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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

Legislators Continue Their Work with the Governor's Budget Address on the Horizon

The first two weeks of the 2010 Regular Session are now complete, and my colleagues and I are eagerly awaiting the Governor's budget address on Jan. 19. Meanwhile, committees have met to hear testimony and vote upon legislative measures.

Among the bills approved by committees this week was legislation that aims to honor military service. Unanimously approved by the House Military Affairs and Public Safety Committee, House Bill 14 provides Kentucky citizens, who are totally and permanently disabled veterans, an exemption from the overnight accommodations rate at any of Kentucky's 52 State Parks. This exemption may be used up to three nights a year for any stay scheduled Sunday through Thursday.

The House Education Committee passed House Bill 160, legislation crafted to ease students' transition from two-year community colleges to public universities. Credit for certain community college courses would be fully credited to related bachelor's degree programs at Kentucky's public universities. These universities would be prohibited from requiring graduates of approved two-year programs from repeating or taking additional courses to earn a bachelor's degree within their major. The expectation is House Bill 160 can aid the state in reaching the goal set in 1997 of doubling the percentage of bachelor degree holders by 2020. I am proud to be a co-sponsor of this legislation.

In an effort to increase colon cancer education, screening and prevention, the House Health and Welfare Committee approved to House Bill 72. This legislation would develop a colon cancer screening program that would be available to uninsured individuals ages 50 to 64 as well as other at-risk, uninsured individuals. The Department for Public Health would be permitted to establish a set of income-based fees to be charged for the screenings. Kentucky ranks among the lowest in the nation for colon cancer deaths, and this action would allow more Kentuckians to receive this life-saving medical procedure.

On Wednesday, House Bill 176 passed by a vote of 97-0, becoming the first bill of the 2010 Regular Session to pass out of the House chamber. This legislation would offer districts ranking low in student achievement a variety of intervention options, such as consolidating with another school in the county, hiring a new principal, and enacting a stringent set of performance-enhancing reforms. Additionally, it sets forth a definition for low-performing schools based upon graduation rates as well as math and reading proficiency.

Our state could potentially receive approximately \$45 million in federal aid for school improvement and \$160-\$200 million provided through the federal Race to the Top school achievement program over four years. Kentucky's application is required to reach Washington, D.C., no later than Jan. 19. With this swift action from both chambers and the Governor's signature, we will meet that deadline.

While House Bill 176 was a small step in education reform, we missed the opportunity to take a giant leap forward for Kentucky's children. The establishment of charter schools should have been included as a provision of House Bill 176. Charter schools are the catalyst behind education reform, not only because these schools are usually among the top performers, but also due to the fact they set the bar for what public schools can achieve.

Under House Bill 1, Kentucky's judges would be given permission to order electronic monitoring in certain domestic violence cases. Commonly referred to as "Amanda's Bill," this legislation passed 97-0 and would allow global positioning system (GPS) monitoring of the accused in domestic violence cases the court recognizes as excessively

violent and dangerous. Kentucky's 120 counties would be provided the option to buy or lease the GPS systems with the cost of monitoring, an estimated \$7 to \$10 a day, paid by those being monitored.

As previously mentioned, the Governor will address a joint session of the General Assembly next Tuesday to unveil his budget proposal for the next biennium. Once this proposal is received, the House of Representatives will begin to formulate a plan that will hopefully place us back on the road to economic recovery.

We still have much to accomplish this session, and I will continue to update you on our progress. In the meantime, I can be reached at home anytime, or through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. If you call my Frankfort office and I am away from the phone, my intern is Amanda Weiss and she will try to help assist you. Those with hearing impairments may leave messages for me by calling the TTY message Line at 1-800-896-0305. If you have internet access, you can e-mail me at ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov or keep track through the Kentucky Legislature Home Page: <http://www.lrc.ky.gov>.

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