



State Senate
West Virginia Legislature

Senator Jeffrey Kessler
(D - Marshall)



State Capitol Complex
Building 1, Room 210W
Charleston, WV 25305

From the Desk of Sen. Jeffrey V. Kessler
June 4, 2009

It was a busy but productive time for myself and other lawmakers in Charleston this week as we closed out the 2009 regular session by passing the state budget and then passed 15 bills during the first special session of 2009.

This year has been unique in that we recessed for 50 days following our first 60 days of the regular session. The unsettled economy was the cause for extending the 2009 regular session from its traditionally scheduled closure date of April 11 to May 26th when we returned to conclude our actions.

Until we obtained better data about tax revenues, economic conditions and the amount expected from stimulus funding, we agreed the delay would prove to be beneficial to balancing the 2010 budget. West Virginia is one of very few states whose Constitution calls for the Legislature to maintain a balanced budget. For fiscal year 2010, West Virginia's total budget is \$11.6 billion.

Since approximately \$7 billion of our budget is derived from special revenue fees, the road fund, the lottery, excess lottery, federal funds and federal block grants, our responsibility is to review and calculate services provided through general revenue, which is your tax dollars.

The Budget Bill (HB 2010) initially submitted in February consisted of approximately \$3.9 billion in General Revenue dollars. In mid-session, a revised version called for a reduction of approximately \$200 million from General Revenue. The challenge was to ensure any reductions we made would not affect services provided to our citizens.

For instance, federal stimulus funding is being used to restore the reductions to the Department of Health and Human Resources for Medicaid. Reductions in state funding for public and higher education were also replaced by federal dollars from the stimulus package.

Other highlights of HB 2010 include:

- * \$175,000 added to the Secretary of State's office for technology and equipment upgrades
- * \$25,000 restored back to the I-79 Development Council
- * \$15,000 restored to the Coal Mine Safety and Technical Review Committee Coal Forum
- * \$145,000 added for the Coal Mine Safety Technology Task Force
- * \$15,000 restored to the WV Commission for Holocaust Education
- * \$93,350 restored to the State Department of Education's Personal Services
- * \$1,500,000 restored to the Mountaineer Challenge Academy's own line... among other changes.

I am proud of the work we did on the budget. We kept the vital services many West Virginians need every day despite the trying economic services we faced.

For those interested in viewing the document, the entire budget bill is available on line via the Legislature's website: www.legis.state.wv.us

Also during our extended session, we took up and corrected bills that were vetoed due to

technical errors. Simple revisions clarified the measures.

In order to quickly pass some much-needed legislation, the Governor called us into the first special session of 2009 on May 31st immediately following the conclusion of the regular session.

During the special session, we passed all 15 items the Governor placed before the Legislature. The Governor's administration had worked with lawmakers to come up with an agenda most lawmakers would support.

We did a lot of work on these bills to come to a consensus before the special session began. During the regular session that ended in April, lawmakers had already taken up many of the bills they addressed this week. Only minor differences between the House and Senate had stalled them.

The bills passed included a tax break for parents of children with autism, a plan to expand the Office of Coalfield Community Development's authority to develop post-mining land use plans for mountaintop-removal sites, and three of the Governor's education initiatives that didn't make it through the regular legislative session.

We also approved two supplemental appropriation bills: \$26 million from the Rainy Day Fund to help southern counties hit by recent floods, and \$21 million from lottery revenues to catch up on payments the state owes to court-appointed lawyers.

In the area of cleaner, more efficient energy, we passed the Governor's bill intended to spur power companies to rely on alternative and renewable energy sources to provide 25 percent of all electricity generated by the year 2025.

The education-related bills are meant to help struggling third- and eighth-graders, better recruit teachers by changing hiring dates, and let counties establish "school innovation zones."

I am proud to say we did a lot of good work, in many different areas, for the people of West Virginia. My hope is that the momentum gained here will carry us into a productive summer as we continue to look at new legislation that will help the people of our great state.

I hear your voice and I encourage all of you, regardless of party or affiliation, to contact me with any concerns you have regarding issues facing our district or our state. You can write to me at: Jeffrey V. Kessler, State Senate, West Wing, Room 210, State Capitol Building, Charleston, WV 25305. You can contact me by email: kessler@mail.wvnet.edu. You can also call my Charleston office at (304) 357-7880.