

**Number 19 – Regular Session****March 10, 2006**

## **Minimum Wage Bill Jumps Another Hurdle**

**HB 4023 – Raising the Minimum Wage** passed out of the Finance Committee yesterday afternoon just prior to the evening session. Labor Commissioner Jim Lewis testified that 17 states and the District of Columbia have already increased their state minimum wage above the federal level and that it appears that the neighboring states of Maryland and Ohio are going to do so soon. He did state that the state minimum wage is likely to effect only very few West Virginians. Jan Vineyard testified on behalf of OMEGA stating the points that we have previously published against the bill. (Jan was the only one asked to testify in opposition of the bill.) The simple fact is that this is all about politics. This is an election year. When the general public is polled minimum wage ranks extremely high as one of the things that need to be changed. Those Senators and Delegates that are running for re-election want to be able to say that they voted to raise the minimum wage and hope that their constituents don't know enough to realize that they didn't really do anything to help West Virginia workers. They are in hopes that they will be sending a message to Washington that the minimum wage needs to be raised at the federal level.

The bill will likely be debated at length on the floor today as it is on 2nd reading – amendment stage. Minority Leader Senator Vic Sprouse offered an amendment in the committee room that would have raised the minimum wage for state workers to what is included in the bill. The amendment tied at 7-7 thus it failed. He intends to bring this amendment up on the floor today. He stated that if small business is required to pay a higher "living wage" then state government should have to as well. This may very well be one of the bills addressed on the floor of the House and Senate when public television airs their evening session tomorrow night.