

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By State Representative Ron Crimm

House Majority unwilling to compromise, legislature adjourns for veto days without budget proposal

Even before the Speaker's gavel fell convening the 2010 Regular Session, my colleagues and I were fully aware of the budgetary challenge that lay before us. Treading these economically turbulent waters, I understood that we needed to construct a budget that not only protects our state's vital services and places our Commonwealth back on the road to financial stability, but also one that would not place a heavier tax burden on our citizens and businesses.

While it is expected that the House and Senate will craft two different spending plans, it is also expected that both sides will work towards a compromise for the best interest of the Commonwealth and our more than 4 million citizens. Moving again along the partisan path, House Democrats refused to recede from portions of their proposal that would create \$2.2 billion in debt and raise \$280 million in taxes.

The Democrat conferees had the opportunity to agree with the Republican budget plan that is structurally balanced and reduced our debt ratio to below seven percent -- a feat that has not been accomplished for many years. This fiscally conservative proposal is also education-centric as it includes two additional school days, greater latitude for local school districts to manage their funds as needed and would not cut teachers pay in lieu of funding for political favors as proposed by the House Democrats.

Democrats' refusal to provide any concessions highlights our philosophical differences. Instead of believing, as my colleagues and I do, that in these austere times, we need a budget with less debt, less deficit spending and fewer projects we cannot afford, the House Democrats operate under the falsehoods that they can spend, borrow and gamble their way into prosperity. My friends, I believe those methods will throw us into a debt tailspin and further off the course to economic stability.

The budget was not the only matter addressed this past week, though. Even though we were only in session two days this past week, we recognized the time as our last opportunity to concur on legislation amended by the Senate prior to the veto period and took final action on a number of measures.

House Bill 447, winning passage 98-0, will allow private, parochial and church schools to fingerprint employees after five years to see if they have been convicted of any crimes since they were originally fingerprinted at the time of employment. This bill help protect our children.

A bill that was originally intended to require personal services agencies to have a policy that addresses the acceptance of gifts from clients took on a dual role thanks to a Senate amendment. House Bill 415, as amended and approved 86-10, not only addresses its original purpose, but also took on the language from Senate Bill 23, which bans all drivers from texting while driving and prohibits the use of cell phones while driving for those under the age of 18.

By a 79-15 vote, we also moved to toughen our DUI laws through House Bill 265. As amended by the Senate, an individual with detectable levels of more than a dozen types of unprescribed drugs in their blood, including amphetamines, cocaine and oxycodone would be presumed guilty of driving under the influence. The allowable blood alcohol level required for an aggravated DUI offense would be lowered from 0.18 to 0.15 and mandates jail sentences if they are convicted of a DUI. Lastly, this legislation will prohibit possession or trafficking of "synthetic cannabinoids," drugs with high levels of THC, the ingredient which gives marijuana its natural potency.

We also approved numerous key bills that, while amended by the Senate, incorporated very few changes. These include House Bill 159, which requires large group health benefit plans to provide up to \$50,000 a year in coverage for treatment of autistic children up to age six. House Bill 160 eases the process of transferring credits from a junior college to a four-year university. House Bill 199 allows military family members to purchase an unlimited number of special military-

related license plates. And House Bill 540 ensures solvency for the retired teachers health insurance fund.

Several bills that I sponsored had a chance this session, but unfortunately, they never made it to the "pen of the Governor". HB 115 "An Act relating to domestic relations" made it to the Senate but the chairman of the committee would not let it be heard. I attempted to add HB 225, legislation that would forfeit ownership of animals involved in cruelty and torture cases as an amendment to a few bills and failed, but I will not give up. This would affect the woman who unmercifully murdered a mother dog and her pups. Then there were several insurance bills the Department of Insurance asked me to sponsor, and the Chairman of the committee refused to let me present them. There were some others, but these are good examples. If you have any questions about these or any other bills that I sponsored this past session, please call me. I'll be glad to discuss any measure with you, one on one.

Although we have adjourned for the constitutionally required 10-day veto period, I still invite you to contact me with questions about this legislation or any of our work in Frankfort. You may reach me at home or leave a message in my Frankfort Office by calling 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 you may keep track through the Kentucky Legislature Home Page at www.lrc.ky.gov.

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