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A Division of the WV State Building Trades, AFL-CIO | Chuck Parker, President | John Epperly, Secretary-Treasurer | Justin Williams, Director

Unemployment Cuts Fail, Claimant Benefits Frozen

On the final day of a whirlwind legislative session, the WV House of Delegates decided not to pass a proposal which would have cut unemployment benefits.

However, in response to political pressure from the WV Senate, the House did pass a proposal which freezes the max weekly benefit for unemployment at \$662 per week and also freezes employers' tax on the first \$9500 in wages per employee.

The proposal, which is an amended version of SB 841, does not include any cuts to the current unemployment system.

The situation started at the beginning of the legislative session, as the Senate asked the House to pass cuts to the unemployment compensation system. The Senate decided on this strategy due to the fact that the House stopped the Senate proposals from becoming law multiple times over the course of the past three years.

At the beginning of 2024, HB

5276 was introduced in the House to cut the amount of weeks unemployment pays to 20 weeks from the

current 26 weeks available for unemployment compensation in a year. HB 5276 was referred to the House

finance committee and WV Building Trades representatives were able to

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Justin Williams, Director of the West Virginia Affiliated Construction Trades (ACT) testifies to the House Finance Committee, at the Capitol building in Charleston, speaking on the status of the WV unemployment system.

Bill to Pay Tuition Costs for Trades Workers Receiving Associate Degrees Passes

A major milestone was reached during the 2024 WV legislative session, when a bill to cover tuition costs for West Virginia Building and Construction Trades (WVBCT) apprentices and journeyworkers receiving associate degrees passed the legislature.

HB 5435, better known as the Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Non-traditional Degree (STAND) Program, instructs the WV Council for Community and Technical College Education (CCTCE) to create and administer a comprehensive registered apprenticeship to associate of

applied science degree program.

The goal of the program is to provide apprentices or journeyworkers with the opportunity to obtain associate degrees in applied science while gaining practical skills and on-the-job training through federally recognized apprenticeship programs.

The bill also makes approximately \$1.2 million available in the budget as a line-item in the CCTCE appropriations, for the Council to administer and use to cover the cost of tuition for trades workers to receive their associate degree at the nearest commu-

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+200 Construction Jobs North Central Building Trades Sign MOU for Solar Project in Berkeley County

On February 7, the North Central Building and Construction Trades Council and the WV Building and Construction Trades signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement with Bedington Energy Facility, LLC to construction a solar project in Berkeley County, West Virginia.

According to a filing with the West Virginia Public Service Commission (PSC), the project will be a 100MW electric generating facility

with interconnecting transmission or distribution lines on the site of the old DuPont Potomac Works.

The site was previously used as an explosives manufacturing plant alongside the Potomac River.

Bedington is a Delaware subsidiary of Torch Clean Energy of Charlottesville, VA, according to information from the West Virginia

Public Service Commission.

Bedington Solar plans to buy 1,037 acres of the brownfield site and

build the plant on 650 of those acres, which is estimated to be an approximate \$135 million project.

According to representatives from Bedington Solar, the project will create upwards of 200 construction jobs during the peak week.

“We appreciate Bedington Solar’s commitment to using local workers,” said Natalie Stone, Executive Secretary for the North Central West Virginia Building and Construction Trades Council.

Under the terms of the MOU, if Bedington Solar elects to construct the project, the trades will receive all the work on the electric generating facility and transmission lines, as well as the work on the “site, infrastructure, buildings, structures, fix-

tures, equipment, and appurtenances used or associated with the generation of electric power.”

Recently, a major milestone was reached in the timeline of the project in terms of receiving regulatory approval from the WVPSC.

Bedington Solar’s filing with the West Virginia Public Service Commission received final approval for the project on March 13. A timeline for breaking ground will be released once local permits have been approved and completed.

“We are excited to be working with Bedington Solar on this project,” said Stone. “We believe they will be more than satisfied with the quality of work from our skilled craftsmen and women.” ■

“We are excited to be working with Bedington Solar on this project”

Natalie Stone

Executive Secretary

North Central Building and Construction Trades Council

Unemployment Cuts

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help stop this legislation from being considered. HB 5276 ultimately died before it could advance to the Senate.

Because of this, the Senate advanced two bills, SB 840 and SB 841, in an effort to try and force the House to make a vote on unemployment cuts.

SB 840 would have cut unemployment down to 12 weeks, and SB 841 would have cut unemployment to 20 weeks. Both SB 840 and SB 841 were passed out of the Senate and sent to the House of Delegates.

The House of Delegates only took up SB 841 and amended it into a brand proposal with only two weeks remaining in the legislative session. The new proposal totally changed the way unemployment benefits were calculated and cut the weeks down to 24 weeks.

However, behind closed doors the House of Delegates majority decided against this new proposal. In response, the Senate retaliated against

the House for not running the bill and held hostage multiple pieces of legislation that affected public employees, retirees, and state police.

The Senate threatened to kill these pieces of legislation unless the House passed some form of legislation related to unemployment. Because of this, the House of Delegates created a brand new proposal on the last day of session that froze the maximum weekly benefit amount at \$662 for claimants as well as the amount of wages employers pay tax on at \$9,500.

“While there are no problems with the current system, and the unemployment fund is healthy, Senate leaders decided to do all they could to make sure something was passed,” said Justin Williams, Director of the WV Affiliated Construction Trades.

“Even though a freeze is not a good thing in the long term, we are proud that we were able to help ensure there were no cuts to unemployment benefits today.” ■

Dropkick Murphys In Wheeling, WV



Members of Wheeling-area labor organizations pose for a picture with punk rock band and labor activist group the Dropkick Murphys.

Each year, the band does a cross-country tour, with the final stop in Boston on St. Patrick’s Day, and the band will frequently meet with labor unions and related groups during their time on tour.

In Wheeling, the band also held a small show during a rally for local unions and played their popular song the “Worker Song” for those in attendance at the rally.

Building trades organizations in attendance included IBEW 141, Laborers 1149, and Ironworkers 549.

West Virginia 2024 Legislative Summary

In addition to the unemployment benefits freeze and the passage of the Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Nontraditional Degree (STAND) Program, West Virginia Building and Construction Trades (WVBCT) representatives worked on many other pieces of legislation as well.

WVBCT representatives were successful in stopping a long list of bad bills from becoming law including: SB 156, which would have concealed public construction pay-

roll documents; SB 231, which would have increased the tax on wind power, deterring future investment in the state; SB 590, which would have prevented cities and counties from setting ordinances related to labor; and SB 762, which would have allowed nonresidents to receive occupational licenses in West Virginia.

“While the unemployment bills and the STAND program received most of the attention this session, we worked hard on

many other bills as well,” said George Capel, Government Relations Director for the West Virginia Building and Construction Trades.

“Sometimes the most damaging bills are the ones no one hears about. We remain vigilant to ensure those bad pieces of legislation don’t pass under the radar,” said Capel.

“We were successful in stopping many of them,” said Capel.

In addition to the bad bills that were stopped, Capel also said there were several other good bills the trades worked on this session.

One of these was HB 5528, which will increase the allowable generating capacity of utility-scale solar projects from 50MW to 100MW passed the legislature and now heads to the Governor’s desk to become law.

WVBCT representatives say this

will help create more jobs for members of the trades.

Two good bills that did not pass were HB 4759, which would have required employers to use the E-Verify system to complete background checks on new hires; and HB 5200, which would have required public school guidance counselors to receive continuing education credits by engaging with local apprenticeship programs.

Overall, Capel says the outcomes for the trades were positive this year.

“We should all be proud of how everything turned out this year,” said Capel. “We were able to avoid cuts to unemployment benefits, we stopped many bad bills from becoming law, and we passed a couple great pieces of legislation which will help the trades.” ■

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George Capel

Government Relations Director

West Virginia Building and Construction Trades Council

Bill to Pay Tuition

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nity and technical in their area.

“While this program has been available in the past, this is the first time a dedicated funding source has been created to run this type of program,” said George Capel, Government Relations Director for the West Virginia Building and Construction Trades Council. “It is also the first time the program will be available to journeyworkers,” said Capel.

Capel explained that in the past, apprentices had to undergo the labor-intensive Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to receive state funding and many apprentices were unable to get funded due to not being able to

complete the process. However, under this new system, the FAFSA process can be avoided entirely.

“Our members no longer have to complete the FAFSA process to get funding to cover their tuition expenses,” said Capel. “We believe it will make the process much easier to start and complete for anyone who is interested in receiving an associate degree.”

If you are interested in participating in the STAND program to receive an associate degree, please reach out to georgecapel@actwv.org to be placed on a mailing list, and you will be alerted when the program becomes available for you. ■

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George Capel

Government Relations Director

West Virginia Building and Construction Trades Council

Trades at the WV Capitol



Members of multiple crafts from the West Virginia Building and Construction Trades pose in front of the West Virginia Capitol building after a day of meeting with representatives and making their voices heard on issues important to the trades.

Throughout the West Virginia legislative session, members of the trades visited the WV Capitol to be heard on a range of issues including unemployment, apprenticeship, public construction bidding regulations, and more.

“It’s important for us to let our representatives know where we stand on issues that affect us,” said John Epperly, Secretary-Treasurer for the West Virginia Building and Construction Trades Council. “We come to the Capitol every year to meet with representatives in person and it truly makes a difference.”

\$500,000 Award Ironworkers 549 Awarded Grant to Elevate and Upgrade Apprenticeship Program

Earlier this year, leaders from Ironworkers Local 549 from Wheeling, West Virginia secured \$500,000 direct appropriations grant from the federal government to provide upgrades to their existing apprenticeship program.

According to the leadership of Ironworkers 549, the funding will be deployed to install numerous upgrades to the welding shop in their training facility.

Included in these upgrades are the addition of 8 brand new welding booths, which will increase the number of stations to a total of 20.

The funding will also cover the expenses associated with the additional electrical and ventilation systems needed to operate the new welding booths.

“We are very proud to have worked with our representatives in

the U.S. Senate to secure this much-needed funding to advance our already top-notch apprenticeship program, making it even better,” said Kevin Coulter, Business Manager for Ironworkers 549.

In addition to the improvement of equipment used for training, Kelly Dierkes, Business Agent for Ironworkers 549, says it will also create local construction jobs in the area as well.

“We will be able to employ local union labor to complete all these upgrades,” said Dierkes.

“We will also be able to utilize our apprentices by allowing them to fabricate some of the iron work that is needed for this project.”

While the project is not yet underway, Apprenticeship Training Director Steven Sipos says construction will begin soon.

“We have just started to get this project moving, but it should be in full swing within the next couple months,” said Sipos.

“We are all excited and thankful for these grants and what they can do to help not only our members but our area as a whole.” ■

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IUPAT Presents Awards to Outstanding Legislatures



(Left) Members of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) District Council 53 award Senator Mike Caputo with an award to showcase his dedication to the labor movement throughout his legendary career.

Senator Caputo will not seek reelection to his seat and will retire at the end of this year.

(Right) IUPAT members award Delegate Evan Worrell (R-Cabell) with a certificate of excellence, acknowledging his continued work as a champion of the larger labor movement.

Delegate Worrell is the founder and current chairman of the West Virginia Republican Labor Caucus.

