Weekly Legislative Update

Session begins to wind down, but the work continues to ramp up

Representative Robert Goforth

As always, it was a busy and eventful week in Frankfort. Although we had a short week with only four days of action, every day was fairly lengthy and the end result was a plethora of bills and resolutions passed, most of which are heading straight to the governor for final approval.

Conference committees were also named this week. Conference committees are groups of both senators and representatives that come together to hash out differences on things the two bodies disagree on. The state budget is the biggest item that the conference committees will work on in the coming days, and heading into final negotiations a final budget will be considered based on three proposals: one from the Governor; one from the House; and one from the Senate.

As you can imagine, many compromises and much negotiation to reach a final two-year spending plan will occur over the next few weeks, starting tomorrow. As that process unfolds, I'd like to highlight a few other bills that made strides this week:

House Bill 68, sponsored by Ken Fleming of Louisville, would establish a mental health wellness program for police. The intent of the program is to help Kentucky's brave men and women in uniform overcome any psychological trauma they experience. The bill passed and now heads to the governor.

While on the subject of police, we passed House Bill 185, which would increase benefits to the spouses of police officers who die in the line of duty. The same guarantee would be given to other first responders, including firefighters, EMS workers, and jail workers. This bill was very important in the House, as many members have a background in law enforcement themselves.

House Bill 132 passed the Senate and is on its way to the governor to be signed into law. The bill, seeks to teach financial literacy in Kentucky's public schools. No longer will Kentucky be a national left-behind when it comes to basic skills such as financial literacy. If we are to invest in our future leaders, we must make sure they know how to invest in themselves.

House Bill 1, a bill that has tremendous bipartisan support, also passed the Senate Health and Welfare Committee. The bill will make sweeping changes to our adoption and foster care systems to reduce barriers for people who want adopt a child into their home, with the end goal of placing every single child in Kentucky into a loving home.

The opioid crisis has a violent grip on Kentucky, slowly killing our residents, and has hit younger generations particularly hard. To join a bevy of bills aimed to reduce the damage and slow the scourge, House Bill 428 passed the House and will allow first responders to detain someone who has overdosed from opioids, take them to a hospital, and get them the treatment they so desperately need and deserve

House Bill 191, which received final passage, will require companies offering eyeglass or contact prescriptions based on virtual eye tests offered by smartphone app or elsewhere to have the prescription signed off on by a Kentucky licensed medical provider. Those receiving prescriptions from such vendors would have to be at least 18 years old and have received an in-person eye exam within the previous 24 months.

These are just some of the highlights from this week. So far, more than 60 bills have passed both the House and Senate this year, and more than 45 have already been sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

As March wraps up, I want to assure you that we will continue to work toward the final two-year budget, which is the most important task for me. There are still numerous issues to tackle in these last few weeks, with the state budget being the biggest challenge, and we will see to it that it all gets done. The people of Kentucky deserve the best, and I will give them mine. You can reach me through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181, or you can contact me via e-mail at robert.goforth@lrc.ky.gov. You can keep track of committee meetings and potential legislation through the Kentucky Legislature Home Page at www.lrc.ky.gov.

RE-ELECT
Goforth
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

RE-ELECT MAY 22nd

KEEPING MY PROMISE, STANDING FOR THE PEOPLE

I was proud to make two votes on legislation that support our police and our fire departments.

- HB 185 supports increased death-in-the-line-duty benefits for the families of our heroic fallen law enforcement officers(and other first responders).
- HB 95 supports increased funding for our fire departments to insure that they have the tools necessary to protect our homes and businesses

Paid for by Robert Goforth

Federal Funding Bill Includes Nearly $4 Billion to Combat Drug Abuse

WASHINGTON, DC -- Among congressional priorities included in the 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act that was signed into law last week, is nearly $4 billion to combat the nation's public health emergency on opioid abuse. It invests billions in treatment, prevention and law enforcement efforts to stem the rapid rise in deadly overdose deaths. In 2016, more than 42,000 Americans lost their lives as a result of a drug overdose.

"The federal response largely reflects the multi-faceted approach that Operation UNITE has successfully utilized over the last 15 years to hold drug dealers responsible, help addicts gain access and support for treatment, and prevent drug use through education in our communities and schools," said Rogers, Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Prescription Drug Abuse. "Today, like every day, approximately 115 Americans will die of a drug overdose, and we simply must remain vigilent in our efforts to combat the epidemic from every angle. This legislation will ensure that our professionals and community advocates have the resources they need to help save lives and change the course for future generations."

In an effort to raise awareness about America's opioid epidemic, Operation UNITE will help host the 7th annual National Rx Drug Abuse and Heroin Summit next week, April 2-5, 2018 in Atlanta, Georgia. It is now the largest national conference addressing the growing global opioid crisis, drawing federal, state and local leaders, including both public and private sectors, and advocates from around the world.

Anti-Drug Funding

Together we've made progress combatting drug abuse in Southern and Eastern Kentucky and across the Commonwealth, but more must be done to curb ever-increasing drug overdose rates and put people on the path to recovery. Consequently, this bill achieves record funding levels to comprehensively support local, state, regional and federal efforts to combat addiction and drug trafficking, including:

Drug Enforcement and Criminal Justice Activities

The bill includes significant increases in law enforcement, prosecution agencies and grant resources for state and local criminal justice entities.

$2.1 billion is included for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), $419.5 million of which is specifically allocated to combat the diversion of prescription drugs. $10 million is provided to support state and local law enforcement efforts to clean up methamphetamine labs, and $8 million is continued for Anti-Meth Task Forces.

$542 million is provided for Interagency Crime and Drug Enforcement, and the bill provides $280 million for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program to assist federal, state, and local authorities clean up trafficking hot-spots, which will enable the Appalachian HIDTA to continue its work in southern and eastern Kentucky.

The bill also includes $236 million for the National Guard Counter-Drug program, an increase of $120 million from the President's request and $2 million more than the FY17 level. The Kentucky National Guard Counter-Drug program is among the best in the nation, and has eradicated millions of dollars of illegal drugs.

Byrne Justice Assistance Grants are funded at $415 million, an increase of $109 million from the FY17 level. This funding will support all components of the criminal justice system, including drug and gang task forces to domestic violence programs, treatment, and justice information sharing. Overall, it will help keep Kentucky safe.

For Drug Courts, the bill includes $164 million for the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to help non-violent offenders struggling with addiction. An additional $20 million is included for Veterans Treatment Courts to help our men and women in uniform who are struggling with addiction. Activities under the Second Chance Act are also funded at $85 million.

Treatment

Over $4 billion is included for treatment services alone, across a broad spectrum of programs within the federal government.

Most notably, over $5 billion is provided for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), including a $1 billion increase for its treatment programming and a $25 million increase to its prevention programming.

The bill also provides an additional $105 million to allow National Health Service Corps members to deliver Substance Use Disorder treatment services to our communities.

The bill also appropriates more than $475 million for the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to continue its Opioid Prescription Drug Overdose Prevention program – more than double the amount appropriated last year.

The legislation also encourages HHS to facilitate training of healthcare professionals and paramedics and to increase access to emergency devices, like Naloxone, and allocates.

Prevention, Recovery and Research

The legislation provides $30 million to implement and enhance Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs), which help doctors make good prescribing decision and investigators root out bad actors.

$99 million is approved for the Drug Free Communities Program, which provides funding to community-based groups seeking to prevent youth substance abuse. $119 million is available for a Strategic Prevention Framework, which provides prevention professionals a comprehensive process for addressing the substance misuse and related behavioral health problems facing their communities.

$7.434 million is provided specifically for Recovery Community Services Program and Building Communities of Recovery to support those in their journey to overcome addiction.

The National Institute for Health (NIH) is slated to receive an overall increase of $3 billion increase for life-saving research, $500 million of which is focused on efforts to combat opioid addiction.