

Activities of Legislature

The middle of the fourth week of the 1949 General Assembly saw the ground-hog scurry back in his hole after having gazed at his shadow momentarily, and saw the legislators scurry down to the Marine base at Camp Lejeune on a tour of inspection after having had a fairly busy time at the beginning of the week. The ground-hog presumably went back to sleep for another six weeks. Although it is thought in some quarters that the quiescence of the session to date indicates that the legislators have been dozing since early January, the pace set during the latter part of the week seems to indicate that they are not really asleep and that the next six weeks will instead be very active ones for them. The introduction of 108 new bills during the week brought the total for the session to 378, putting this legislature only seven bills behind the 1947 session. The comments below will reveal that important legislation was being considered by the committees as the week ended, and that some of it was already beginning to come out.

School Legislation
The third bill of the session launching the State on a program of participation in the business of providing school buildings was introduced this week. The first, introduced by Rep. John Umstead and others, called for the appropriation of \$50,000,000, the full recommendation of the State Education Commission. The next, brought in by Rep. Harris, dropped the appropriation down to \$40,000,000. And now Rep. Huskins' bill, HB 221, drops the appropriation another ten million dollars and, unlike the others, provides that \$7,500,000 of the \$30,000,000 total shall be distributed in outright grants to the 25 counties found to be most impoverished by the State Board of Education according to a fixed procedure for determining the ability of a county to produce funds.

The pleas of the school forces were heard by the Joint Appropriations Committee on Thursday afternoon, not only on the building program but also on other school needs, some of which were embodied in the following

bills introduced last week: HB 222, providing for the appropriation of \$424,800 for each year of the coming biennium to finance the institution and enforcement of a compulsory attendance program; HB 223, providing for the appropriation of \$575,000 for each year of the coming biennium for establishing and operating a program of instructional supervision; and HB 200, providing for the appropriation of \$1,400,000 for 1949-50 and \$700,000 for 1950-51 for the purchase of school buses by the State Board of Education, this to be in addition to the program of replacement of school buses by the State which the law presently provides.

Roads
While the road bond and gas tax measures gathered dust in committee files awaiting public hearings on February 9, another portion of the Governor's road program, reorganization of the Highway Commission to provide more diversified representation, was introduced in the House this week. Appointment by the Governor of three associate commissioners in each of the 10 divisions is called for by HB 204. Each division would be divided into three districts, one commissioner to be resident in each district, and the district commissioners would elect one of their number as chairman, to cast the division's vote on the state commission. Whether or not the secondary road program goes through, HB 211 would put the state in the Portland cement business if the commission it authorizes the Governor to appoint finds it advisable for the Highway Commission to make the product.

Election Law Changes
As an expected aftermath of the recent struggle of the Progressive and State Rights supporters to gain party status, in addition to long-standing complaints about registration and enforcement of the Corrupt Practices Act, bills embodying recommendations of the State Board of Elections were introduced in the Senate on Thursday. SB 94 seeks to dissipate the haze surrounding the statutory definition of a political party. If passed, no new party could include

any part of the name of an old party in its title. The 10,000 required registered voters who sign the petition for a new party would have to include in their petition a statement that they intend to support the candidates of the party they seek to establish in the next election. To maintain its status the new group would still have to poll at least 3% of the total vote for governor or presidential electors. SB 93 would institute a single registration book in each precinct by the time of the 1950 primary in place of the separate primary and general elections books now used. As a possible solution to the admittedly hard job of getting convictions under the Corrupt Practices Act, SB 92 would empower solicitors to seek indictments and trial for election law violations in any county in their district adjoining the one in which the allegation occurs. The judge presiding at the conviction of a public official under the Corrupt Practices Act would be required to remove the offender from office. SB 95 would keep members of county boards of elections from openly campaigning for any candidate in primaries and general elections. Reflecting a possibility mentioned by the Governor in his inaugural address, HB 250 would allow county elections boards to decide whether they want to use voting machines in their counties.

Libraries
On Wednesday several bills affecting libraries were introduced in the House. HB 225 would allow rural areas to establish libraries by popular vote. HB 228 restores the 10¢ top limit on local library taxes, cut to 5¢ in 1945. HB 227 and HB 229 add to the powers of counties and municipalities the authority to construct and maintain libraries and finance these operations by tax levies and bond issues.

Motor Vehicles
The Highway Safety Act, still reeling from three weeks of frontal attack, weathered the fourth round but was on the defensive all the way from the haymaker aimed by SB 100. Not only does this bill propose repeal of the vehicle inspection program but suggests the first concrete substitute — a system prohibiting motorists from obtaining their annual plates without first submitting a certificate from an "experienced automobile mechanic" that he has inspected the car within the preceding 6 months and that it is safe for highway operation. The alternatives now before the General Assembly make modification of the inspection program a sound prediction and repeal a distinct possibility.

Public hearings were held during the week on two matters of great importance to the municipalities of the State, important because they relate to revenue. The Joint Finance Committee heard representatives of the cities and towns request a share of the State franchise tax on utilities and the House Roads Committee heard a very large delegation present

its case for the allocation of 1¢ of the franchise tax to the municipalities. The fate of both requests should soon be determined.

The bill to ban all advertising of alcoholic beverages, HB 12, was reported favorably by the House positions and Grievances Committee

and the apparent sentiment was that the bill would pass. It was referred to the Finance Committee, however, as possibly affecting state revenue,

causing some members of the House to observe that this procedure subjected the bill to greater hazards than seemed warranted.

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