



WRAP-UP

The Newsletter of the West Virginia Legislature

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From the Classroom to the Capitol Halls: Students to Staffers

By Melissa Myers

When you hear the word internship what comes to mind? Perhaps it is someone delivering multiple Starbucks orders for grande mocha latte frappe cappuccinos in the morning. A young person carrying a pile of papers from one office to another only to curse in anguish as they drop the whole stack. Or how about the classic image of someone standing over a copy machine, going through the motions for hours on end. I am going to put these myths to rest, at least for the interns who work for the West Virginia State Legislature.

Many of the interns walked through the Capitol Complex as children and were filled with a sense of awe and wonder. Personally, I had never been in a building so perfectly designed for hide-and-go-seek. The marble floors made my little feet echo throughout the halls. As I looked up into the mesmerizing rotunda, I plotted out ways to design a similar sparkling chandelier for my Barbie dream house.

This year I have returned as a journalism intern for Legislative Information and sometimes I still feel like that little girl. Although the outside designs are still inspiring, I am more fascinated now at how the legislative process works from the inside. I am learning so many things as the Session goes on, and I am not alone.

Around 70 students have the opportunity to be involved with the 2009 Regular Session. Students come from universities and colleges throughout West Virginia. Our majors range from political science to public relations to international studies to psychology, while other interns are graduate students. All of us have the unique opportunity to be involved with lawmaking from start to finish.

Steven Wood, from Marshall University, appreciates the break from the collegiate classroom setting.



Interns work in several capacities in both the House of Delegates and the Senate. Clockwise from top left: Daniel Moseley, Vanessa Rogers, Steven Wood, Olivia Lambert, Jermain McKenzie, Nina Orndorff and Lindsey Strain.

photos: Martin Valent and Max Hunt

"I am learning about the process, not through a book, but through experience. Books can detail out a process of the steps involved in making legislation, but seeing it firsthand is different," Wood said.

Real life experience pays off as many former interns have gone on to obtain jobs within the Legislature, state agencies and private organizations. Some students have even gone on to become Delegates and Senators. Interns are selected by the Legislative Internship Committee, which is comprised of professors, Legislative members and staff.

Many interns are shocked at how little they actually knew about the legislative process before arriving at the Capitol. Logan Gibson, from West Virginia Wesleyan College, was surprised at the amount of detailed work that goes into lawmaking.

"I never realized what an involved process it is to turn a bill into a law," Gibson said.

Any intern might feel uneasy at first, but truthfully, the process of lawmaking is challenging for even the most experienced lawmaker. Information comes at us faster than the speed of light. Shall we open the Manual of Parliamentary Practice and convene?

Joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, fiscal notes, summaries, bill language, speech writing, bill drafting, first, second and third readings, committee meetings, amendments, appeals, motions, adoptions, caucuses, order of business and now we adjourn...and your mind explodes.

Lindsey Strain, a senior from Marshall University, expressed the intimidation most of us felt. "I was sitting in an impressive committee room, surrounded by people who all sounded much more intelligent than me and I thought 'Oh Dear Heaven, what have I done?'"



In the House

As of 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 25th, 2009, the 15th day of the 79th Legislature's 1st Regular Session, 831 bills have been introduced in the House of Delegates. Of those, 6 have passed and have been sent to the Senate for its consideration. Some of those bills passed were:

House Bill 2069 would increase the faculty senate allotment for classroom teachers and librarians from \$50 to \$100 to be spent on academic materials, supplies or equipment to contribute to the improvement of teaching. The funds would be used in programs that enhance student behavior, increase academic achievement and address the problems of at-risk students.

House Bill 2419 would authorize the West Virginia Regional Jail and Correctional Facility Authority to grant time off of the sentence for certain convicted inmates in a regional jail who have completed educational and rehabilitation programs. It would allow inmates who have been sentenced to prison terms for more than six months to be granted one day of good

time for the successful completion of these programs.

House Bill 2504 would establish the Silver Alert System for cognitively impaired persons. Mirroring the Amber Alert System, the Silver Alert would use public alerts to aid in the finding of a missing cognitively impaired adult who has a deficiency in short-term or long-term memory, orientation as to person, place, and time, deductive or abstract reasoning or judgement as it relates to safety.

A Sampling of Bills Introduced In the House

House Bill 2662 would require election officials, poll clerks and poll workers to vote in the precincts where they are registered.

House Bill 2678 would provide payment of unemployment compensation when a person misses work due to domestic violence. The proposal notes the employer is not responsible to pay for benefits when the worker is unable to work due to domestic violence. Instead, the benefits are paid from the General Unemployment Compensation Fund.

House Bill 2682 would establish a minimum alternative and renewable energy portfolio. By the year 2025, at least 25 percent of the electric energy sold to retail customers in West Virginia should be generated from alternative and renewable energy resources including advanced coal technologies, wind, solar and other nontraditional sources of energy. The bill would require the Public Service Commission to establish a credit system to monitor and track the generation of electricity by these technologies.

House Bill 2689 would dedicate a new surcharge on the policyholder of any fire insurance policy or casualty insurance policy issued in West Virginia to defray costs incurred by qualified volunteer and part-time volunteer fire companies and departments that provide benefits to their members under a qualified Length of Service Awards Program. The new surcharge would be 0.20 percent.

House Bill 2695 would impose criminal penalties on hunters who fail to render aid to a person the hunter negligently shoots while hunting. A hunter who discharges a

firearm or arrow and injures or kills another person will have to immediately give his or her name to the injured person, administer first aid, obtain medical or hospital care and immediately report the injury or death to the sheriff of the county in which the shooting took place.

House Bill 2696 would authorize persons who are emergency medical technician-paramedics with a minimum of five years active service in West Virginia, and are also licensed as practical nurses, to apply to obtain a license to practice registered professional nursing.

House Bill 2713 would authorize a study and investigation by the Department of Administration on the likelihood, implementation, effects and related issues with regard to creating a pilot program for state-operated child care centers.

Some of the intended purposes of this bill would be to help ensure the safety, health, education and development of the attending children and to make sure management and staff personnel are adequately educated, trained and compensated, (including healthcare insurance and other benefits). The bill also calls for the operation of these facilities to be financially effective.

House Bill 2732 would require county boards of education to employ a certified library media specialist in each county school. The professional standards and salary of the library media specialist would be determined by the West Virginia Board of Education.

House Bill 2736 would authorize the use of motors exceeding nine horsepower in the operation of motorboats on lakes if they are operating according to navigation rules including observance of existing 100ft no-wake zones.

House Bill 2772 would increase penalties for exposing children to methamphetamine manufacturing. Any person 18 years of age or older who knowingly causes or permits a minor to be present in a location where methamphetamine is manufactured or attempted to be manufactured would go to prison for five to 30 years and would be fined up to \$10,000. If the child suffers bodily harm as a result of this action, the

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In the Senate

As of 4:00 p.m., Wednesday, February 25, 2009, the 15th day of the 79th Legislature's 1st Regular Session, 384 bills have been introduced in the Senate.

A Sampling of Bills Introduced In the Senate

Senate Bill 294 would provide additional protection for incapacitated and elderly persons by increasing penalties, which consist of being sentenced to one to five years in prison or being fined \$500 to \$5,000 to those persons found guilty of neglect of an incapacitated or elderly person, or one who knowingly permits another to neglect said adult.

Senate Bill 296 would require the State Board of Education to create a school drug safety program. The bill would require the program to include drug testing of individuals prior to being hired, transferred or promoted to positions within a school and include random drug testing of all individuals employed in a school.

Senate Bill 300 would authorize counties and municipalities to enter into performance-based contracts with qualified providers of energy-conservation measures for the purpose of significantly reducing energy operating costs of agency owned buildings. Current law only allows the state and its agencies to do this.

Senate Bill 303 would exempt the retirement benefits of certain annuitants under the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) from state income tax. Any member of the STRS who elected on or before March 6, 1972, to participate the full extent of their salary in the State Teachers Retirement System would be exempt from the payment of state income tax to the extent of the State Teachers Retirement benefits received.

Senate Bill 307 would create the Maternal Screening Act. This bill would estab-

lish an advisory council on maternal risk assessment within the Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health. The Department of Health and Human Resources would have rule-making authority to develop a uniform maternal risk screening tool to serve as an alert to medical care providers of the need for greater evaluation and assessment of high-risk pregnancies.

Senate Bill 312 would require medical facilities to be free of tobacco smoke by codifying a smoking ban through law and posting requirements upon the medical facilities. The bill would also set forth penalties that if found guilty, a person would be fined between \$50 and \$500 for each separate offense.

Senate Bill 313 would expand the number of hours a "part-time" state employee can work in a temporary position each year. The bill would change the maximum amount one could work from 90 days to 1,000 hours.

Senate Bill 316 would authorize that net settlement proceeds held for a minor may be invested in a Smart 529 college savings plan.

Senate Bill 317 would increase penalties under current law when someone who is driving under the influence causes bodily injury or serious bodily injury. The bill would require those persons found guilty be confined in a state correctional facility for three to 15 years and fined up to \$5,000, whereas current law has those persons serving two to 10 years and being fined between \$1,000 and \$3,000.

Senate Bill 322 would exempt life insurance policies with a death benefit of \$25,000 or less from assignment by Medicaid recipients to the Department of Health and Human Resources.

Senate Bill 323 would exclude disability income for service related injuries

received by a veteran from the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs from any calculation used to determine spousal support. Under this bill, disability income received by a veteran from the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs for service related injuries would not be considered as property.

Senate Bill 325 would create the West Virginia Energy Efficient Buildings Program to concentrate on energy demand-side management in private and public buildings, generating energy savings and promotes the more efficient use of the state's natural resources. The bill would require annual reports to be provided to the Legislature.

Senate Bill 328 would create the West Virginia Transportation Infrastructure Bank. The purpose of the bank is to provide loans and other financial assistance to government units for transportation infrastructure.

Senate Bill 335 would authorize the Commissioner of the Division of Culture and History to distribute fairs and festivals funding. The division would be able to assist in the promotion and operation of fairs and festivals entitled to aid when funds are available and to expend those funds for the support and development of fairs and festivals.

Senate Bill 337 would increase the time for a member of the State Teachers Retirement System to make retirement contributions for credited service, during periods of temporary total disability with a worker's compensation injury, from two to three years. It would also provide for an additional retroactive period of two years from the effective date of the amendment.

Senate Bill 343 would substitute the definition of pain with the definition currently in use by the Board of Medicine and the Board of Osteopathy that is the definition adopted by the Federation of State Medical Boards in model policy. The bill would strike the term intractable from being used to define pain and change the working definition to read that "pain" is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage or described in terms of such damage.

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>

While the information may be overwhelming at times, we were chosen from many applicants because professionals believed we could handle the job. It is a great privilege to serve the state of West Virginia and something to be proud of.

Legislative interns have a variety of responsibilities, some of which include: researching legislation, tracking bills, attending committee meetings, writing news releases, answering constituent requests, preparing floor books, covering floor sessions, and publishing newsletters to name a few.

To have a prosperous government, it is important that everyone works as a team. From intern to staff member, to Speaker of the House to President of the Senate, success comes when people work for the common goal of making our state a better place for now and for generations to come.

Meghan Arnold, from Marshall University, compared the process of legislation to gears turning in a machine.

"If one gear is not working properly, it all gets messed up. I love how we are all working together to make West Virginia one of the best states in the nation," Arnold said.

Although moments of intimidation are still there and lost expressions are likely painted on our faces, I will speak for my fellow interns and say we are excited and thankful for the great opportunity to work with our state leaders.

We still walk through the Capitol with the same sense of childhood awe, only this time we are young adults ready to take on the world. Members have an extraordinary responsibility to make tough decisions during these challenging days. There is no greater time to be an intern.

Stay tuned for part two of this series at the close of the 2009 Session to see the progress the interns have made, and how we plan to use our skills and knowledge for our careers and for the future of West Virginia.

In the House - from Pg. 2

guilty party would go to prison for 10-30 years and would be fined up to \$25,000.

House Bill 2784 would establish prevailing hourly rates to be used in connection with the construction of public improvements. This bill would require the Commissioner of Labor to base the determination of prevailing rates on statistics made available by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and to provide county commissions with the authority to review the determination.