

# UNDER the DOME



JANUARY 20, 2015

## Welcome

Under the Dome is a weekly update on actions and activities of the West Virginia Legislature, provided for West Virginia University faculty and staff by WVU's Office of State, Corporate and Local Relations.

## A Historic Legislative Session Begins

The 81st Legislature of the State of West Virginia convened on January 14, 2015. For the first time in 80 years, Republicans gained control of both the Senate and the House of Delegates. The Senate elected Bill Cole (R-Mercer) as President, and the House of Delegates elected Tim Armstead (R-Kanawha) as Speaker. Senator Jeff Kessler (D-Marshall) is the Senate Minority Leader, and Delegate Tim Miley (D-Harrison) is the House Minority Leader.

## State of the State Address

West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin presented his fourth State of the State address on January 14 in the House Chamber at the State Capitol. Highlights from his address include:

- The need for cooperation between both parties
- The establishment of a STEM network to review education initiatives and refine local programs to improve service to students
- The need for additional legal reforms
- The need for alternative certification of teachers

## The Budget

The Governor's budget proposal to the Legislature includes a 1.4 percent reduction in higher education's base budget allocation for each institution (about \$2M for WVU). Additionally, in previous budgets passed by the Legislature, certain programs had dedicated funding within our budget. All told, WVU had approximately \$6.7M in programming with dedicated funding within our operating appropriation. The Governor's budget proposal removes all language that dedicated money for those programs and also removed 80 percent of the funding for those programs. (If enacted, this would result in an approximate \$5.4M decrease for WVU—on top of the 1.4 percent cut).

We do not believe that the Governor's office is necessarily opposed to these programs, but instead developed this strategy of reductions to obtain a balanced budget.

## WVU's Response

WVU's administrative team has compiled summaries of the programs that would be subject to this budget cut and are working on immediate strategy and response. Contacts are being made with the appropriate dean, vice president or other party responsible for the programs that have been proposed to be cut so that we can assess the impact of the potential cuts and develop a strategy to address them.

According to Rob Alsop, WVU's vice president for legal and governmental affairs and entrepreneurial engagement, "Our best strategy is one where we collectively work on a solution and response to these proposed cuts. I will be in touch again soon with additional information on the budget and our proposed legislative program."

## Legislative Leadership

Monongalia County Delegate Amanda Pasdon was appointed by Speaker Tim Armstead to serve as Chair of the House Education Committee, and Senator Dave Sypolt (R-Preston) was appointed by President Bill Cole to serve as Chair of Senate Education. This means both education chairs represent Monongalia County.

## The Bills Begin

In the first three days of session, 342 bills have been introduced. Some of the topics represented by the bills include the nonpartisan election of judges, charter schools, alternative certification of teachers, prevailing wage and legal reform. Leadership in both the Senate and the House has stated they want to advance legislation to create jobs for West Virginians. In the coming weeks, WVU's Office of State, Corporate and Local relations will monitor bills that relate to higher education and WVU.

## WVU's Presence at the Legislature

West Virginia University President E. Gordon Gee attended the State of the State address, met with legislators and legislative leadership, and engaged with various groups visiting the Capitol, including the delegation present for Monongalia County Day at the Legislature. Each legislator received an informational packet about the University and its programs.

## Fast Facts

- There are more than 40 WVU alumni serving in the West Virginia Legislature.
- For more information about WVU's legislative initiatives, including photos, facts and resources, visit <http://staterelations.wvu.edu/>.
- For more information about who represents you, districts, bill tracking, committees and a daily summary of legislative activities, visit the West Virginia Legislature website at <http://www.legis.state.wv.us/>.