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## **Gazette editorial: Dismal, anti-business Legislature**

Day after day, Republicans who control the Legislature, along with some conservative Democrats, push law changes that make West Virginia seem backward and repressive. People who ran for office saying they would draw business to the Mountain State are doing the opposite.

Thursday, the House voted for “religious freedom” (translation: let people inflict prejudice on gays, in violation of human rights laws). With this odious measure, the Mountain State will be ridiculed as a bigoted place. Most business groups denounce this plan, on grounds that it may cause corporations and conventions to shun West Virginia.

Another dubious conservative action that will cost West Virginians jobs is an attempt to repeal math, reading and science standards — a complex list of what is required to be taught in public schools. (That includes, by the way, a science standard that says fossil fuels spur global warming. That effort is led by Delegate Jim Butler, R-Mason, who doubts that coal-burning causes a greenhouse layer in the sky.)

Why on earth do right-wing lawmakers want to “dumb down” West Virginia schools and return to less up-to-date, less competitive requirements?

Conservatives also want to let everyone carry a hidden pistol with no permit or safety training — another change that would make West Virginia less safe, less hospitable and more repellent to potential employers.

Further, House Republicans want to force West Virginians to show a photo identification card before voting. This is part of a national GOP attempt to obstruct voting by low-income folks, college students, blacks and Hispanics, people who tend to lack a government ID and who tend to vote Democratic. Only one-third of eligible West Virginians voted in the last election. This bill would drive the ratio lower.

Meanwhile, lawmakers are doing little about real issues. Gov. Tomblin complained that no progress is being made toward closing an \$820 million shortage in the current state budget and next year's. Tomblin said his proposal for a 45-cent boost in the state cigarette tax would generate more than \$70 million revenue (and also save thousands of teens from deadly nicotine addiction), but nothing is happening.

So far, the 2016 Legislature is hurting West Virginia more than helping.