

Gazette editorial: Sorry state in the WV Legislature

The new Legislature will reach its midpoint this week, and results so far have been pathetic. Beckley's Register-Herald commented:

“In these difficult days, our Republican Legislature is passing bills that don't amount to a hill of beans.”

Right. Conservative lawmakers have focused on letting everyone carry hidden pistols, hurting labor unions and letting fundamentalists discriminate against gays. That's a disgusting agenda.

Visitors at the Capitol must go through metal detectors to ensure that they aren't carrying loaded pistols — which shows that people under the golden dome fear guns. Yet many Republicans and Democrats back a bill to let nearly anyone wear a concealed murder instrument without a permit or safety training.

As Statehouse correspondent Phil Kabler noted Sunday, what business “would be attracted to the wild west atmosphere of unlicensed concealed carry of firearms”? National corporations may see West Virginia as an undesirable place.

Similarly, the GOP's “religious freedom” bill has no purpose except to let evangelicals show hostility to gays, without fear of breaching human rights laws.

Business groups denounce this crude exercise in prejudice. (In some other states, “religious freedom” laws also let pious employers refuse to let their insurance plans provide birth control for female workers — but that issue hasn't yet arisen in the Mountain State.)

Damaging unions is a standard GOP goal. If right-wing lawmakers override a veto and make West Virginia a “right-to-work” state, the future probably will see a reduction in wages — not just for union members but also for other hourly workers. That has been the experience in some states.

While this far-right onslaught is occurring, lawmakers are doing little about real problems. Sen. Mike Woelfel, D-Cabell, protested that no solution is being offered for “the horrific conditions of our roads,” or for the \$120 million shortfall in PEIA medical insurance, or for tragic opioid addiction that kills more West Virginians than residents of any other state.

Here's a real need: The state's cigarette tax should be raised sharply to provide \$100 million extra revenue and also save thousands of teens from becoming hooked on deadly nicotine. Will GOP legislators do anything?

By law, they must pass a balanced budget. How will they solve the enormous gap between current revenue and glaring needs?

So far, the Legislature is doing more harm than good.