bill 480 would grant a classroom teacher who has been awarded a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certificate an additional salary bonus provided the teacher is subsequently employed as a school principal, assistant school principal or in an instructional leadership position.

Senate Bill 483 would prohibit the operation of a video lottery game or terminal between 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. on Sundays. If found guilty, a person would be charged with a misdemeanor and fined at least \$1,000.

Senate Bill 493 would grant powers to the Secretary of State to implement emergency procedures to ensure all eligible voters have the opportunity to cast a ballot in the case of a natural disaster, terrorist attack or other emergency.