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## Legislators return to Capitol

### Must approve state budget

BY DAVID BEARD The Dominion Post

The State Legislature returns to the Capitol on Tuesday to approve a slimmed-down budget, override some or all of what Delegate Bob Beach calls a "record amount" of vetoed bills and reconsider some bills that died in March.

The work begins with the budget. The Legislature is essentially picking up where it left off in March, said Matt Turner, Gov. Joe Manchin's spokesman. Instead of adjourning at the end of its regular session, it went into recess and is simply reconvening Tuesday.

Manchin originally proposed a state budget of about \$10.8 billion, with about \$3.9 billion of that in the General Fund. But Manchin wants to trim about \$200 million from the General Fund, said Sen. Mike Oliverio, D-Monongalia.

Twelve Conferees — six from the Senate, six from the House of Delegates — will negotiate the details and hammer out the final budget, said Sen. Roman Prezioso, D-Marion, who will be one of the 12.

With the cuts in mind, several legislators said, various interests will be lobbying to keep their share of the pie.

The Legislature authorized the extended session to run through June 6, Turner said. Prezioso said he'd like to see budget deliberations completed in three days, but things may not wrap up until Saturday.

Part of the process will be apportioning what used to be called Budget Digest Funds and is now called Community Participation Projects (CPPs).

CPP funds are divided three ways, Prezioso said — a third to Manchin, a third to the Senate and a third to the House. Senators and delegates can channel their portions to local projects.

Delegate Alex Shook, D-Mon, recalled that last year each delegate received roughly \$70,000. Prezioso estimated that because of Manchin's budget trimming, each legislator's share may get cut in half this year.

But no one really knows. "I don't know how that's going to impact" the CPP money, Shook said.

Prezioso said he and Oliverio represent the same district and work together to get the best bang for their buck. Delegate Charlene Marshall, D-Mon, said Mon's four delegates also work together.

"I have probably 20 or more requests [from constituents]. I'm hoping to fund all or a portion of them."

Marshall and Beach, also DMon, said they keep an eye on funding for senior organizations.

Beach also cited a project at Brookhaven Elementary School in Morgantown.

The 3-K building at Brookhaven is detached from the school, but linked by a covered walkway. He hopes to get some money to enclose the walkway to protect the kids from harsh weather.

#### Vetoes

Legislators will also review the 20 vetoed bills during the extended session.

Delegate Barbara Fleischauer, D-Mon, said Manchin vetoed most of the bills for technicalities. That number is "larger than normal, but the governor has also had a lot more time to study them for flaws."

Some are vetoed at the request of legislators who sponsored them.

For instance, she asked Manchin to veto Senate Bill 695 — about payment for some state workers' unused sick leave — “because it retroactively would take away benefits from higher education employees. I am pleased he vetoed it.”

Other vetoed bills include one prohibiting animal gas chamber euthanasia; a bill requested by the city of Morgantown to allow cities to hire litter-prevention officers empowered to issue citations; and one establishing a procedure to challenge a county commission candidate's qualifications for office.

Tuesday also marks the beginning of the legislative interims, and several committees will be meeting from Tuesday to Thursday.

Dead bills revisited

Following the extended session, Turner said, the Legislature will adjourn and Manchin will call a special session for lawmakers to review bills he's interested in reviving.

The legislators can only handle bills that Manchin puts “on the call,” Turner said. The call is essentially the working agenda.

Turner said Manchin has at least four bills in mind:

House Bill 2832, to provide

help for third- and eight-grade students who may be failing.

Oliverio said the Senate version of the bill will be considered.

Some kids are “socially promoted” through the grade levels, he said, and this has often done more harm than good. So kids who are struggling and in danger of failure will be evaluated and given extra help — even into the summer if necessary.

SB 375, to force better use of land when mining is complete.

Oliverio said regulations require mining firms to restore surface mines to as close to their original condition as possible, but often this “doesn't serve any public purpose.” Especially in southern West Virginia, where some of the available land is a narrow tract between a hill and a creek — crammed with a road, a railroad track and whatever buildings can be squeezed in.

This law would allow for development on hilltops where, often, some infrastructure is still in place — such as roads and electricity.

“I've seen with my own eyes what these sites can look like,” he said, referring to hilltop developments around Morgantown.

SB 297 would create some incentives for utilities using mostly coal power to develop alternative energy resources.

Oliverio said his is an effort to support Manchin as he makes a case for coal power around the country. When people ask about alternate energy, “he can say we're doing that in West Virginia.”

The fourth bill would offer some tax incentives to high-tech firms, Shook said, to help lure them to the state.

Two additional bills on the slate, according to The Associated Press, are SB 249, to revamp the school calendar to allow more counties to meet the 180-day requirement; and HB 2836, to allow schools to seek and receive waivers of certain statutes, rules and policies and to create special innovation zones.