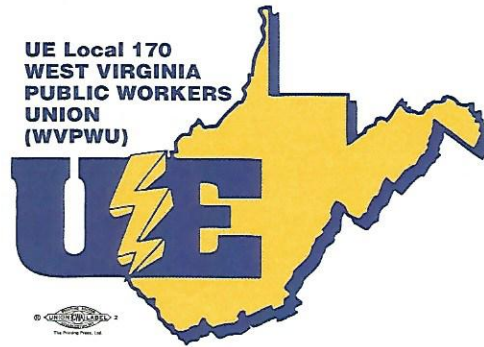


# United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)



## 2018 Legislative Summary

A significant portion of Local 170's attention has been concerned with the anticipated reintroduction of attempts to privatize state health facilities. With that in mind, we drafted and secured the introduction of legislation that would revitalize the aging facilities at Hopemont Hospital in Preston County and Jackie Withrow Hospital in Beckley. The bills called for the construction of new buildings incorporating both long-term care nursing homes and opioid-addiction treatment centers. Neither bill made it out of committee and onto the floor before the deadline to cross over to full legislature consideration, but they will both get automatic reintroduction in the 2019 regular session.

Much of our lobbying attention has been absorbed in the attempt on the part of Republican leadership a major reorganization of the state's largest agency, the Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR), in which a large segment of the Local's membership are employed. We were able to review a draft of the bill well before the session began. In its original version, it would divide DHHR into four separate cabinet-level agencies as well as give the current DHHR secretary a carte blanche authorization to privatize any functions of the DHHR prior to implementing the actual reorganization.

Fortunately, the bill that came out of House of Delegate committees and crossed over to the Senate was much altered from the original version. The dismantling of DHHR into four separate components was reduced to two principally due to the hefty fiscal note attached to any wholesale fragmentation. More importantly for Local 170, the privatization provision was gutted, and barring last minute maneuvers, there will be no dismantling of health facilities coming out of the session this year.

The most significant feature of the 2018 regular session was the outbreak of a statewide strike shutting down all 55 of West Virginia's school districts. The strike movement began and spread in January via a rank-and-file Facebook account titled West Virginia Public Employees United. The grassroots demand for a strike was fueled by both low pay (the state is 48th in the nation just for teachers) and by a draconian proposed reduction in medical benefits through the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA).

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The demand was not just that the reduction not occur, but that the state implement full funding for the long-neglected medical benefits and restore it to future solvency and previous coverage terms.

After staging the largest labor rally in state history on February 17, 2018 as well as a few forced closings of county school districts, school personnel walked off the job on February 22, 2018 and have stayed on strike since with continued massive rallies and demonstrations at the Capitol. Despite a 'deal' made between the governor and the state leadership of AFT and NEA to delay implementing PEIA reductions, and to create a 'task force' for developing a long-term solution for PEIA viability, as well as boosting pay increases to 5% for school district personnel and 3% for state workers, as of this date strikers have refused to return to work. A poll of the participants in the Facebook United page was a majority disapproving the terms of the deal.

This strike differs from the 1990 eleven-day walkout insofar as union leaders did not want to remain out (and probably didn't want a strike at all) and that non-teaching school personnel affiliated with the independent West Virginia School Service Personnel Association (WVSSPA) are involved in the wildcat strike. WVSSPA has initiated contact with Local 170, finding that our situations and interests are very compatible. They invited Local 170 to their legislative reception and provided speaker for Local 170's Presidents Day rally. This promises to be a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship, well past the current strike.

Jamie Beaton  
President,  
UE Local 170