

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

### Week in Review: Health care, public assistance programs, and broadband expansion receive legislative attention

By State Representative Timmy Truett

Almost two full months into this year's legislative interim, lawmakers continue to work on issues that will dominate the 2023 Regular Session agenda. Last week was particularly busy in Frankfort, with 16 committees, task forces, and working groups meeting to work on the issues facing our state. While information about all the meetings is available on the General Assembly's website, below is a review of a handful of the discussions.

**Task Force on Public Assistance Benefits Cliff:** Lawmakers began diving into issues and looking for solutions to the public assistance benefits cliff in Kentucky. The cliff effect refers to the sudden and often unexpected decrease in public benefits like childcare or health coverage that can occur with a slight wage increase or employment. Members received a briefing on where the commonwealth currently stands, with a few startling statistics sticking out. Over the last three years, Kentucky's poverty rate remained a full three percentage points higher than the national rate. Since expanding Medicaid eligibility in 2000, the state has had more than a million new enrollees—an increase of 153%—while our labor participation rate dropped by 11%. Lawmakers also evaluated successful policy options other states have implemented, hearing directly from a nonpartisan, national legislative research organization.

**IJC on Health, Welfare, and Family Services:** Members discussed a number of issues, including a proposed pilot program that serves as a 24/7 mental health resource for students. The proposal would test an app called SafeKY that would, at no cost, connect those in need with certified mental health therapists and crisis counselors. It is based on a similar program with a proven track record in Utah. Also, legislators received an update on health care workforce shortages statewide. According to industry representatives, health care workers are retiring in large numbers, and not enough students are entering the professions. Hospital leaders shared they expect 18% of nurses to retire within the next year. To meet growing demands, hospitals continue using traveling nurses and offering employees premium pay. In 2019, hospitals spent \$88 million on nursing contract labor. Through the first six months of this year, that number has skyrocketed to \$489 million. Nursing premium pay has also escalated from \$50 million to \$185 million over the same time period.

**IJC on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative Regulations:** Members heard testimony on several key issues surrounding the commonwealth currently. The topics discussed were veterinarian licensing, real estate wholesaling, and charitable gaming. Despite being one of Kentucky's premier industries, like most of the nation our state is suffering from a shortage of thoroughbred and large animal veterinarians. To combat the issue, the legislature will take a closer look at modernizing the 1942 Kentucky Practice Act that sets the parameters for veterinarian practice in the Commonwealth. Additionally, real estate wholesaling has been a prevalent issue in Kentucky for decades but has gone without regulation since its inception. From committee testimony, I expect we will see a proposal to add a fiduciary mandate for real estate wholesalers in order to provide protection to consumers. Essentially, this would place wholesalers on a level playing field with realtors. Finally, current laws mandate that charitable gaming deposits are made roughly every other day regardless of the amount collected. This may have been helpful when the law was enacted, but today most charitable gaming facilities collect a small amount daily. We may consider legislation next session would update the timeline.

**IJC on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology:** Lawmakers received an update on the Broadband Deployment Fund, as well as hearing about Tennessee's approach to increasing broadband access. Broadband service provides a higher speed of data transmission and access to the highest quality internet services, such as videoconferencing for telehealth, that require large amounts of data transmission. Access to service plays an important role in economic development and paves the way for rural community growth and sustainability. Increasing broadband access and usage in rural areas will lead to higher property values, increased economic growth, higher rates of new business emergence, and lower unemployment rates. Broadband expansion can also improve health and life outcomes, offering access to telework, remote healthcare, entertainment, and educational opportunities.

**IJC on Economic Development and Workforce Investment:** Legislators delved into the Registered Apprenticeship Program, which works to help employers with the recruitment, training, and retention of talented employees. There are currently 623 registered apprenticeship programs aimed at growing our state's workforce and preparing the next generation of worker. The committee also heard from Kentucky's Secondary Career and Technical Education (CTE) System. During the 2021-2022 school year, 70% of Kentucky's high school students were enrolled in CTE career pathways and for many students it represented a third of their high school experience. CTE programs range from a focus on careers in agriculture and medicine to finance and law enforcement.

With the 2023 Regular Session nearing, I am excited to continue our work and prepare legislation that makes Kentucky the best place to live, work, and grow a family. In the meantime, I can be reached through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. Feel free to contact me via email at [Timmy.Truett@lrc.ky.gov](mailto:Timmy.Truett@lrc.ky.gov). If you would like more information, please visit the LRC website [legislature.ky.gov](http://legislature.ky.gov)

### Amid Rising Costs Nationwide, Congressman Rogers Votes Against More Democrat Spending

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Rep. Harold "Hal" Rogers (KY-05) voted to put the brakes on H.R. 8294, an out-of-touch federal spending package proposed by House Democrats totaling nearly \$400 billion.

"Everyday costs are out-of-control; between gas, groceries, energy prices and other expenses, American families are projected to spend an extra \$400 every month. Instead of working together to drive down those costs, Washington Democrats have proposed six new bills in a record-spending package," said Congressman Rogers, Dean of the U.S. House of Representatives and a senior appropriator. "Not only are they out of touch with the reality of the financial strain that this package will add on American family budgets, but this bill also removes long-standing prohibitions on taxpayer funding for abortions, while protecting a FDA policy allowing abortion pills to be mailed to patients, among other concerning liberal policies."

Rather than addressing the energy crisis with commonsense legislation, House Democrats are using this package to push a climate agenda with a 20% increase for the Environmental Protection Agency to further regulate and limit energy independence in the United States.

The federal funding package also fails to address the ongoing border crisis and increases national security concerns by supporting the closure of Guantanamo Bay and the transfer of dangerous criminals to the United States.

House Democrats passed the spending package with a partisan majority vote, sending the bill on to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

## Attorney General Cameron Co-Leads

### 17 States in Letter Urging Google Not to Censor Crisis Pregnancy Centers From Search Results

FRANKFORT, Ky. (July 21, 2022) – Attorney General Cameron today joined Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares and a coalition of 15 other states in sending a letter to Google expressing concerns about recent political pressure encouraging Google to discriminate against crisis pregnancy centers in search results, online advertising, and other products like Google Maps.

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) has advocated for the shutting down of crisis pregnancy centers, and Senator Mark Warner (D-VA) and Congresswoman Slotkin (D-MI), joined by 19 of their Democrat colleagues, sent Google their own respective letter, urging them to discriminate against these private charities by removing them from search results.

In their letter, the Attorneys General promise to investigate potential violations of antitrust laws and religious discrimination, should Google fall to this political pressure and attack free speech.

"Right now, we should all be working together to provide women and families with life-affirming care and support. Instead, Democratic members of Congress are pressuring mega-corporations to censor information about crisis pregnancy centers," said Attorney General Cameron. "Google must not give in to the political pressure to alter search engine results to discriminate against crisis pregnancy centers. Any attempts to do so will result in legal action."

Crisis pregnancy centers are private charities that show compassion and practical support to women in a time of need. In 2019, crisis pregnancy centers served over 1.8 million clients and provided services valued at over \$266 million for little or no cost. These included ultrasounds, pregnancy tests, STD testing, parenting and prenatal education classes, post-abortive care, recovery counseling, free or reduced-cost diapers, baby clothes, car seats, and strollers.

In their letter, the attorneys general explain the importance of providing users "unbiased access to information." Because Google accounts for ninety percent of all internet searches in the United States, it is essential for the corporation to act in the best interests of the American public.

Attorney General Cameron, together with Attorney General Miyares, was joined by attorneys general from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia in sending the letter.

### U.S. Economy Headed Towards Recession, But Democrats Claim Otherwise

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) delivered the following remarks today on the Senate floor regarding the economy:

"For the past year and a half, Washington Democrats have continually found new ways to be wrong about the U.S. economy.

"Last springtime, Democrats insisted their plan to dump \$1.9 trillion dollars onto the economy would not cause inflation. Here was the Democratic Leader in March of 2021: 'I do not think the dangers of inflation, at least in the near term, are very real.' And here was President Biden: 'The biggest risk is not going too big... it's if we go too small.'

"Obviously, they were wrong. Their reckless spending fueled the worst inflation in 40 years. As Ms. Alvarado, a teacher and mother of three explained to a reporter, 'When I say, 'OK, we cannot buy anything this week or else we'll go into overdraft,' [my husband] says, 'No, what are you talking about? We're both working. That shouldn't happen.'

"No, Madam President, it shouldn't have happened, but it's exactly what Democrats' policies have inflicted on working families in this country.

"'Every time I fill up our van I'm flabbergasted,' Ms. Alvarado explains, 'I'm always worrying... I can postpone the mortgage by two weeks, but then it becomes two more weeks, and then all of a sudden they're calling you.'

"After Democrats' policies did cause inflation, they moved on to their next wrong prediction. President Biden admitted inflation did exist, but said it was, 'expected to be temporary.' That one didn't work out, either. That was over a year ago.

"Then, seven months ago, in early December, President Biden promised inflation had peaked. Wrong again. It didn't peak in December, it's just kept getting worse. Inflation set a fresh new 40-year high just last month.

"Well, now, these same folks are preparing for yet another battle against reality. In advance of the GDP numbers coming out later this week, the Biden Administration has begun their latest project—a frantic effort to re-define the word 'recession.'

"The White House published a whole explanation insisting that even if the new data suggest that our country is in recession, we actually won't be.

"It's almost beyond satire, Madam President. The White House isn't focusing their energies on correcting their mistakes and making the economy better for working families who are hurting. Instead their priority is telling everybody things aren't as bad as they look or feel. They want working Americans like Ms. Alvarado to believe Democrats' spin instead of their own lying eyes.

"I guess the whopping 42% of Americans who say they're struggling to stay where they are financially are supposed to read the White House's press release and cheer up.

"The same people who said inflation wouldn't happen... and then said it would be transitory... and then said it had peaked last year... are now insisting we aren't headed into a recession. Draw your own conclusions."