

Frankfort Report...

By Jared Carpenter, State Representative

This past week in Frankfort has been a busy one. As the end of session gets close, debates about the many issues have been intensifying. After this week, only a few more days remain of the 2013 Session.



As Chairman of the Senate Natural Resource Committee, I've been working with my colleagues in the Senate and with leaders in the House on passing several fish and wildlife issues important to Kentucky. We worked towards increasing transparency in the Cabinet for Environment and Energy and for allowing for more public input on the state of Kentucky's waters. Gas line distribution systems, wildlife takings, and public/private partnerships for Heritage Land Conservation were also considered and were passed out of committee. Our committee also passed a bill relating to binding reclamation that prevents the federal government from coming into Kentucky to take over the bond pool and raising our rates.

Two anti-drug measures have been passed. House Bill 217 is the General Assembly's attempt to curb the unintended consequences of last year's House Bill 1 which shut down pill mills across the state but also put undue regulatory burdens on doctors, nursing homes, and hospitals. The bill adjusts treatment protocols to allow medical professionals the flexibility they need to adequately treat patients without opening the floodgates for unscrupulous doctors. House Bill 8 is another bill to help combat synthetic drugs. These drugs, which are designed to chemically mimic certain drugs and controlled substances such as marijuana and meth, are constantly evolving as bad actors continue to try to outpace our young people. They may look harmless and be sold in innocuous packages of bath salts or incense but make no mistake; they are dangerous and often life-threatening.

We have also been continuing our efforts to strengthen education. Kentucky has in place a process for improvement for struggling schools. When the state Department of Education cites a school for being persistently low-achieving, there are several options the school board can choose from such as restaffing, allowing an outside management company to lead a turnaround effort, or even closing. Senate Bill 176 further empowers local school boards to deal with consistently low achieving schools. Unfortunately there are schools in Kentucky that are graduating only a small percentage of students. This is unacceptable and parents, teachers, and communities should have every tool possible to make sure our kids are col-

lege or career ready. Anything less is a disservice to the students.

A bipartisan compromise has been achieved on the high school drop-out bill. Senate Bill 97 allows local school districts to adopt a policy requiring students to stay in school until age 18, or graduation whichever comes first, with the understanding that they would have to offer an approved alternative education program that would help meet the needs of students most likely to drop out. Further, once 55% of school districts have programs in place, the rest of the state will come on board so that we can all work off the same page. With this bill, decisions are not made by a Frankfort bureaucrat but by educators who are better prepared to assist all students.

Another bipartisan bill, House Bill 1, also passed which will provide much-needed transparency to special taxing districts. While there are many taxing districts that are acting appropriately to their mandate, there are unfortunately some that have abused the trust that the people have put in them. HB 1 adds accountability and transparency to these authorities' finances by directing them to publish their financial statements online and provides for regular audits. Further, the Fiscal Court would have 60 days to veto any tax increases.

I should also mention House Bill 3 which passed this week. The measure helps victims of human trafficking in the state by adding that horrible crime to our abuse and neglect statutes, in turn stiffening penalties. According to advocacy groups, human trafficking is one of the fastest growing criminal activities in Kentucky. Sadly, the majority of its victims are children. HB 3 would protect victims from prosecution for forced crimes, providing specific treatment options instead. It would also create a victim assistance fund and would make training available for law enforcement in the identification and control of these crimes.

Finally, I was very happy to vote for House Bill 279, known as the Religious Freedom Act. This bill protects religious liberty from government overstepping its bounds. It is in reaction to a Kentucky Supreme Court decision from last year. HB 279 reaffirms the standard of "strict scrutiny" as the standard for religious freedom cases.

As I write this, I remain hopeful that the House and the Senate can work out a compromise on Senate Bill 2, the commonsense public pension reform bill. The bill does not apply to teachers and does not impact current employees or retirees. It does put protections in place that save the system from insolvency without additional costs to the taxpayers.

Please call me toll-free at 1-800-372-7181 toll-free or you can see the action yourself by looking up www.lrc.ky.gov.



Patty Vance, Activities Director, and her staff bring the fun, excitement and magic of an old fashioned outdoor carnival indoors for 104 rehabilitation and long term care residents at the Rockcastle Health Rehabilitation Center. Vance clears the large dining room and transforms it into a carnival of games, food, music, entertainment, karaoke, and prizes. Pictured above are Activities Assistants, Kim Bowling, Tabatha Carpenter, and Rhonda Abney with resident, Monnie Stallsworth.



Activities Assistant Tabatha Carpenter with residents, Bonnie and Clarence Jackson.

Legislative Update...

By David Meade, State Representative
It's Past Time to Put People Above Politics in Frankfort

When the 2013 Session of the Kentucky General Assembly gaveled into business in January, there was talk of a spirit of bipartisanship and working together for the betterment of the Commonwealth. That spirit seems dashed as we near the end of this session.

That was never more evident this week when the House once again tackled the topic of redistricting. It was the second attempt in the House after last year's plan was found to be unconstitutional by the Kentucky Supreme Court, and there was hope in January that talk of bipartisanship would equate to drawing districts in a manner that is fair and equitable to all Kentuckians.

What happened instead was a plan that pits 11 current members of the Republican Caucus against each other, including three in one district. While on the other side of the aisle only one Democrat incumbent faces opposition against an incumbent Republican.

Questions about this latest version of House redistricting, which centers around the inclusion of numbers from Kentucky's prison population counted by the U.S Census in 2010, which is the roadmap used to draft district boundaries. When the maps were approved in 2012 for Congressional and judicial boundaries, the federal prisoner count was included in crafting districts. But in the current House plan that data was not included.

Four states, New York, California, Maryland, and Delaware have approved

legislation that stipulates Federal prisoner numbers not be included in drawing up new districts. But in Kentucky no such law exists.

No one, outside of those individuals who drafted the plan, knows why the federal prison data was left out. What we do know is that this is the latest example of what should be of great concern to all Kentuckians, the continued practice of leaving important legislation up to a few people conducting the people's business behind closed doors.

We've seen its impact on trying to deal with Kentucky's broken public pension system, and on other important pieces of legislation like a proposal allowing farmers to grow industrial hemp. After it finally received a hearing and passed out of committee, the top leader in the House declared it to be a revenue measure and refused to let it come to the floor.

As long as this attitude continues to permeate the hallways and House chamber, we will never be able to tackle the real issues affecting our great Commonwealth. We must change the culture and work to put our people above politics in Frankfort, otherwise Kentucky will continue to lag behind the rest of our nation.

I welcome your comments and concerns for the upcoming session. I can be reached through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181, or you can contact me via e-mail at david.meade@lrc.ky.gov. You can keep track of legislation for the 2013 session through the Kentucky Legislature Home Page at www.lrc.ky.gov.

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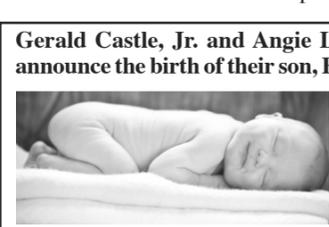
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Gerald Castle, Jr. and Angie Lawless are proud to announce the birth of their son, Ellis Jack Castle, born February 18, 2013. Ellis weighed 7 pounds 0.08 ounces and was 19 inches long. Paternal grandparents are Stephen and Cathy Lowe of Abingdon, VA. Maternal grandparents are Jack and Judy Lawless of Mount Vernon and Judy Duerson of Mount Vernon. Paternal great-grandparents are Chester and Loretta Moore of Abingdon, VA.



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