

# Wheeler: Senate approves bill to stabilize electric rates and improve fuel cost reviews

## Special to Appalachian Newspapers

The Kentucky Senate has passed legislation sponsored by Sen. Phillip Wheeler, R-Pikeville, which, according to a statement, is designed to promote greater stability in electric rates and strengthen oversight of utility fuel costs.

Senate Bill 172, the statement said, would update Kentucky law governing electric utility fuel adjustment clauses, which allow utilities to recover fuel costs through customer rates. The bill will provide the

Kentucky Public Service Commission with additional flexibility to extend the recovery period for fuel adjustment costs when requested by a utility, helping reduce sharp month-to-month swings in electric bills and encouraging greater rate stability for customers, the statement said.

The legislation also clarifies how fuel costs should be evaluated during commission reviews of fuel adjustment clauses. For fuel procurement contracts entered into on or after July 1, 2021, the commission is required to assess the reasonable-

ness of fuel costs and competing bids based on the cost of fuel net of any coal severance tax imposed by another jurisdiction.

The statement said this ensures a clearer, more accurate comparison of fuel options when regulators review utility purchasing decisions.

"Kentucky families and businesses deserve predictability when it comes to their utility bills," Wheeler said. "This bill gives regulators tools to reduce unnecessary volatility while ensuring fuel costs are reviewed in a fair and transparent way. It's about stability, accountabil-

ity and commonsense oversight. This is especially true for families on a fixed income who cannot afford an additional \$50 to \$80 dollars on their monthly bill."

Wheeler cautioned that the bill is not a silver bullet that would immediately solve the high energy prices facing Kentucky consumers.

"The challenge that the Kentucky legislature faces is that the current energy prices are the result of a series of bad energy policies passed in Washington during the Obama and Biden administrations," Wheel-

er said. "By taking coal off the table as a source of reliable base-load energy, they have left Kentucky ratepayers at the mercy of more volatile natural gas markets. The only way to return to cheap energy prices is for Congress to work with the president to adopt an 'all of the above' energy strategy that includes fossil fuels, nuclear and renewables to provide maximum flexibility for power generation."

SB 172 now heads to the Kentucky House of Representatives for consideration.

# Several indicted by Pike grand jury

## A News-Express Staff Report

A Pike County grand jury indicted 24 people after returning 26 felony and two misdemeanor true bills after convening on Feb. 11. Of those true bills, 10 were for drug trafficking charges.

Those indicted included:

- Erica R. Bartley, 45, Ky. 80, Elkhorn City; first-degree bail jumping.
- Tyler Begley, 31, Feisty; second-degree fleeing or evading police, menacing, resisting arrest and alcohol intoxication.
- Rose Booten, 43, Riverview Drive, Pikeville; first-degree possession of a controlled substance.
- Joseph Bryant, 50, Road Fork, Pikeville; first-degree possession of a controlled substance, DUI (second offense), possession of marijuana and a traffic violation.
- Randall L. Bryant, 60, Dry Fork of Shelbiana,

Shelbiana; first-degree possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of marijuana and public intoxication.

- Matthew Cook, 44, Ky. 194 East, Phelps; third-degree burglary and theft.
- Herbert Courtney, 52, Poor Bottom Road, Elkhorn City; first-degree criminal mischief and first-degree persistent felony offender.
- Devin Gearles, 31, KBC Mine Road, Phelps; second-degree wanton endangerment.
- Travis Holloway, 39, Lucy Branch, Shelbiana; three counts of first-degree bail jumping on three separate indictments.
- Whitney Hurley, 36, Old Shoe Hollow, Freeburn; first-degree bail jumping on three separate indictments.
- Kevin Johnson, 60, East 55th Street, Cleveland, Ohio; first-degree fleeing or evading police, tampering with physical evidence, DUI, possession

of marijuana, possession of drug paraphernalia and traffic violations.

- Johnathan King, 53, Mays Branch, Pikeville, tampering with physical evidence and second-degree possession of a controlled substance.
- Brittany McClanahan, 32, Smith Village Court, Richmond; two counts of first-degree possession of a controlled substance.
- Nathan Newsome, 42, U.S. 23 South, Pikeville; first-degree trafficking in a controlled and first-degree persistent felony offender.
- Adam Pierce, 40, South Johnson Bottom Road, Freeburn; second-degree fleeing or evading police; first-degree possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and traffic violations.
- Jared R. Datliff, 33, Venters Lane, Pikeville; first-degree fleeing or evading police; second-degree persistent felony offender and traffic viola-

tions.

- Mark Anthony Smith, 45, Sycamore Road, Ashcamp; first-degree trafficking in a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, DUI (third offense), possession of marijuana, second-degree persistent felony offender and traffic violations.
- Robert Smith, 50, Motley Road, Feds Creek; second-degree fleeing or evading police and a traffic violation.
- Oliver Boyd Spears, 18, Rainbow Lane, Pikeville; first-degree possession of a controlled substance.
- Kayla Staton, 39,

Mossy Bottom First Street, Pikeville; fourth-degree assault and resisting arrest.

- Johnny Stewart, 58, East Shelbiana Road, Pikeville; first-degree promoting contraband; second-degree possession of a controlled substance and prescription drug not in proper container.
- Steve Tackett, 53, Brushy Fork, Jenkins; possession of a firearm (handgun) by a convicted felon, resisting arrest and first-degree persistent felony offender.
- Donna Renee Walker, 58, Bent Mountain Road, Sidney; DUI, first-degree possession of

a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia, first-degree persistent felony offender and traffic violations.

• Darla Yates, Zebulon Highway, 37, Pikeville; third-degree assault (two counts), resisting arrest, menacing and second-degree disorderly conduct.

*Editor's note: An indictment is not an assertion of guilt; it is a finding by a grand jury that there exists enough evidence to formally charge an individual with a crime. All individuals listed are considered innocent until proven guilty.*

## LANDFILL

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widespread social media controversy.

"They (various Facebook and TikTok content creators) have never done anything in the community," he continued. "They are just trying to get clicks. You have other people who hold themselves as energy experts. They have never called me to ask for information about what is going on."

With the RFP, Jones said, the county solicited proposals from one or more companies. USA Waste Management was the only company that responded.

"When that proposal came back, we voted to accept it in open court," he said. "I was authorized to negotiate a host agreement."

He said the host agreement was necessary to allow the company to begin the work on an administrative permit. Jones added that it will take several years for the company to get a permit, and then it would have to be approved by the fiscal court.

Jones said the current fiscal court and the one that takes over at the first

of the year have three options in dealing with the landfill issue:

- Significantly raise solid waste fees;
- Close the current landfill and haul garbage to another landfill; and
- Explore the possibility of a privately owned landfill.

He said previous court administrations were supposed to have created a fund for the expansion and/or closure of the current landfill, which was not done. He added that, when he took office, the Pike County Solid Waste Department was in significant financial trouble with dilapidated equipment and the landfill had been subsidized by coal severance taxes.

An emergency expansion of the current landfill granted by state agencies because of the increased need for disposed of waste materials generated by the February 2025 flood is estimated to have a lifespan of six to seven years, Jones said.

Other factors Jones cited in reference to the solid waste issues in Pike County are that the costs of everything have risen drastically since the COVID-19 pandemic and

that Pike County's population continues to decline, thereby making it more expensive to operate a landfill.

The landfill issue has become volatile over the past few weeks, including a Facebook post — which was subsequently taken down — threatening to burn Commissioner Clinard "Bubby" Adkins' house.

Jones and the members of the fiscal court said they would not do anything to hurt the people of Pike County. They said a private landfill could be an economic development opportunity employing construction workers and permanent on-site employees.

He also addressed the concerns of solid waste being brought in from outside Pike County to the current landfill.

"Our landfill is permitted to serve 16 counties and three states," Jones said. "What makes our garbage better than anybody else's garbage? If at some point, our landfill closes, you had better hope that the future court can negotiate for somebody else to take our garbage."

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