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4100 Edison Lakes Parkway, Suite 100

Mishawaka, Indiana 46545

Phone: (574) 243-4100

Fax: (574) 232-9789

www.maylorber.com

Statehouse Report

FEBRUARY 19, 2010

This week in the General Assembly saw most work taking place in House and Senate committees. Both bodies are busy considering bills that have been passed over from their original chambers the week before. While a few bills have already been passed by both chambers, most are still being debated.

The unofficial deadline for Senate Bills to be heard in House committees is Monday, February, 22. The Senate's deadline for House bills is later that same week. Committees from both chambers have been especially busy this week in order to complete their work in time.

Once the committees have concluded their deliberations, bills that have been favorably received will move back to the full House and Senate chambers for additional debate and votes.

Unemployment Insurance Fund

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Labor and Employment amended a bill aimed at delaying an unemployment insurance premium increase on businesses, adding provisions that expand unemployment eligibility and raise the maximum benefits.

[SB 23](#) passed out of Committee by a [7-2](#) vote, and now heads to the full House for consideration.

Since 2001, Indiana's unemployment insurance trust fund had been paying out more in benefits than it has been receiving in taxes paid by employers. It ran out of money in late 2008, which forced the state to borrow \$1.6 billion from the federal government to pay claims.

Legislation passed last year included raising \$315 million in new revenue from increased premiums for businesses in 2010.

Generally, the Senate has been advocating for a delayed implementation for the new increases, and the House has attempted to find a way to provide benefits for the state's expanding number of unemployed workers.

The committee made several changes to the Senate Bill. One amendment would make permanent changes to the state's unemployment system to allow Indiana to draw down \$148 million in one-time assistance from the federal stimulus program. Under one of these changes, a person who quits a job to deal with a family illness or disability would qualify for unemployment benefits.

A second amendment would base the state's maximum unemployment benefit on the state's average weekly wage for the previous year. Currently the maximum benefit is set at \$390 a week, but the amended bill would let it fluctuate with wages, with a floor of \$390 a week, and a maximum of \$406 a week.

Casinos

A new proposal to build a land-based casino in Gary was offered in a House committee on Wednesday.

The proposal to amend [SB 405](#), which contains various minor changes to state gambling law, was to keep one of Gary's two casino licenses in the current Majestic Star footprint at Buffington Harbor. The General Assembly would then allow the other license to be moved elsewhere within Gary. The site most discussed for this new location would be at the intersection of Interstate 65 and the Borman Expressway.

The amendment was not acted upon in committee, but it is expected to be reconsidered once the bill moves on to the full House for consideration.

High Interest Bank Credit Cards

Two separate bills are moving through the Legislature that seek to punish banks issuing credit cards with rates higher than 21 percent by forbidding them to hold Indiana public funds. [HB 1336](#) passed the House by a vote of [59-38](#), and [SB 238](#) passed the Senate by a vote of [28-22](#).

Between \$11 billion and \$14 billion in public funds are invested in almost 200 banks - including both state dollars and funds from local governments and schools. At the end of 2009, 25 banks had at least \$100 million each, and the top ten banks held \$6.2 billion, or more than half the money. JPMorgan Chase had the most with \$1.377 billion.

Of the 15 largest credit card issuers in the nation, only three take public deposits: JPMorgan Chase, PNC and Wells Fargo. All three hold Indiana funds, and have argued that if they could no longer accept those funds, smaller banks in the state would not be able to absorb or manage the estimated \$4 to \$5 billion they currently hold.

Ethics

On Monday, the Senate Rules Committee voted [11-0](#) in favor of [HB 1001](#), the legislative and lobbying ethics bill, after hearing testimony from supporters. Among the bill's provisions are requirements for legislators to wait one year before becoming lobbyists after their terms expire, and for lobbyists to report any gifts or expenditures worth \$50 or more.

Bills of interest

Below are lists of some bills of interest that have recently passed out of the House and Senate. Please note that these lists are not comprehensive.

House Bills of interest that have passed the Senate

[SB 110](#) - Conservancy district elections.

[SB 134](#) - Noncode statutes.

[SB 176](#) - Nonparticipating tobacco product manufacturers.

[SB 190](#) - Discriminatory practice definition; vulnerable individuals.

[SB 222](#) - Technical corrections.

[SB 226](#) - Teen suicide prevention.

[SB 257](#) - Commission for higher education.

[SB 401](#) - Petitioners and remonstrators for local debt.

Senate Bills of interest that have passed the House

[HB 1008](#) - Purchase of out-of-state service credit.

[HB 1068](#) - Access to handgun license information.

[HB 1165](#) - Exempt veterans' benefits from attachment.

[HB 1193](#) - Juvenile, education, and law enforcement matters.

How to track legislative action.

The [web page for the Indiana General Assembly](#) is a free resource for the public that provides some helpful tools to follow the progress of legislative action during the session. You can [find out how to contact your legislator](#), read [all of the filed bills](#), and search the [Indiana Constitution, Indiana Code, and Indiana Register](#).

You can also watch live streaming video of the legislature while it is in session, as well as some committee meetings [here](#).

The regularly updated House and Senate Committee schedules are also available online, and contain links to legislation up for consideration in committee.

[House Committee Schedule](#)

[Senate Committee Schedule](#)



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