



People & Politics



The Bonusgate scandal in Pennsylvania has now snared 25 current and former House members and aides from both parties. The latest people charged were House Majority Whip and former House Speaker **Bill DeWeese** and former long-time Representative **Stephen Stetler**, who was Governor Ed Rendell's state revenue secretary for the past three years. The two, along with **Sharon Rodavich**, DeWeese's legislative aide, were charged in December and released on \$50,000 bonds. The charges included one count of conflict of interest, four counts of theft, and one count of criminal conspiracy. They carry a sentence of up to 40 years in prison and \$85,000 in fines. The charges were handed down by a grand jury in its probe of political fundraising inside the Capitol from 2001 to 2007. A former House employee, **Kevin Sidella**, testified before the grand jury that he had raised "millions of dollars" for DeWeese when he was a legislative employee.

Montana's longest serving fiscal analyst retired in December after 24 years in the Legislature, 16 as head of the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Division. **Clayton Schenck** is trading in balance sheets for the hiking trails of Glacier National Park. A Vietnam veteran with a master's degree in business administration, Schenck was respected for his "steady hand" and ability to point out the "larger perspective" of issues, according to House Appropriations Chairman **Jon Sesso**. "This has been, no question, a very challenging job and a high stress one," said Schenck, "but I wouldn't have traded it for anything. This has been an incredible honor and a privilege."

A group of New Jersey lawmakers has demanded that MTV cancel the reality show "Jersey Shore," which debuted in November. The New Jersey Italian American Legislative Caucus wrote to Viacom, MTV's parent company, stating the show "promotes ethnic stereotypes of Italian Americans that are offensive and untrue." The letter stated, "Rather than profit off ethnic stereotypes and derogatory myths about Italian Ameri-



PHOTO: SCOTT GRIES/PICTURE GROUP

Mike "The Situation," left, and DJ Pauly D are cast members of MTV's reality show "Jersey Shore," which has upset a group of Italian-American legislators in the state.

cans, MTV and its parent company, Viacom, should do the socially responsible thing and pull the plug on Jersey Shore. Not only is the program wildly offensive, but it diminishes the accomplishments and contributions of Italian Americans in New Jersey and across the nation." The lawmakers have asked advertisers to boycott the show.

John Wilder, an enduring and at times controversial legend in Tennessee politics, died at 88 Jan. 1. He was a towering political figure who served in the Senate for 44 years. He was elected speaker of the Senate in 1971. None of his 77 predecessors as speaker served longer than six years. Wilder smashed that record by holding the post for an astonishing 36 years, making him the longest serving presiding senate officer in modern U.S. history. Under Tennessee's constitution, the speaker is also the lieutenant governor and first in line of succession. During his long career Wilder wanted to make a difference for the state and put the state ahead of the party. His legislative colleagues believed he did. Wilder, who retired in November 2008, died four days after suffering a massive stroke. Wilder was "a Tennessee institution, the very definition of a gentleman legislator," said U.S. Sena-

tor Lamar Alexander, who was a Republican governor during part of Democrat Wilder's tenure.

Republican **David Ralston** is the new speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives. He replaces former Speaker **Glenn Richardson** who resigned the post in November amid a scandal that included an admission of a suicide attempt and accusations by his wife of an affair with a utility lobbyist while he was promoting legislation to benefit the company. Ralston bested Representatives **Larry O'Neal** and **Bill Hembre** in the race for speaker. "He's absolutely the best choice Republicans could make to try to get themselves on the right track," said former Democratic Representative **Tom Bordeaux**, who served with Ralston. Representative **Jan Jones** was selected become speaker pro tem by her GOP colleagues, making her the highest ranking woman in the history of the Georgia General Assembly.

Never before has it been more important for us to put partisanship aside and renew our commitment to putting the people first," said New York Senate Democratic Conference Leader **John Sampson** when he appointed two Republicans to chair major Senate committees—a first in Senate history. Sampson appointed GOP members **George Maziarz** chairman of the Committee on Energy and Telecommunications, and **Tom Morahan** chairman of the Committee on Mental Health and Hygiene. "These are thoughtful and principled ... who can bridge the gap that crippled this body for too long."

President Obama has nominated Oregon Representative **Sara Gelsler** for the National Council on Disability. The youngest woman in the Oregon Legislative Assembly, Gelsler is assistant majority leader and chair of the House Education Committee. The council is an independent federal agency that makes recommendations to Congress and the president on issues affecting the 54 million Americans with disabilities.

Reaching Military and Overseas Voters Earlier

The new Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act requires states to send absentee ballots to overseas voters at least 45 days before the next federal election, beginning with those held on Nov. 2, 2010. It's forcing at least 10 states and the District of Columbia to consider holding their primaries earlier or seek a federally approved waiver.

If a conflict prevents a state from meeting the 45-day deadline, it must apply for a hardship waiver with the U.S. Department of Defense's Federal Voting Assistance Program. The three grounds to qualify for "undue hardship" are:

- ◆ The date of the state primary is too close.
- ◆ A delay occurs in generating ballots because of a legal contest.
- ◆ The state constitution prohibits the state from complying.

Forty-five days before the Nov. 2, 2010,

election is Sept. 18.

Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia had planned to hold primaries on Sept. 14, with Hawaii on Sept. 18, 2010. That doesn't give these states enough time to certify results, conduct recounts, print ballots and still make the 45-day deadline.

New Hampshire and Vermont are already considering changing their primary election dates.

The new federal law also requires each state to designate at least one means of electronic communication—fax or e-mail—to handle voter registration and absentee ballot applications, to provide election and voting information and to send blank ballots overseas.

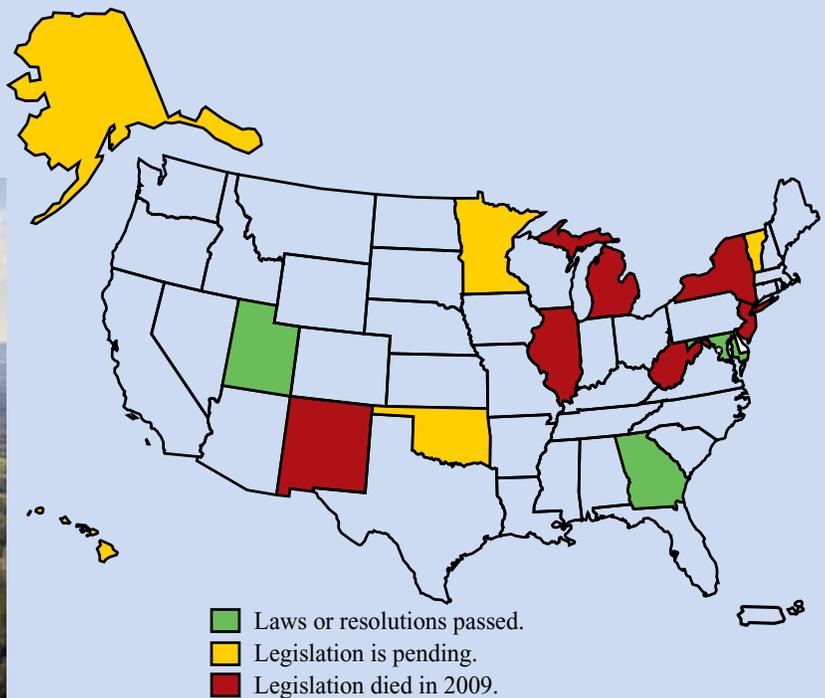
Finally, states may not reject an otherwise valid registration application, absentee ballot



application, voted ballot, or Federal Write-in (emergency) Absentee Ballot because of notarization requirements, paper type, or weight and size measurements.

Nuclear Energy Legislation Explodes

At least 14 states considered legislation last year related to the permitting, building or financing of new nuclear energy generation facilities.



Note: Utah passed a resolution expressing support for nuclear power development but failed to pass a bill modifying the powers of the Public Service Commission.

Source: NCSL, Dec. 2009.

Paid Family Leave Law Delayed

The economic downturn has caused the Washington Legislature to delay implementing a bill passed in 2007 that would have offered up to five weeks of benefits per year for parents to stay at home with a new child.

Funding was to be worked out by a legislative committee before the effective date of Oct. 1, 2009. However, because of current state budget concerns, a bill was passed last year to delay the paid leave law until Oct. 1, 2012.

Congress passed the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act in 1993, which provides most employees with up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year. The leave can be used for the birth or adoption of a child, to care for a seriously ill immediate family member or for an employee's own serious medical illness.

Eleven states and the District of Columbia have since passed their own versions of family leave, in most cases expanding eligibility to include caring for a seriously ill extended family member, such as a step-child, in-law or sibling. California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia enacted family leave laws, similar to the federal law, and all were unpaid leave laws when originally enacted.

In 2004, California passed the first paid family leave law. It offers up to six weeks of paid leave a year to care for a newborn, newly adopted or foster care child, or a seriously ill parent, spouse, domestic partner or child. Benefits provide for a 55 percent wage replacement, up to a maximum of \$882 per week. The paid leave benefit is funded by a payroll tax on employees and allows employees to participate in the state's temporary disability program that provides leave benefits.

New Jersey in 2008 extended its existing temporary disability insurance system to administer paid leave, and, like California, funds the program through an employee payroll tax. The New Jersey Temporary Disability Benefits law provides up to six weeks of paid family leave to covered employees for the birth or adoption of a child or to care for sick family members. New Jersey's benefit rate is two-thirds of a worker's average weekly wage, with a maximum weekly benefit of \$546.

Health Centers Struggling



Safety-net health centers are struggling to keep up with the growing demand for services from America's uninsured, a number that has grown alongside unemployment rates.

Health centers are nonprofit providers of primary and preventive health care that serve as medical homes to a disproportionate number of the nation's low-income and uninsured patients in all 50 states. Annually, health centers serve 20 million patients.

Research shows that health centers improve access to health care, help people manage their chronic diseases and reduce emergency room visits, all of which contribute to total health care system savings. It is estimated that health centers save between \$9.9 billion and \$17.6 billion a year.

About 38 percent of health center patients are uninsured. Uninsured patients increased from 6.5 million in June 2008 to 7.8 million in June 2009 because of the loss of employer-sponsored insurance, strained family finances and other pressures of the economic downturn.

At the same time, states are grappling with nearly unprecedented financial situations that put state appropriations for health centers in jeopardy. Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia report providing state funding to health centers in FY 2010. In an effort to balance their budgets, however, 23 states have decreased funding to health centers in FY 2010. Two states, Idaho and South Dakota, eliminated funding.

Colorado cut funding to health centers and programs that fund centers by \$15 million. "With \$1.5 billion less in revenue, cuts need to be made in almost every program to deal with budget deficits," says Colorado Representative Jim Riesberg. "Despite the importance of health centers and the needs of our own people, cuts had to be made."

Not all states are reducing health center funding, however. Thirteen states increased funding in FY 2010.

The Illinois General Assembly appropriated \$50 million for the construction and renovation of health centers. "Community health centers have a responsibility to meet the increased needs of their communities ... the Community Health Center Construction Program gets them one step closer to meeting those needs," says Jill Hayden, the director of state government affairs at the Illinois Primary Care Association.

Health centers will have to continue to find ways to address the growing needs, as FY 2011 state budget projections are not looking any more promising.