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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

Budget Proposal Lays the Groundwork for Legislative Action

The pace of the 2010 General Assembly picked up during the third week of legislative action. A number of bills passed committee and were sent to the House Floor for approval of the full body.

On Tuesday, Gov. Steve Beshear presented his budget address in which he described his \$18.4 billion plan as one that utilizes "a new source of recurring revenue" in an effort to help the Commonwealth regain its financial footing. His proposed budget relies on an estimated \$780 million in revenue that would come from the 800 pound gorilla in the room, expanded gaming at racetracks. Many programs, including SEEK funding, Medicaid, State Police, mental health services, prosecutors, public defenders and mine permitting would not see their funding reduced.

Additionally, the Governor's proposed budget includes \$1.8 billion in new capital projects, \$2.6 million for the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, \$1.3 million for the Kentucky State Police, and \$650,000 to the Kentucky National Guard. Also included is \$587 million in new spending for programs, such as the state's retirement system, new debt service, operating new courthouses and paying for increases in the state's prison population.

While opinions differ greatly on the issue of casino gaming in Kentucky, the sentiment shared by many is a budget based on money that does not exist is not the path to financial stability. In the midst of a deep recession, we need to formulate a budget that is based on definite revenue. The Governor's plan is based on a thrice-defeated proposal.

A flurry of bills received committee approval this week. The House Health and Welfare Committee approved House Bill 118. This legislation would allow a health care facility patient, over the age of 18, to designate in writing whom they wish to be granted visitation rights. This visitation request does not affect individuals who are legally related to the patient and would add another layer of protection for the patient's privacy.

The House Natural Resources and Environment Committee approved legislation that offers limited, nonrefundable tax credits for energy improvements to an existing structure, or the purchase or construction of an "Energy Star" residence. House Bill 240 would also promote the construction of energy efficient state buildings, study potential energy savings in public school buildings, and encourage private investments in hydroelectric power at Kentucky's dams.

House Bill 158, approved by the House Local Government Committee, would establish a training program for city officials, focusing on methods to address different scenarios that might arise in daily activities. This would

enable officials to react in an appropriate fashion while boosting job performance.

The House Banking and Insurance Committee gave favorable passage to House Bill 165, legislation that would stipulate only Kentucky residents would be eligible to participate in Kentucky Access. This high-risk pool program offers insurance to people with pre-existing health conditions who are unable to buy private health insurance, as well as individuals who are HIPAA eligible.

In House Floor action, legislation to aid returning military service members was approved by a vote of 95-0. House Bill 19 would allow military personnel, whose concealed weapon license expired while on active duty, to renew their license within 90 days after returning from deployment without being subject to late fees or other penalties.

A campaign to raise suicide prevention awareness would be instituted under House Bill 51, which passed the House 97-0. Beginning this year, all of Kentucky's public middle and high schools would be required to provide suicide prevention awareness information to every student by Sept. 1 of each school year. An additional provision would direct the Cabinet for Health and Family Services to post suicide prevention information and warning signs on their website no later than August 1, 2010.

House Bill 75 was easily approved 97-0 and would amend the state's employment methods for veterans. This legislation, which has won House passage in previous sessions, would require state agencies, when interviewing applicants for state employment, to give preference to veterans who meet the job requirements.

Over the next few weeks, I will continue to update you on our progress with the budget and other legislation. In the meantime, I can be reached at home anytime, or through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181.

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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