

Gazette editorial: Botched session

Last fall, West Virginia GOP National Committeeman Kris Warner implied that 15,000 to 18,000 state government employees should be purged. He declared on the Mike Queen radio show: “We have 43,000 state employees; we should have somewhere between 25,000 and 28,000 state employees.”

Republicans who took control of the Legislature may be pursuing that drastic strategy. So far, their work on the state budget threatens to cripple government in the Mountain State. They’ve made little progress in raising revenue to meet a devastating potential \$847 million shortfall.

Last month, House Finance Chairman Eric Nelson, R-Kanawha, asked state department heads how they might adapt to another 6 percent budget slash, atop numerous reductions imposed in recent years. He got these responses:

Some 87 state troopers would be laid off, along with five forensic analysts, two evidence technicians and three support staff. Eight State Police detachments would be closed.

State-owned colleges and universities would lay off 350 faculty and staff, and perhaps impose another 10 percent tuition hike on students and parents — after West Virginia already has suffered horrendous college cost increases, at a time when middle-class careers depend on higher education.

County school systems would suffer \$71.5 million loss, putting 14 of them into deficits and forcing teacher layoffs.

Five state hospitals would lay off 166 staffers and dump patients, because accreditation wouldn’t allow such low staffing. Also, Public Broadcasting, state prisons, state parks, the Tax Department and other agencies would be undercut.

Would mine safety inspections and road repairs be lessened?

Is the Republican-controlled Legislature incapable of governing? Do leaders willfully want to harm West Virginia?

So far, conservative lawmakers have spent their energy on far-right travesties like unfettered pistol-carrying, hostility to gays, hurting women’s right to end pregnancies and requiring IDs at polling places, to curtail voting by lower-income people who lack driver licenses and tend to vote Democratic. (We hope Gov. Tomblin vetoes the latter abomination.)

The 2016 Legislature is inflicting misery on West Virginia.