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## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

By State Representative Ron Crimm

### **Partisan budget proposal increases overall debt while neglecting one-third of the Commonwealth**

As each budget cycle rolls around, legislators advocate for project funding that their districts receive in budgetary allocations. There was no way that I, or any of my fellow House Republicans, could have planned for what we saw presented by the House Majority in this budget, as it was an unimaginable move of partisanship following Washington DC-style politics.

Passing 65-33, largely along party lines, House Bill 290, the state's executive branch budget bill, is a \$17.5 billion spending plan that will drive Kentucky into record high debt, while increasing taxes on our businesses and borrowing billions of dollars for projects. It would cut funding for state agencies and higher education, while providing more than \$2 billion in bond issues for school construction, roads, and water and sewer infrastructure. Revenue used to fund these projects would be derived from legislation passed by the House last week that I strongly opposed due to the extreme anti-business provisions. The remainder would be taken from approximately \$250 million in anticipated federal stimulus funding for Medicaid, about \$40 million in one year's worth of excess base SEEK school funds, and around \$150 million from the state employee insurance program.

The plan also proposes \$20 million over the biennium to restore base funding for social worker protections, \$700,000 for newborn vision screenings, \$2 million to support the Meals on Wheels program, \$1.1 million in each year of the biennium for Family Resources and Youth Service Centers, and \$2 million over the next two years for Kentucky Educational Television. House Bill 290 looks to save another \$30 million by ordering the Department of Corrections to parole 1,000 inmates by July 2011.

Full funding would be recommended for the state retirement system along with restored funding for the teachers' retirement system. Additional funding is allocated for vocational education, energy development, agriculture and Fort Knox's base realignment and closure (BRAC) relocation.

The \$2 billion borrowed for school construction, water and sewer lines, and road projects was largely not slated for use in Republican districts; this taught my colleagues and me a lesson in political retribution. Last week I, along with 35 other members of the House, voted against House Bill 530, which would create revenue by prohibiting businesses from deducting net operating losses for two years. For taking a stand in support of businesses and differing in philosophy from our Democrat colleagues, we had projects in our districts stripped from the biennial budget bill; projects that were included prior to our vote on HB 530. This includes the renovation of category five schools. Of the 14 such schools identified in our state, not one of the seven schools in Republican districts received funding. These kids, who must attend schools that are in deplorable conditions, some of which have sewer water standing in their classrooms, are not Democrat or Republican children, but rather Kentucky children.

This treatment was simply an extension of what we saw when the House approved the state's two-year road plan. The passage of House Bill 292 was also split by a nearly straight party line vote of 67-32 and provides more than \$3 billion for road projects throughout the state. All Republican projects originally scheduled for ground-breaking in the next two years were moved back to the "out" years, or years 2012 through 2016. These shifted projects include the replacement of bridges that have been declared structurally deficient, the installation of life-saving cable barriers and the clearing of roads that are giving way to landslides.

It is truly unfortunate that the House Majority Leadership deems it appropriate to use the budget and road plan as tools to reward political compliance. You, the citizens of the Commonwealth, deserve better and, be assured, I will not give in to pay-to-play politics.

House Bill 290 now heads to the Senate and is sure to be returned as an entirely different document as our colleagues down the hall work on their version of this spending plan. The House also passed the state legislative budget, House Bill 511, and the state judicial budget, House Bill 293, by a 97-1 and 97-0 vote, respectively.

Regarding other business, the House Education Committee passed legislation requiring teachers to complete two hours of training each year aiding the recognition of students contemplating suicide. Senate Bill 65 would allow teachers to complete the training by self-reviewing reading materials on suicide, the second-leading cause of death in American youth.

Individuals who admit to or are found guilty of drunk driving would be required to pay the cost of their blood tests under House Bill 343, approved by the House Judiciary Committee. The charge for this test would be capped at \$50 and would relieve sheriffs' offices that are currently shouldering this fee.

Many dairy farmers throughout Kentucky are struggling to keep their operations in production. In order to provide some much needed help to this ailing industry, House Concurrent Resolution 207 was passed by the House Agriculture and Small Business Committee. This measure would urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to evaluate the efficiency of the formula used to establish milk prices paid to farmers and determine whether that formula puts Kentucky dairy farmers at a competitive disadvantage.

With only 14 legislative days remaining in this session, our working hours promise to be long but productive as we move toward placing the Commonwealth in a better position than it was when we arrived in January. If you would like to speak with me regarding our work in Frankfort, please contact me at home or through the Legislative Message Line at 1-800-372-7181. 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](mailto:ron.crimm@lrc.ky.gov) or you may keep track of bills on the Kentucky Legislature homepage at [www.lrc.ky.gov](http://www.lrc.ky.gov).

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