



2015 Weekly Legislative E-Briefing

WEST VIRGINIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

January 15, 2015
2nd Day of the 60-Day
Legislative Session



Republicans Assume Top Leadership Positions in Both Houses

It's been over 80 years since Republicans controlled both houses of the West Virginia Legislature. Yesterday, they made it official with the election of Senate President Bill Cole (R-Mercer) and House Speaker Tim Armstead (R-Kanawha). Both Cole (*above left*) and Armstead (*above right*) addressed the state's growing "job crisis on the first day and called for cooperation between the two political parties and with the Governor. Cole noted, "Before we were Democrats, before we were Republicans, we're all West Virginians. We have a short window of time to accomplish these goals and I hope you share my sentiment. It's time for us to get to work." In a similar vein, Armstead commented, "It's time to work together to write a new chapter for West Virginia."

On the first day of the 60-day session, nearly 300 bills were introduced. Those of interest to Chamber members include:

- Nonpartisan election of judges
- Requiring performance reviews and audits for every spending unit of state government
- Repeal of the Alternative & Renewable Energy Portfolio Act
- West Virginia Public Charter Schools Act
- Alternative programs for the education of teachers & creating a teacher's corps program
- Payment of final wages to a discharged employees
- Prevailing wage rate for construction of public improvement projects



2015 Legislative Schedule

Session Convenes
Wednesday, January
14

**Last day to introduce
bills in both Houses**
Monday, February 23

**Bills due out of
committees**
Sunday, March 1

**Last day to consider
bill on 3rd Reading
(passage stage)**
Wednesday, March 4

Session Adjourns
Saturday, March 14

- A host of bills relating to legal reform

Governor's State of the State Address

Governor Earl Ray Tomblin presented his fourth State of the State Address last night before a joint session of the West Virginia Senate and House of Delegates. The 45-minute speech covered a number of topics including the following areas of interest to Chamber members.

- Stressed the need for cooperation with the new Republican controlled Legislature
- He noted improvements to the business climate, workers' compensation reform, medical malpractice reform, reforms to the state's education system, addressing long-term liabilities and cutting and phasing-down taxes over the past decade. *(NOTE: regarding the improvements to the business climate, most, if not all, of the significant improvements originated with the WV Chamber and were part of our policy agenda)*
- The state has one of the strongest Rainy Day Funds in the country
- Called for additional legal reforms, but puzzled many observers with an apparent applause line criticizing out-of-state legal reform groups
- Noted state highways are critical to continued economic growth and "we must find ways to do more"
- Said it would be "irresponsible" to remove the tolls from the West Virginia Turnpike
- Will establish a STEM network to review education initiatives and refine and expand local programs to better serve our students
- He also noted "We must ensure our students are being taught by great teachers including those who may not have a traditional education degree"

To read the Governor's State of the State address, [click here](#)

2015-16 State Budget

The Governor also presented the Legislature with his \$ 4.77 billion budget, which is \$39 million less than last year's budget. To balance the budget, the Governor recommends a \$69 million transfer from the state's Rainy Day Fund. The document contains no raises for state employees or teachers

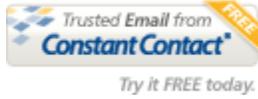
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