

February 17, 2017



Legislative Update

Now that the 2017 legislative session is finally picking up steam, we would like to take the opportunity to provide our first weekly legislative update.

In kicking off the session, Governor Jim Justice gave an unconventional, lively State of the State address, laying out an aggressive agenda with big and bold proposals for addressing the worst budgetary crisis of our lifetime while at the same time diversifying and growing our economy. We are especially pleased to report he wants to make major investments in our state's infrastructure that will create tens of thousands of jobs, as well as streamline bureaucracy in our education system and dedicate more resources to the classroom.

However, Governor Justice faces an uphill legislative battle, as indicated by early session priorities of the Republican leadership.

Rather than following Gov. Justice's lead and working on ways to grow our economy, the Republican legislative leadership is yet again wasting time and taxpayer money by taking up and prioritizing legislation that is solely intended to attack working people:

- * Senate Bill 330, introduced Thursday and immediately passed out of the Senate Judiciary Committee by a 10-6 vote, would make retroactive changes to the 2016 "Right to Work" law currently being challenged by the West Virginia AFL-CIO and others in court.

Democrat members of the committee questioned whether the bill -- an apparent attempt to clean up errors inserted into the fast-tracked 2016 legislation that are now part of the legal dispute -- would violate separation of powers provisions because the court case is still pending. The legislation is now before the full Senate.

- * Senate Bill 222, which would deny unemployment benefits for striking workers in all instances and locked out workers in some instances, passed out of both the Senate Workforce and Judiciary committees this week and was sent to the full Senate for consideration.

As WV AFL-CIO General Counsel Pat Maroney told both committees, the legislation creates an unequal playing field for union workers and is an intrusion by the state into the collective bargaining process.

We will be following these and all other issues affecting West Virginia working families during the coming weeks and will report back on any developments.