Governor and House attempt to address PEIA issues

Through a series of statements, town halls and press conferences, Governor Justice rolled out his most recent positions on PEIA and salary. At Thursday’s press conference, the Governor touted a plan that he and the Republican leadership developed to address PEIA. Their plan places a 17 month stay, or moratorium, on any changes PEIA. This would allow for time to study the PEIA situation and come up with some solutions to the funding problem.

His plan also comes with a $29 million price tag with $6.5 million of that already budgeted. The Governor was vague as to how the state would come up with the additional $22.5 million.

In addition, The House passed House Resolution 5. HR5 asks the PEIA Finance Board to hold off on any changes for 2019 until PEIA could be further studied and that the board adopt a new financial plan for 2019 that reflects the 2018 financial plan. HR5 will be sent to the PEIA Finance Board.

The governor also addressed pay raises during his press conference. He stood by his original plan for 1% raise over the course of 5 years, despite the House Finance Committee passing a bill that would give teachers a 2% raise followed by 3 years of a 1% raise.

In response to the governor’s remarks WVEA President Dale Lee made the following statement: “Governor Justice provided no new information and no details on how the issue of PEIA will eventually be resolved. We’ve seen lots of studies that either ended with nothing new or a proposal that made things worse. Plus, we’ve heard lots of promises from elected leaders that never came true.

In terms of pay, the governor has still not budged from his initial statement of 1% for 5 years. He keeps saying that it is unprecedented. His proposal means $404 for each of the next 5 years for teachers. It will do nothing to make our salaries more competitive and will most likely keep us at 48th in the nation.

In 1990, Governor Caperton provided a three-year package of $2,000, $1,000 and $2,000 and it moved us from a ranking of 49th to 30th. That is the type of movement we need in order to retain our quality employees and attract new people to the profession.”

Continue contacting the governor and your elected leaders. Let them know they have not done enough to correct the situation with PEIA or salary.

SB 267 (pay raise bill) moves in the House

The House Finance Committee amended SB 267 (Governor’s pay raise bill). After defeating, along party lines (all Democrats voting yes; all Republicans voting no), an amendment to provide a pay raise of 3% in each of the next three years; the Committee agreed to an amendment that would shorten the pay raise period from 5 years to 4 years and frontload the teacher pay raise to $808 (2%) for the first year and 1% ($404) the remaining 3 years. The amendment provided service personnel with a 2% increase the first year and 1% the following year.

In the end, SB 267, as amended by the committee, passed and is headed to the House floor. It now includes a teacher pay raise of 2% - 1%-1%-1% (four years total) and an increase for service professionals of 2% - 1% (two years total).

As of this writing, the bill has been read once. It would need to be read a total of three times on the House floor and then be voted on to pass. Since the bill was amended in the House Finance Committee, the Senate would have to agree to the amendments before it could be sent to the Governor for his signature. The Governor stated in a
press conference on Thursday that he stood by his 1% raise for each of the next 5 years, despite the House Finance Committee passing a different version of the bill.

Contact your House members and let them know that the raises contained in SB 267 is not enough.

Senate passes punitive bills as punishment for your actions

As a result of employees standing up and being heard, the Senate has started running a series of punitive bills. The first is SB 335 (Payroll Deduction). The Legislature passed this anti-worker bill last year and it was vetoed by the Governor.

SB 335 is a clear attempt to silence your voice! Immediately following last Friday’s rally, the Senate Judiciary Committee passed SB 335, which will make it very difficult to have your union dues deducted from your paycheck. The purpose of the bill is to weaken the organizations and make it more difficult for people to have the ability to influence legislation through collective action.

Additionally, it is an intrusion of government into the decisions you make regarding which organizations to belong to and where the money from your paycheck is distributed. The bill was read for a second time on the House floor on Thursday, and as of this writing is expected to have a third reading today (Friday). It will then be sent to the House for consideration.

You should begin contacting members of the House and tell them to vote no on SB 335 whenever it is considered in the House.

The second bill, SB 494 (retirement bill) was introduced Thursday and was fast tracked for consideration in the Senate Pension Committee. The bill proposes that members of the State Teachers Retirement System be counted as absent while serving as officers within statewide professional associations (such as WVEA and AFT-WV).

Quite simply, this bill is directly aimed at the leaders of our organizations and is being run in retaliation for your actions. After being considered SB 494 was laid over due to committee members questions, and will be heard at the next Senate Pension Committee meeting, which has yet to be scheduled.

Such punitive actions by legislators will only heighten the anger of employees and further erode confidence in our elected leaders.

Contact your Senators and let them know that such punitive bills are wrong and ask them to vote against the two bills (SB 335 and SB 494).

Public hearings to focus on moratorium suggested by the governor

Instead of the single issue of total family income, PEIA will now be presenting a plan at the public hearings based on the moratorium proposed by Governor Justice and will re-introduce the plan that is currently in place for the 2017-18 year.

The dates and locations of the public hearings remain the same. The public hearings will be held as follows:

Monday, February 12, 2018 -- Charleston - University of Charleston, Geary Student Union Ballroom,

Tuesday, February 13, 2018 -- Morgantown - West Virginia University, The Erickson Alumni Center

Wednesday, February 14, 2018 -- Beckley - Tamarack Conference Center

Hearings will be conducted from 6 - 8 p.m. at each location. Registration will begin at 5:30. Those requesting to speak at the hearing must indicate that at registration. Speakers will be limited to five minutes each.

WVEA has requested additional hearing dates and locations be added but those requests have not been granted.