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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

As budget negotiations continue, the House focuses on other key measures

The task of crafting our Commonwealth's biennial budget is still a work in progress as we approach the halfway mark of the 2010 Kentucky General Assembly. While writing a viable, fiscally responsible spending plan is a slow process, legislative committees have taken the opposite approach, passing a flood of bills this past week.

Breath-monitoring "ignition interlock" devices would be installed in the vehicles of first-time DUI offenders under House Bill 58, approved by the House Appropriations and Revenue Committee. Courts would be required to order the installation of the interlock device, which electronically senses a driver's breath alcohol concentration before the person can start his or her vehicle. If the device detects alcohol consumption in the driver's breath content, the vehicle will not start.

After two weeks of thorough debate, the House Judiciary Committee approved House Bill 189. The compilation of six different legislative proposals, this bill would extend protective orders to cover individuals who are dating and would include intentional strangulation under the state's definition of physical injury. Additionally, police officers would receive domestic violence training once every two years, and the state would develop a database that tracks domestic violence crimes, including homicides.

House Bill 199, which sailed through the House Military Affairs and Public Safety Committee, would permit military family members to purchase an unlimited number of special military-related license plates, such as Gold Star, Purple Heart, disabled veterans and POW/MIA.

Veterinarians would be allowed to report cases of animal abuse detected in their patients through House Bill 238. Approved by the House Agriculture and Small Business Committee, this legislation protects doctors who report the abuse by providing immunity from civil or criminal action.

The House Elections, Constitutional Amendments and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee approved House Bill 247. This measure would require gubernatorial nominees to select their lieutenant governor candidate no later than the second Tuesday in August, allowing the selection to be made after the primary election. Current statutes require candidates for governor and lieutenant governor to file jointly in January.

Necessitated by last year's audits, which revealed questionable spending, House Bill 325 easily cleared the House Local Government Committee. This legislation would require the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo) and Kentucky League of Cities (KLC) to comply with the state's open records laws and adhere to Kentucky's open meetings statutes. They would also be directed to adopt ethics policies, follow state procurement codes and be subject to annual audits.

Legislation addressing highway construction safety won approval from the House Transportation Committee. House Bill 400 sets forth a policy stating double fines incurred from speeding in highway work zones would only be applicable if signs stating such are posted and workers are physically present in the designated zone.

House Bill 115, of which I am the main sponsor, has passed the House and now awaits similar action in the Senate. This legislation addresses domestic relations.

In floor action, we approved House Bill 349 on a 97-0 vote. This legislation would replenish the state's overworked and depleted unemployment insurance trust fund. Local governments would be required to make interest payments

to the fund and the taxable wage base that determines how much employers pay into the fund would be increased. Additionally, by 2012, the percentage of weekly wages paid by the fund would be reduced. These changes are estimated to save employers \$356 million over an eight-year period.

Last year's debilitating ice storm reminded many Kentuckians of the importance of being prepared for a natural disaster. As a result, we approved House Bill 300 by a vote of 99-0. In a declared state of emergency, this measure would authorize the governor to issue an executive order granting pharmacists the power to operate in an unconventional manner to ensure that all Kentuckians have access to vital medications.

Mirroring an action taken last year, the House approved legislation, 93-3, that prohibits the hiring of undocumented, illegal aliens. House Bill 321 would require local governments and school systems to ensure that businesses they hire for government construction projects utilize E-Verify, an electronic employment verification system, to check their employees' legal status.

For the fourth consecutive year, the House moved legislation addressing the restoration of felon's voting rights forward. The provisions contained in House Bill 70, approved 83-16, would place a question before the voters that, if approved, would amend the Kentucky Constitution and automatically restore the voting rights of non-violent felons who have completed their sentence and paid restitution.

The General Assembly will not be in session on Mon., Feb. 15, as we break in observance of President's Day, but will resume our work the following day. As we enter the second half of this 60-day session, I encourage you take an active role in the lawmaking process. If you would like to speak with me, I am available at home or through the toll-free message line at 1-800-372-7181. For bill information, please call the Bill Status Line at 1-866-840-2835. 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 at www.lrc.ky.gov.

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