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Legislature approves bonus for state retirees

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CHARLESTON — One of the few bills the House was able to pass Thursday morning, before lunch break and before action slowed to a crawl — after one member moved that every bill be read in its entirety — was a bonus for certain state retirees.

HB 3145 gives a one-time \$1,200 bonus to state retirees with 20 or more years of service and who earn an annuity of \$7,200 or less. Survivors of qualified beneficiaries also will receive a check.

The fiscal note says the bill will affect 2,158 people, who will receive a check July 1.

The bill began in the House as a \$600 bonus, but the Senate doubled it to \$1,200. On Wednesday, the House Finance Committee doubled it again, to \$2,400, and it was reported to the House floor that way.

The bill will cost the state about \$2.5 million, figured by doubling the cost calculated in the original fiscal note — which was based on a \$600 bonus.

Thursday morning, House leaders withdrew the Finance amendment and voted to concur with the Senate amendment. It passed 87-7 with eight members not voting, including Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, who attended



the session but wasn't in the chamber for that vote.

Typically, it takes from 10 to 30 minutes or more to begin House business, but leaders skipped most of the ceremonies Thursday in order to begin quickly, and Fleischauer said she didn't reach the chamber in time. She voted in favor of the bill when it passed the House the first time.

She said she will have her preference to vote yes recorded in the journal and said she agrees those retirees deserve a double bonus.

Delegate Dave Pethtel, D-Wetzel, was lead sponsor, and all local delegates voted for it.

Delegate Amanda Pasdon, R-Monongalia, commented that "HB 3145 was created in an effort to give minor relief to our low-income seniors. I supported this legislation because I believe that when there is a surplus of funds it should be returned to the people who contributed. This is a responsible way to help ease the burdens of increasing health care costs, fuel costs and other cost-of-living increases experienced during this economic downturn. This one-time benefit for our senior citizens does not increase pension plan obligation and does not create long-term costs."