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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 19, 2010

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

Legislators work on education, military issues in addition to state budget

FRANKFORT – While the 2011-12 budget details are being fine tuned, my colleagues and I turned our focus to other measures that deserve legislative action. House committees did not let the shortened week dampen their diligence as they quickly resumed work.

House Bill 242 passed through the House Committee on Labor and Industry. If this legislation becomes law, individuals who are laid off, receive unemployment benefits and are later found to be guilty of embezzling funds from their former employer, would be required to repay the state all unemployment payments they received. The current state of our unemployment fund, which is severely depleted, warrants the action provided by this bill.

Two weeks of thorough debate and discussion in the House Education Committee yielded the passage of House Bill 301. This bill was crafted with the goal of raising the school dropout age from 16 to 18 by 2015. The state graduation rate would increase to 90 percent through the provisions included this legislation.

Due to the recent increase of abandoned horses in our state, the House Agriculture and Small Business Committee unanimously approved House Bill 398. Under this bill, the Kentucky Equine Health and Welfare Board would be established with the mission of creating a voluntary certification system that sets care standards for equine rescue operations, collecting data to determine the biggest equine health and welfare issues, developing regional centers of care for neglected horses and recommending needed changes in current laws. This legislation follows closely behind the passage of House Bill 251 which aims to streamline the process in which an individual may claim a stray horse.

The House Local Government Committee was this session's first House panel to hear and approve a bill from the Senate. Senate Bill 47 would aid our cash-strapped detention facilities by permitting a county jail to charge inmates a co-payment each time medical facilities are utilized. Those who could not afford to pay for treatment would not be denied medical assistance and the co-payment amount would be set on a county-by-county basis.

Clearing the House 96-0, House Bill 199 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. World War II veterans and service-connected disabled veterans would be exempt from paying a fee to purchase any additional plates.

To honor what some refer to as a "forgotten war," we approved House Bill 339 by a vote of 96-0. This legislation would create the Commonwealth of Kentucky War of 1812 Commission. This 18-member group would meet between 2010 and 2015 to study and recommend bicentennial activities, educate the public and nation about the state's role in the war, assist with preparations for special events, and seek grants and other support. In this conflict, which confirmed our independence from Britain, Kentucky suffered more casualties than all other states combined.

On behalf of Kentuckians who have been directly affected by a drunk-driving accident, I proudly supported House Bill 58. Overwhelmingly approved by the full House, this legislation would require the courts to confiscate a person's license plates and order the installation of interlock devices on a first or subsequent DUI offense. The interlock device 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.

Combat veterans could receive additional help for post-traumatic stress and other disorders through House Bill 377,

approved 97-0. When combat veterans are arrested, they will be identified by pretrial officers as having served in the military and will be immediately connected to available assistance. By providing quick and effective aid to these veterans, we can help them ease back into work and home life after enduring the horrors of war.

Today, I filed House Bill 463, titled "An Act relating to child welfare." This legislation directs education to be made available to the Foster Children Skills for Independent Living program. It also permits educational records to be electronically transferred within counties.

While many believe the budget process has been moving at a slower than normal pace, please remember we were not presented with a viable plan from the governor and were forced to start constructing our own budget plan. Subcommittees worked throughout the week to reach a consensus on their budgetary requests. I believe, by working together in a bipartisan spirit, we can pass a fiscally sound budget.

Please know I am available at home or through the Legislative Message Line at 800-372-7181. A taped message containing information on legislative committee meeting schedules is available by calling 1-800-633-9650. 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 you may keep track through the Kentucky Legislature Home Page at www.lrc.ky.gov.

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