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SAFETY

MCHD revamping food service inspection process

BY BEN CONLEY

BConley@DominionPost.com

If the purpose of the inspection is to prevent food-borne illness, the focus of the inspection should be on the handling and

preparation of food.

That, in a nutshell, sums up the new risk-based inspection system for food service establishments being implemented by the Monongalia County Health Department.

“Right now when we go into a facility, we’re concentrating on everything – floors, walls, ceilings,” MCHD Sanitarian Jennifer Costolo-Michael said. “The risk-based inspection approach is seen widely across the nation

right now. It’s more geared toward looking at the five risk factors identified by the CDC that are most frequently identified as contributing to food-borne illness or injury.”

The MCHD will begin the transition internally in July by implementing the new inspection and interview procedure.

Then, come Jan. 1, 2024, all permitted food and retail establishments in the county will be placed in one of three

SEE SERVICE, A-2

STATE

Many question governor’s plans for ARPA funds

BY BRAD MCELHINNY

WVMetroNews.com

CHARLESTON — Gov. Jim Justice submitted a bill meant to transfer \$678 million in federal American Rescue Plan dollars to state development funds.

Not everybody thinks that’s a great idea.

House Bill 2883 calls for \$500 million to be transferred to the state Economic Development Authority, a \$177 million transfer to the state Water Development Authority and another \$1 million to be transferred to Marshall University.

Twenty-one people spoke against the transfer during a public hearing at the state Capitol on Thursday. All said there are more urgent uses for the money, and several contended such a transfer would be against the spirit and the letter of the federal COVID relief funding.

“Frankly, I believe the approach in today’s bill, 2883, is placing a pretty risky \$500 million roulette wheel bet with federal funds,” said attorney Bruce Perrone at the public hearing at the state Capitol about the bill and making specific reference the money that would be transferred to the EDA.

“If the Department of Treasury does not accept that that is a permissible use, handing \$500 million to the economic development authority, then the State of West Virginia, all of our taxpayers, will be on the hook for every dollar of that.”

Guidance from U.S. Department of Treasury questions the use of the federal relief funds for economic development.

“Generally, no,” Treasury wrote. “General economic development — activities that do not respond to negative economic impacts of the pandemic but rather seek to more generally enhance the jurisdiction’s business climate — would generally not be eligible under this eligible use category.”

Many of the speakers at the Capitol contended the federal money should be directed elsewhere.

One was state Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt, a Republican.

SEE FUNDS, A-4

Phil’s forecast: More winter



AP file photo

Groundhog Club handler A.J. Dereume holds Punxsutawney Phil, the weather prognosticating groundhog, during the 136th celebration of Groundhog Day on Gobbler’s Knob in Punxsutawney, Pa., Feb. 2, 2022. On Thursday, Feb. 2, 2023, people will once again gather at Gobbler’s Knob as members of Punxsutawney Phil’s “inner circle” summon him from his tree stump at dawn to learn if he has seen his shadow. According to folklore, if he sees his shadow there will be six more weeks of winter. If he does not, spring comes early.

Don’t like it? Check out these rodents instead

Associated Press

He gets most of the PR, at least nationally, but Punxsutawney Phil isn’t the only groundhog to purport to predict the weather. Not hardly.

From Staten Island Chuck in New York City to Jimmy the Groundhog in Wisconsin, there are a lot of them. And their predictions, which of course is a generous term, can be all over the map just as they are. And please do remember Charlotte, a groundhog who died in 2014 a week after the New York City mayor dropped her during festivities.

Rodents predicting weather trends. Why? Just as fair a Groundhog Day question, though, is this: Why not? And more importantly, why should Punxsutawney Phil always get to, well, hog the press?

The spring-heralding (or spring-delaying) small animal has taken firm root in some swaths of American culture. And while Phil and his Pennsylvania ilk are the most celebrated, there is an broad selection of other critters who have felt the need (or, at least, their handlers have) to put reputations on the line to “predict” meteorology in the dead of winter. Here we offer just a few.

Do take aboard a disclaimer, though. This is merely a smattering of groundhogery, offered

up in no particular order. Please don’t be offended if your animal isn’t included. Maybe next year.

■ Jimmy the Groundhog, Wisconsin: Caused controversy in 2015 after biting the mayor of Sun Prairie on the ear.

■ Milltown Mel, New Jersey: Event got caught up in problems with state law this year after the previous prognosticator expired.

■ Woody the Woodchuck, Michigan: Emerged from a tiny green door in a small, human-made tree stump on Thursday.

■ Woodstock Willie, Illinois. Saw his shadow Thursday. Site of where the best-ever PR around the day — the 1993 movie “Groundhog Day” — was filmed.

■ Octoraro Orphie, Pennsylvania: Predicts from a home base in Quarryville in Lancaster County, Pa. Because of Pennsylvania Dutch folklore, which helped give birth to the Groundhog Day tradition, that region has several on the job, including Mount Joy Minnie and Dover Doug.

■ Staten Island Chuck, New York: Longtime predictor in the New York City borough. This year, the current mayor didn’t attend.

■ Buckeye Chuck, Ohio: Another Chuck, this one further inland. This year, according to reports, the Chuck used publicly was a stuffed one after an animal-rights group objected to how a live one had been treated.

■ Gen. Beauregard Lee, Georgia: Claims high accuracy rate. Contradicted Phil this year.

NATION

Last abortion clinic in W.Va. files federal suit

BY BRAD MCELHINNY

WVMetroNews.com

Women’s Health Center of West Virginia, which had been the state’s last abortion clinic, has filed a federal lawsuit over the ban passed last fall.

The plaintiffs are asking the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia to issue an injunction to block the entire ban while the full case is considered by the court. The suit contends West Virginia’s law is irrational and unconstitutional.

“Every person deserves to access the critical care they need, but this law pushes essential abortion care out of reach,” said Katie Quiñonez, Women’s Health Center of West Virginia executive director.

“With each day this ban remains in effect, we are forced to turn patients away because politicians took away their power to make the best medical decisions for themselves during pregnancy.”

West Virginia lawmakers took up the debate after the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the landmark Roe vs. Wade federal guarantee of abortion and sent policy decisions back to states.

The bill passed by lawmakers last September would not allow for abortion at any time during pregnancy, except for in some limited circumstances. In recent years, West Virginia law had allowed abortion up to 20 weeks of gestation.

The new law allows exceptions for a nonmedically viable fetus, an ectopic pregnancy, which is when a fertilized egg implants and grows outside the main cavity of the uterus, or a medical emergency. There are also narrow exceptions for cases of rape or incest.

If a licensed medical provider performs or induces an abortion, the law calls for the provider to file a report within 15 days with the commissioner of the Bureau of Public Health.

The version that passed would put the licenses of medical providers at risk if the boards that oversee their professions

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WORLD

U.S. to send Ukraine longer-range bombs in latest turnaround

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After months of agonizing, the U.S. has agreed to send longer-range bombs to Ukraine as it prepares to launch a spring offensive to retake territory Russia captured last year, U.S. officials said Thursday, confirming that the new weapons will have roughly double the range of any

other offensive weapon provided by America.

The U.S. will provide ground-launched small diameter bombs as part of a \$2.17 billion aid package it is expected to announce Friday, several U.S. officials said. The package also for the first time includes equipment to connect all the different air defense systems Western

allies have rushed to the battlefield and integrate them into Ukraine's own air defenses, to help it better defend against Russia's missile attacks.

For months, U.S. officials have hesitated to send longer-range systems to Ukraine out of concern that they would be used to target inside Russia, escalating the

conflict and drawing the U.S. deeper in. The longer-range bombs are the latest advanced system, such as Abrams tanks and the Patriot missile defense system, that the U.S. has eventually agreed to provide Ukraine after initially saying no. U.S. officials, though, have continued to reject Ukraine's requests for fighter jets.

CLINIC

FROM PAGE A-1

conclude that they've gone beyond the boundaries of the law. People who aren't licensed to provide abortions could still face criminal penalties if they attempt the procedure.

The lawsuit was filed against officers of the West Virginia Board of Medicine because they have the capacity to sign complaints against physicians who perform abortions.

The suit focuses on elements of West Virginia's law specifying that abor-

tions that are performed must be by a licensed medical provider who has hospital privileges.

"HB 302's requirement that all procedural abortions be provided in a hospital is unheard of in modern medicine," the lawsuit states.

And, "likewise, HB 302's requirement that any physician who provides abortion care have hospital privileges at a West Virginia hospital is patently illogical."

The lawsuit contends Women's Health Center of West Virginia and the doctor working there can no longer provide abor-

tions because of the restrictions.

"For the reasons set forth above, HB 302's Care Restrictions are out of touch with modern medicine, lack any rational justification, and are not logically connected to any legitimate government interest and are therefore unconstitutional," the lawsuit states.

As the lawsuit notes, West Virginia's law has a severability clause stating that if any provision is found to be unconstitutional then the entire law is deemed to be unconstitutional and West Vir-

ginia's older laws would return to being in effect.

Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, a Republican, said his office is ready to defend the new law.

"We are ready to defend West Virginia's abortion law to the fullest. This law reflects the will of the majority of the citizens of the state as relayed by their elected representatives in the State Legislature," Morrisey stated.

"I will stand strong for the life of the unborn and will not relent in our defense of this clearly constitutional law."

SERVICE

FROM PAGE A-1

risk categories.

Low risk will receive one inspection per year and include the county schools, coffee shops, hot spots and other facilities where no food is prepared from raw.

Medium risk will receive two inspections per year and will include retail stores with deli counters, fast food restaurants, convenience stores with kitchens and facilities that would normally be low risk but have a poor inspection history.

High risk will receive three inspections annually and include all full-service sit down restaurants, hospitals, nursing homes, child care facilities, ethnic facilities, facilities with special processing (like reduced oxygen packaging) or preparation (like sushi or smoking/curing). Medium risk facilities with a poor inspection record will also start out in this category.

While any physical issues within a facility will also be noted by the inspector, Costolo-Michael said more emphasis will be placed on speaking with owners and staff about things like handling procedures, holding/cooking temperatures, food sources and sanitation.

"The goal is to build your program, make it strong and prevent food-borne illnesses, and spend your time in these facilities where it's needed. Instead of going in and concentrating on a chipped floor tile and those kind of things that really aren't going to

contribute to a food-borne illness," she said.

County Health Officer Lee Smith said the risk-based inspection system will take the health department from counting garbage can lids to actually addressing risks within local food establishments.

He noted this change has been years in the making.

"We're now at the verge of instituting this as a policy, which will put us on a national footing. This is the way it's being done," he said. "We need to get out of this 1950s health department mentality and move to this next level."

Food and retail establishments — including food trucks, vending machines, farmer's markets and temporary food establishments — are among the 1,100 facilities regularly inspected by MCHD Environmental Health Services.

MCHD Environmental Health Services is also in charge of providing food handler training, and the fees for some of those services are going up.

During its most recent regular meeting, the county's board of health approved increases for in-person food manager class and testing (from \$125 to \$150); food manager test only (from \$50 to \$100); off-site food handler presentations (from \$175 to \$200) and off-site food handler cards (from \$10 to \$20 for one or two-year cards).

Environmental Health Program Manager Todd Powroznik said the fees were last adjusted in 2016.

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