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Voters to decide primary races

Polls are open 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. today

By Riley McCoy
THE REGISTER-HERALD

BECKLEY — Raleigh County voters will choose legislative nominees Tuesday in

several West Virginia Senate and House of Delegates primary races.

The May 12 primary election includes Republican contests in Senate District 9 and several House of Delegates districts, along with a Democratic primary in House District 44. Raleigh County voters may fall into House districts 41-45, meaning not every legislative race will ap-

pear on every ballot. Other candidates face no primary challengers but will still appear on party ballots.

Winners of each partisan race will advance as their party's nominees for the Nov. 3 general election.

Polls will be open from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Voters can confirm their assigned polling place and political districts through the secre-

tary of state's voter lookup tool. Raleigh County's online voting map also provides precinct and delegate district information by address.

In the U.S. Senate race, Democrats Rachel Fetty Anderson, Thornton Cooper, Jeffrey V. Kessler, Rio Phillips and Zachary Shrewsbury are seeking their party's nomination.

On the Republican ballot, incumbent Shelley Moore Capito faces Alexander Gaaserud, Bryan McKinney, Janet McNulty, David Purkey and Tom Willis. The winner of the Senate race in November will serve a six-year term.

West Virginia has two seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Raleigh County is part of
VOTERS » 2A



Riley McCoy/The Register-Herald

Gov. Patrick Morrisey speaks to attendees Monday in Pax, where speakers discussed legislative cooperation, economic development and voter turnout ahead of Tuesday's primary election.

Governor makes last-minute stop in Pax ahead of primary

By Riley McCoy
THE REGISTER-HERALD

PAX — Gov. Patrick Morrisey's Monday stop in Pax brought his statewide push in Republican legislative primaries to Raleigh County one day before the Primary Election.

Morrisey is not on Tuesday's ballot but he has publicly backed candidates in

several Republican state races and the results could shape how the GOP-controlled legislature works with his administration. His Pax appearance came during the final stretch of a primary season shaped by fights over legislative direction and economic investment.

Sen. Brian Helton, R-Fayette, said local lawmakers

have worked together on economic-development funding for Raleigh and Wyoming counties, including money for recovery programs, fire departments, parks and municipal projects.

"That's why we need to be together," Helton said. "Because we put our local economic development money together."

Morrisey framed that kind of legislative cooperation around his administration's economic-development goals.

"Over the past six months, we have made over \$12.8 billion in new private sector economic development announcements, with over 12,000 projected jobs forthcoming," Morrisey said.

STOP » 2A

Report: W.Va. among states where hospitals charge commercial insurance plans the most

By Lori Kersey
WEST VIRGINIA WATCH

CHARLESTON — West Virginia hospitals charge commercial insurance prices that are among the highest in the United States, according to a report released Thursday.

According to the report, West Virginia hospitals charged on average prices that are 337% of the rate that Medicare charges for the same services. Only two states — Florida and South Carolina — have higher prices.

The report, from health care consumer advocacy organization Families USA,

analyzed financial data and commercial insurance prices for more than 2,800 hospitals in 49 states and Washington, D.C., from 2018 to 2023 and came up with each state's weighted average commercial price.

"This report adds to decades of literature that detail how big hospital chains have become big business in America," Families USA director Anthony Wright told reporters during a virtual briefing Wednesday. "The health systems incentives for corporate health systems are to get bigger, not to get better. As a result, healthcare consumers, primarily the more than

182 million with commercial coverage, are paying the price — around three times what Medicare pays for the same set of services."

Ellen Allen, executive director of West Virginians for Affordable Health Care, said that consolidation — particularly by West Virginia's two largest healthcare systems — contributes to the high prices.

"We've had this great consolidation over the last decade, primarily by WVU Health Systems and Vandalia Health, and that has driven up costs because there's fewer choices," Allen said during the brief-

ing. "And it's made rural healthcare much more expensive and inaccessible."

The report says West Virginia hospitals had an average annual net income of more than \$14.1 million per hospital for 2018 through 2023.

West Virginia is one of the most consolidated states when it comes to healthcare systems, Alicia Camaliche, senior policy analyst for Families USA and one of the authors of the study, told reporters.

Five of the largest health care systems in the state control 89% of hospital care delivered, and three of those systems control 84%

HOSPITALS » 3A

Morrisey: Uphold vaccine ruling

Raleigh County case appealed to W.Va. Supreme Court

By Lori Kersey
WEST VIRGINIA WATCH

CHARLESTON — West Virginia Gov. Patrick Morrisey has asked the state's highest court to affirm a Raleigh County Circuit Court ruling that found that — without religious exemptions — the state's school vaccine policy violates a 2023 religious freedom law.

West Virginia Attorney General J.B. McCuskey filed an amicus brief on Morrisey's behalf in the state Supreme Court case Board of Education v. Guzman. The school board is appealing Judge Michael Froble's November ruling that schools must allow children to attend school with a religious exemption to the vaccine requirements.

"West Virginia law protects religious freedom, and that law must be followed," Morrisey said in a statement Monday. "Parents should not be forced to choose between their sincere religious beliefs and their child's right to an education. The Equal Protection for Religion Act is clear, and my administration will continue fighting to ensure that religious liberty is respected across state government."

States generally require school children be vaccinated against a number of infectious diseases, like measles, polio and chickenpox. West Virginia is one of only a handful of states with laws that do not allow families to opt out of vaccinations because of philosophical or religious objections to the shots.

Morrisey issued an executive order his first day in office requiring the state to allow religious exemptions. The order is based on the 2023 Equal Protection for Religion Act. The governor did not rescind the order, even after lawmakers rejected a bill in the 2025 legislative session that would have codified the religious exemptions. The state school board has directed county boards not to allow religious exemptions.

Two Raleigh County families filed a lawsuit against the state and county school boards. Froble ruled in the families' favor.

The school board formally appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court in March.

In the amicus brief, the governor argues that the EPRA was

VACCINE » 2A

