



**Line Ruptures**  
Mid-Ohio Valley crews busy repairing broken water lines  
**Region, 1B**

**High School Basketball**  
Gilmer County girls enjoying the process of trying to repeat  
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# The Parkersburg News and Sentinel

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## Parkersburg City Council members outline priorities for upcoming fiscal year

By **EVAN BEVINS**  
City Editor

**PARKERSBURG** — Body or dash cameras for police, loosening restrictions on the public forum and all city workers making at least \$15 an hour were among the priorities pitched by members of Parkersburg City Council during a recent Committee of the Whole meeting.

Council President Andrew Borkowski asked the members ahead of the meeting to focus on specific

areas regarding priorities for the upcoming fiscal year 2026-27 budget: public safety, parks and recreation, community development, stormwater and employees' cost of living.

The administration plans to present the proposed budget to council on Feb. 24.

Council Vice President Sharon Kuhl pitched raising the salaries for the lowest paid workers to \$15 an hour, according to the council clerk's recording of the Jan. 26 meeting attended by eight of nine council mem-



Borkowski



Kuhl



Rexroad



Tuck

bers and Mayor Tom Joyce. Councilman Mike Reynolds was absent.

Kuhl said there has been talk of eventually raising the state or federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

"Why can't we be the first to do that?" she said. "I just

think that it's time."

Kuhl said she had not requested numbers from the Finance Department on how much the move would cost and acknowledged it may not be feasible to do it all in one year. But she said that to help offset the

costs she would not support a cost-of-living increase for the city's department heads in the upcoming fiscal year, although she praised the work they do.

"Let's get the employees up where they need to be," she said.

Kuhl acknowledged that would likely require other adjustments, something Joyce addressed later in the meeting.

"It's very noble work to say ... our lowest paid people are going to be making \$15 an hour," Joyce

said. "You've got all kinds of folks that will become immediately devalued (when those rates go up). That's just the way it is."

Councilman Chris Rexroad said the raises could be looked at as an investment in the workforce and cited staffing issues in the Sanitation Department that prompted the city to consider and council to ultimately vote on contracting out trash service to Waste Management.

■ **SEE COUNCIL, PAGE 8A**

### WEST VIRGINIA GOVERNMENT

# Party Lines

## Bill meddling with city elections stalls following pushback

By **STEVEN ALLEN ADAMS**  
Staff Reporter

**CHARLESTON** — A bill that would require cities and towns in West Virginia to switch from nonpartisan municipal elections and require candidates be identified by political party affiliation appears to be stalled, with concerns raised about big government interference in local control.

House Bill 4080, on markup and discussion phase, was pulled from Wednesday's House Judiciary Committee agenda. The bill was recommended for passage last week by the House Legal Services Subcommittee.

HB 4080 would require cities and towns to eliminate their nonpartisan races for mayor and city council by 2032, requiring candidates to be identified on the ballot by party affiliation, such as Republican, Democrat, Mountain Party, Libertarian, etc.

HB 4080 aligns with the requirements of Senate Bill 50 passed by the Legislature last year, which requires municipalities to move their elections to coincide with statewide primary or general election days by 2032. HB 4080 also prohibits the practice of a city council appointing a mayor from among its members, mandating a direct, popular vote for the office of mayor in all municipalities.



Photo Courtesy/WV Legislative Photography

During a House Judiciary Committee meeting earlier this week, House Minority Whip Shawn Fluharty said House Bill 4080 was an attempt by some Republican lawmakers to control municipalities from Charleston using the levers of big government.

The lead sponsor, Del. Jimmy Willis, explained his rationale for the bill during a hearing on the bill held Tuesday by the House Judiciary Committee.

"I guess you would say my intent for the bill, just the same as our names would be now with

it beside the name — whether it's Republican, Democrat, Mountain Party, Libertarian Party, and I can't remember any other parties — that would be listed ... that would suffice for what the bill is trying to do," Willis said. "It wouldn't change

what their system of government would be, whether it be strong mayor or weak mayor, but it would change the mayor from being elected by the city council to elected by the people."

■ **SEE ELECTIONS, PAGE 8A**

## Former W.Va. senate president Kessler joins U.S. Senate race

By **STEVEN ALLEN ADAMS**  
Staff Reporter

**CHARLESTON** — Jeff Kessler, a former long-time state senator and former president of the West Virginia Senate, has a history of public service to the Northern Panhandle and the state.

After taking a break from public service, Kessler wants to represent West Virginia in the U.S. Senate.

Kessler is the latest Democratic candidate to announce for the May primary for the U.S. Senate currently held by U.S. Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.



Kessler

Kessler traveled to the West Virginia Secretary of State's Office in the State Capitol Building in Charleston on Friday to file his statement of candidacy one day before the Saturday midnight deadline to file.

"This race is about one simple question: Do we keep sending someone to Washington who sells us out, or do we finally elect a senator who will fight like hell for West Virginia," Kessler said in a statement Friday. "I've stood up to powerful interests my entire career. I'm ready to take that fight to the U.S. Senate - and I will never stop fighting for West Virginia"

Kessler, a native of Glen Dale in Marshall County, served in the West Virginia Senate for 20 years, representing the 2nd senatorial District. He was appointed to the state Senate in 1997 and won election in 1998. Kessler later served as the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

When former senate president Earl Ray Tomblin became acting governor in 2010 after former governor Joe Manchin won a special election for the U.S. Senate seat held by the late Robert C. Byrd, Kessler was chosen as acting senate president.

Kessler was also a candidate for governor in the 2011 Democratic primary special election, but following Tomblin's special election win for governor, Kessler became the 50th senate president and the final Democratic senate president prior to the Republicans taking the majority in the Legislature in 2015.

■ **SEE KESSLER, PAGE 6A**

## Vienna, Williamstown mayors react to elections legislative proposal

By **GWEN SOUR**  
Staff Reporter

**VIENNA** — Vienna Mayor Chad Emrick said Vienna currently operates as a nonpartisan community and that structure shapes how local elections and governance function.

"Vienna functions as a nonpartisan community, in a sense, when it comes to the election of the mayor and the council," Emrick said.

He said the nonpartisan format "allows the focus to be on the candidate and what the candidate can specifically do for the city itself," rather than on broader party priorities.

Emrick said removing party labels helps prevent national or state-level political agendas from overshadowing local con-



Emrick



Jordan

cerns. A nonpartisan system, he said, allows city leaders to "focus on the city itself without getting all that mixed in."

Emrick said he values representing all residents regardless of political affiliation.

"The people in Vienna — their political affiliation can be Republican, Democrat, Indepen-

dent, whatever," he said. "As the mayor, I represent each and every one of them independently."

Emrick said he is still reviewing the bill and remains unsure why the legislation is being pushed. He described House Bill 4080 as "a unique bill" and said it is unclear how it would affect Vienna if it were to move forward.

■ **SEE MAYORS, PAGE 8A**

**"The people in Vienna — their political affiliation can be Republican, Democrat, Independent, whatever. As the mayor, I represent each and every one of them independently."**  
**Vienna Mayor Chad Emrick**

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<b>The Parkersburg News and Sentinel</b> P.O. Box 1787 Parkersburg, WV 26102-1787 304-485-1891	<b>Israel opening Gaza's border crossing with Egypt</b>  Israel said Friday that it will reopen the pedestrian border crossing between the Gaza Strip and Egypt over the weekend, marking an important step forward for U.S. President Donald Trump's Gaza ceasefire plan. <b>Details, Page 2A</b>	<b>Panama Canal will keep operating despite ruling</b>  Panama's president moved to assure the public on Friday that critical ports at both ends of the Panama Canal will continue to operate without interruption. <b>Details, Page 5C</b>	Thank you, <b>Rose Marie Morgan of Vienna</b> for being a <i>News and Sentinel</i> subscriber.
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