

April 5, 2017



Legislative Update

In the midst of a budget battle that has spanned the entire legislative session but produced no serious results, an unexpected move by rank-and-file Republicans to join House Democrats in supporting legalizing medical marijuana has forced an interesting late-in-the-game debate.

It's a serious debate, spurred on by the calls and statements of support from countless West Virginia residents who want their ailing loved ones to have access to the medical treatment option. But it's unclear how that issue, which continues to be time consuming, will affect other pending legislation, most importantly, the budget.

So far, the Republican leadership of the House of Delegates and Senate have come up with separate, unrealistic proposals that include major cuts to public education, higher education, health care, and other important programs.

When Governor Jim Justice held a budget summit this week made up of business, education and labor leaders, including West Virginia AFL-CIO President Josh Sword, he said he would veto any budget that had such drastic cuts "in a millisecond." Governor Justice's plan requires some modest tax and fee increases spread equally among businesses, the wealthy and consumers, but much more importantly includes a road-building plan that would create as many as 48,000 jobs for West Virginia workers.

As always, we are closely watching numerous other pieces of legislation that would affect working West Virginians.

Unfortunately, legislators just passed and sent to the Governor a bill to eliminate the West Virginia Greyhound Breeding Development Fund despite the tireless efforts by members of the United Steelworkers, greyhound breeders who traveled to Charleston to fight, and many legislators.

So far, the House of Delegates has yet to act on two pieces of anti-working-family legislation the Republican leadership seemed very intent on moving quickly early in the session.

- While the Senate voted along party lines to override Governor Justice's veto of Senate Bill 330, the Right to Work "clean up" legislation, in order for an override to go into effect, the House must also vote on it.
- Senate Bill 239 is an attempt to impede the free speech of workers and the groups that represent them. The bill would make employers responsible for monitoring any paycheck deduction an employee elects to have withheld, such as for union membership, a charity or other organization, and require a form be signed annually by both the employee and the employer.

As the end of the session nears, we will let you know what happens to these and any other pieces of legislation that affect working West Virginians.