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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

By State Representative Ron Crimm

**Legislators Gain a Clearer Picture Through a Partially Released Budget Bill**

Each even-year session ushers in the time for legislators to craft a two-year spending plan to guide our Commonwealth. With the Governor proposing unrealistic measures, my colleagues and I hoped this year would provide the opportunity for a budget to be crafted in a bi-partisan manner, satisfying the needs of Kentucky in a fiscally sensible manner. Now, with less than a month remaining in the 2010 Regular Session, I was disappointed to see the Democrat's proposal that raises taxes in House Bill 530.

The bill is a revenue measure that would raise funds through adjusting existing tax code statutes by prohibiting businesses from deducting net operating losses for two years. Businesses would also experience an acceleration of the time when sales taxes are collected.

Touted as a "key component" for the 2010-2012 budget, House Leadership identifies this proposal as the solution to our \$1.5 billion shortfall, while producing a balanced spending plan. In my opinion, it is not good policy to pass a revenue measure before knowing a plan for expenditures. I understand that we need to pass a balanced budget, but achieving that goal by placing an undue tax burden on our community businesses is not the answer. Unemployment in this state exceeds 10 percent, and we are further burdening those struggling businesses. I was proud to stand with 35 members of the House in opposition to this measure.

With the budget bill slated to be heard in a House committee next week, my colleagues and I also acted on some other key pieces of legislation.

Under House Bill 540, approved by the House Education Committee, teachers and retired teachers under age 65 will see an increase in the cost of health insurance. Retired teachers under the age of 65 would ease into a payment plan with small increases over a two-year period. Active teachers would be provided a funding mechanism for their premiums, with less than \$10 deducted from their paychecks; this amount would be matched by the district and state. This move would save the school districts money and ensure the teachers' health insurance system's future solvency. All major education associations in Kentucky, including the Kentucky Education Association and the Kentucky Retired Teachers Association, are supportive of this legislation.

The House Local Government Committee moved favorably on Senate Bill 87. This multi-pronged legislation would require the Kentucky Association of Counties (KACo) and Kentucky League of Cities (KLC) to place their expenditures on a website featuring line-item spending along with the type of expenditure. The bill also confirms that these groups are subject to state open records and open meetings laws, as well as the adoption of procurement, compensation and ethics policies.

Proposed as an avenue to close the education achievement gap by creating grants to expand learning time at low-performing schools, House Bill 154 was approved by a vote of 89-6. A grant pilot program would be created to help expand learning time by 300 hours per school year at schools with an enrollment of 50 percent or more eligible for free or reduced lunches. The extra hours could be used for a variety of activities, including after-school programs, Saturday school or summer programs.

House Bill 301, which passed by a vote of 94-6, requires students to attend school until at least age 17, beginning July 1, 2013, unless the student has already completed high school. Beginning July 1, 2014, students must complete high school or stay in school until at least 18. The goal accompanying this legislation is for Kentucky to achieve a high school graduation rate of at least 90 percent by July 1, 2015.

The number of employees working in state agencies and on state contracts would be tracked quarterly by state lawmakers under House Bill 387. If this bill, approved 99-0, becomes law, legislators would receive a quarterly report on the number of agency employees and personal service contract employees working in Kentucky state government, removing the veil of “shadow government.”

Passing with a vote of 87-10, House Bill 407 would allow the Supreme Court to open child abuse courts in three to seven jurisdictions under a four-year pilot project. The public could attend court proceedings, with an exception provided for cases involving sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Opponents to the bill feared that by allowing the public to attend these hearings, the children’s confidentiality would be violated.

This week, we also had the opportunity to put our final seal of approval on two pieces of legislation. House Bill 19 would allow active duty military to renew a concealed-carry permit and have it sent to their duty station. Troops that do not renew their permits before they expire would have a year after deployment to renew without penalty.

Senate Bill 35 has also cleared the final legislative hurdle and would address Kentucky voting precincts that are split due to intersecting city boundaries and school board lines. Cities and school boards would be required to provide the county clerk a list of properties and boundaries to clarify who has the right to vote on races that legitimately affect only a portion of the precinct. With final passage of 95-0 and 99-0, respectively, these bills now await the Governor’s signature into law.

This past Tuesday was the filing deadline for all new House bills. Each bill may be viewed in its entirety at [www.lrc.ky.gov](http://www.lrc.ky.gov). I ask that you please contact me with any questions about the legislation proposed this session by calling me at home or sending me a message by calling 1-800-372-7181. If you have Internet access, you may e-mail me at [ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov](mailto:ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov).

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