

# Area lawmakers comment on 'deja vu' session

by Jim Davis STAFF WRITER | Posted: Sunday, January 24, 2016 12:00 am

CLARKSBURG — The 2016 state legislative session could be summed up in the immortal words of Yogi Berra: “It’s like deja vu all over again.”

The Republican leadership is rushing through bills pertaining to right to work and prevailing wage — two measures that dominated last year’s session.

Area GOP lawmakers said they support both bills, as they did last year, because they will create more jobs.

“I look at it from the standpoint of freedom and our Constitution and what government is supposed to be doing,” Del. Theresa “Terry” Waxman, R-Harrison, said.

Local lawmakers from across the aisle said they regard the moves as a repeat of last year’s attempts to whittle away at the working class.

“We’ve spent the first few days of the legislative session chasing ghosts,” Sen. Mike Romano, D-Harrison, said.

The Senate passed a right-to-work bill on third reading last week on a 17-16 vote.

Senate Bill 1, titled the West Virginia Workplace Freedom Act, eliminates the requirement that people pay union dues as a condition of employment.

Labor organizations or employers who violate the bill would be subject to fines between \$500 and \$5,000.

The measure now goes to the House of Delegates.

Meanwhile, a bill to repeal prevailing wage for public projects has cleared the House Government Organization Committee and is set for first reading on the House floor Monday.

The right-to-work bill died during the last session.



Delegate Theresa "Terry"  
Waxman

Waxman

As for prevailing wage, the GOP last year retreated from efforts to repeal the wage and passed a compromise to have the Tomblin administration develop a better method to calculate hourly rates. Unsatisfied with the new methodology, Republicans are bent on repealing the wage this year.

Waxman said she looks to the Constitution when considering right to work and prevailing wage.

“When it comes to prevailing wage, the government is not supposed to be setting prices for anything,” Waxman said. “In my view, whatever price someone is willing to accept for their services and somebody else is willing to pay, that is a fair price.

“When it comes to right to work, again I go to the Constitution,” Waxman added. “Our Constitution guards against our government forcing us to be a member of anything we don’t want to be a member of. It defends our right to decide what to do with our hard-earned money.”

Del. Patsy Trecost, D-Harrison, and Sen. Doug Facemire, D-Braxton, said lawmakers have more important issues to address than going after the working class.

“They want issues like these to dominate the session so we don’t have to tackle the real issues facing people, such as roads, PEIA (Public Employees Insurance Agency), drug addiction and jobs,” Trecost said.

“Quite frankly, I have to wonder where our focus is,” Trecost added. “Is it about the election, or the people and what matters to them? Certainly teachers and the middle class deserve better.”

Facemire agreed, saying the No. 1 issue facing lawmakers is the budget.

Revenues are down primarily because of a drop in coal and natural gas severance taxes. The coal industry is in a downturn because of market conditions and stringent regulations. Natural gas prices are at all-time lows because of a glut in the market.

“We’ve got a \$400 million hole in the budget,” Facemire said. “If you don’t have a strong financial situation, you cannot do anything. These are the kind of issues that we should be working on.

“I really believe the Republicans are focusing on things like this, because they don’t want to address the budget issues,” he added. “We’ve heard no answers from them on what to do with the budget.”

House Minority Leader Tim Miley, D-Harrison, said the session does appear to be a repeat of the 2015 session with right to work and prevailing wage dominating lawmakers’ attention.

“Unfortunately, a lot of time and energy will be spent on these two issues, neither of which will create a single job in the state or result in savings to the taxpayers in any meaningful way,” Miley said.

Delegate Danny Hamrick, R-Harrison, didn’t return calls in time for this report.