

PEIA,  
union  
differ  
on plan

By Jennifer Bundy  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gov. Cecil Underwood's latest suggestion to improve the Public Employees Insurance Agency's financial condition would require new hires to pay more for health insurance.

Although Underwood, who announced the plan during his Jan. 12 State of the State address, has yet to introduce the legislation, sides are already being drawn.

Teachers union officials are wary and the chairmen of the House and Senate finance committees and the PEIA director say the plan looks good.

*The insurance program is expected to have a \$162 million deficit by 2004 if nothing is done.*

PEIA, which covers 211,000 state and local government employees, teachers and even legislators, has been a legislative problem for more than a decade because of spiraling medical costs, particularly in the area of prescription drugs. The program is expected to have a \$162 million deficit by 2004 if nothing is done.

Besides the program for new hires, Underwood is asking for another \$21 million for PEIA expenses for the fiscal year starting July 1. Legislators say that will be enough to prevent premium increases next year. The PEIA finance board plans to increase employee premiums incrementally for several years after that. Deductibles and co-payments were raised last year.

The new-hire proposal "is a very good way of having some immediate impact and long-term impact," said PEIA Director Robert Ayers.

New hires could still be part of the same insurance pool yet pay more for their insurance and perhaps get fewer costly benefits, Ayers said.

The state now generally pays 90 percent of the premium while employees pay 10 percent. A legislative consultant recommended increasing employee premiums to 20 percent.

"If you change the benefit design effective July 1, while it may not be a huge savings, there is immediate savings for each employee hired after that," Ayers said.

West Virginia Education Association officials are not enthusiastic.

With state teacher salaries 39th in the nation and one-third of the

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Double Header

The Justice twins barbered their way through school, war and low coal



From flattops to facials, Riley (left) and Rush Justice have brought big-city barbering trends to McDowell County for almost 52 years.

Photographs by F. Brian Ferguson  
Story by Tara Tuckwiller  
SUNDAY GAZETTE-MAIL

**W**AR — Spencer Howard eased himself into one of the old wooden-backed theater seats along the wall of the Justice Twins Barber Shop. He sat right under the wrinkled dot-matrix printout that advertises, "Haircuts \$5."

Rush Justice glanced up from his flashing scissors, which were clipping a young man's flattop with precision.

"How much are they?" Rush asked. Howard knew he was talking about haircuts down in Florida, where Howard lives now.

"Eight dollars," he replied, and watched with satisfaction as Rush's mouth formed into a surprised "O."

"And a tip," Howard added, watching Rush's eyebrows shoot up toward his wavy white pompadour. "They expect a dollar tip."

Rush and Riley Justice stopped raising prices in their barbershop several years back. They don't need the money, they say. They've got all their equipment — barber chairs, straight razors, electric shaving cream warmer. They've got all the work clothes they need, clothes as identical as they were 51 years ago when the twins left the coal mines and World War II behind to open their first McDowell County barbershop.

"Mother made us some of these shirts before she died," said Riley, whose gingham shirt is snuff-colored. Rush's is pristine black-and-white. "We don't call each other or anything. Sometimes, we just show up dressed alike."

Riley buzzed an electric clipper over his customer's white hair. Then he slapped his razor against a leather strop. Like a mirror image, first Riley, then Rush dispensed some shaving cream out of the electric warmer onto the backs of their fingers. First Riley, then Rush smoothed cream over their customer's neck and sideburns, then steadied the men's heads with gentle fingers as they plied the sharp blades.

As they worked, they reminisced with Howard. A neighbor of Homer Hickam Sr., the father of the Coalwood

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Occasionally, Riley gets a customer who wants the old-time straight-razor shave.

You can have your  
plate and eat it. too

**T**WO days after it was announced to the Legislature that West Virginia is poised to eclipse Mississippi as the state with the nation's worst per capita income rate, the Legislature responded decisively — by initiating a debate on whether or not the opossum should be featured on the next series of non-game wildlife license plates.

Apparently, there was some concern that selling a series of opossum plates would cause image problems for the state, in the same way that a bill allowing the consumption of road-killed game animals did after a previous Legislature enacted it several years ago. The way I look at it, if you've officially become the poorest state in the union, your positive image is pretty well shot, and you needn't worry about how showcasing the opossum will play in Poughkeepsie.

But if we're going to have a new series of non-game wildlife license plates featuring popular road-kill species — a Macadam's Family of the animal kingdom — why not at least have them tout their gourmet possibilities? Just for instance, how about:

▲ Groundhogs: Pigs That Whistle, Without the Gristle. Cruise the Shoulder for the Taste



RICK STEELHAMMER

That's Bolder. Or, Make Mine Median Rare.

▲ Black snakes: You Gotta Crawl Before We Can Wok. Flat-Out Flavorful. Or, Less Waist, More Taste.

▲ Raccoons: You Can Mask the Mammal, but You Can't Mask Great Taste. Here's Lookin' at You, Skid! Or, Takes a Lickin', Tastes Like Chicken.

▲ Frogs: The Taste Worth Croaking For. The Meal That's Only a Hop, Skip and a Jump Away. Or, The Other Green Meat.

▲ Rabbits: Let Your Bumper Meet Our Thumper. The Place to Come for Splitting Hares. Or, Country Roads, West Virginia — There's a Hare in Your Stew.

▲ Turtles: Road Food Worth Shelling Out For. One Scoop and It's Soup. Or, The Crunch That Spells Lunch.

Tax credit helps low-income families

By Dawn Miller  
SUNDAY GAZETTE-MAIL

If you work, but you don't make a lot of money, you might be tempted not to bother filing a tax return this tax season.

That would be a mistake, says Jo Ann Anderson, especially if you have children. A family of four where a parent works full time at minimum wage makes \$10,700 a year and can get as much as \$3,888 back from the federal government at tax time.

But the family has to file a return and claim the Earned Income Tax Credit to get the money, said Anderson, a bookkeeper who helps others with their tax forms and Business Tax and Accounting Service.

Anderson claimed the credit herself a few years ago.

At the time, she was taking care of both of her teen-age granddaughters. She and her husband had always worked. They purposely had the IRS withhold more of their earnings than necessary. Each year, they got a refund of about \$1,000 that they used to travel to Florida, Canada or the beach.

But in 1995 her husband had a stroke. Although he has regained some ability to move and a few words of speech, he cannot work. She stopped working to care for him. They spent their savings to pay bills, and



CHRIS DORST/Sunday Gazette-Mail

Jo Ann Anderson, who helps families fill out their tax forms, learned about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit one year when her own family fell on hard times.

then their rent and bills fell behind, messing up their credit rating.

Anderson said she and her husband were never wealthy, but they never thought of claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit, even with two grandchildren living with them.

"We always felt like there were other people who needed it worse than us," she said.

But then her money ran out. Her family qualified for the

the federal government, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a research group in Washington D.C.

About 20 million families who file federal tax returns — about one in six — claim the credit. The refund lifts 4.8 million people, including 2.6 million children, out of poverty, according to the group. The EITC gets more children out of poverty than welfare, food stamps, free school lunch or any other federal program.

In addition to the federal credit, some states, including Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Vermont and Wisconsin, also offer low-income, working people a refund on their state taxes.

Iowa, Oregon and Rhode Island offer non-refundable credits. Non-refundable credits can eliminate a family's tax bill, but not give them any money if they made so little money that they owed no taxes. Montgomery County in Maryland offers a credit toward local taxes.

The feds' latest welfare rules allow states to spend federal welfare money to offer the refundable part of a state tax credits to low-income families, said Nicholas Johnson, a policy analyst at the Center on Budget

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Riley and Rush Justice pulled some old seats out of the long-gone theater at Elbert, a nearby coal camp, so their customers could relax and chat while they wait.

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man who wrote "Rocket Boys," just passed away, Howard said. "That book Sonny wrote," Howard said. "He didn't have too much nice to say about his daddy. I just didn't think he should talk about his daddy like that." The twins finished their work. The white-haired old man stepped out of Riley's chair with exactly the same buzz cut as Rush's young man in green nylon workout pants. Howard rose and moved toward the door. "Raise your price at least a dollar," he called as he walked out onto Main Street. A coal truck rumbled by as the door swung shut.

**'They'd eat like hogs'** Rush and Riley Justice were born 74 years ago in Davy, a McDowell County coal camp that was thriving back then. "We come up on a little mountain farm," Riley said. "You know, we come from a big family. Twenty-four kids." The twins' mother was their father's third wife. She had 12 children, the previous wife had had 11, and the first wife had had one. Every kid had a job, Riley said. One of Rush and Riley's earliest was cooking. They were extremely good cooks. "We'd bake biscuits, man, they'd eat like hogs," Riley remembered. Rush and Riley wound up cutting hair more out of self-preservation than anything. "Our mother'd cut our hair, she'd pull half of it out," Riley said. "When we were 12 years old, we decided to trade haircuts."

At first, their older brothers laughed at their haircuts. But after a while, they started coming to the twins for trims. Then the school principal heard the Justice twins could cut hair. It was right after the Depression, and hardly any of the students could afford a haircut. "The principal, a lot of times he'd send Rush and I down to the basement to cut the other kids' hair," Riley said. "We didn't even go to class." Barbering saved the twins from schoolwork. When they grew up, it saved them from the coal mines. Before they went to barber school in Wheeling, Riley worked in the Davy Crockett mines for six months. Rush was there a year. "The foreman said he'd save me a job for when I got back from barber school," Rush said. "I knew if I stayed in there, I'd be like the rest of these miners. Eat up with rock dust."

**Off to war** Rush and Riley had never been separated ... until World War II. They joined the Navy, and went to boot camp together. But after the five Sullivan brothers died together when the USS Juneau was sunk in 1942, the Navy refused to station brothers on the same ship. "I went to the chief petty officer and told him, 'I've got a twin brother and I'd very much like to be with him,'" Riley said. "He said, 'I'll do what I can.'" Miraculously, the Navy made an exception to its rule. Rush and Riley were stationed together in the 30th Seabees. "We were earmarked to go to Iwo Jima," Rush said. "I mean, time was pushing. But the 31st Seabees had had jungle training. They took the 31st, put our boat in Hawaii. "We ended up in the Philippines. We were lucky." The Seabees were a construction battalion, and the Justice twins did their share of carpentry. But when it came to grunt work, barbering saved them again. "I was supposed to report the next day for KP. Man, I didn't want to be on KP," Rush said, kicking back in his empty barber chair. The toe of one shiny wingtip tapped the air, a couple



Rush mined coal for a year before barbering got him out of the mines. "I loved low coal," he remembers.

F. BRIAN FERGUSON photos/Sunday Gazette-Mail

of feet from Riley's scuffed black tennis shoes. "I saw a sign said they needed barbers," Rush said. "So I took my tools — we had 'em there in our footlockers." From then on, Rush and Riley spent half their time cutting hair. In Saipan, an island near the Philippines, the twins ran the company barber shop. "There was a sign up that said, 'No tips,'" Riley said. "A boy handed Rush a 50-cent tip. The chaplain saw it and said, 'Give me that.'" Riley affected his sternest demeanor. "Then he sat down and had Rush cut his hair. Rush didn't know what was going to happen to him." He paused for effect. "When he got up, he gave Rush that 50 cents," Riley finished. "He gave me a dollar, Riley," Rush corrected, his mountain accent turning the name to "Raleigh." While Rush and Riley were in the Seabees, they became part of a national twin study by Duke University. "Once a year, twice, they call us," Riley said. "On this Alzheimers, they say twins are the best way to study it. They ask you tricky questions. The last time this lady called, she asked me, 'Who's the president?' And I said, 'Bill Clinton.'"

Rush started shaking, his chair squeaking with the silent laughter. Evidently he'd heard the story before. "She asked me, 'Who's the vice president?' I couldn't remember!" Riley finished with glee, and Rush finally let the sound of his laughter escape him. "Hee," Riley sighed, wiping tears from his eyes. "She started laughing." **Masters of the flattop** In 1948, Rush and Riley returned to War. Even though they hailed from nearby Davy, some of the townspeople still saw them as newcomers. "We dressed alike all the time then," Riley said. "Rush worked in a shop up the street, and I worked down the street. This guy came walking along outside my shop, and I knew he didn't want me to cut his hair. I was new here. "Well, he walked up and down a few times, and then he just



Some days, Rush (left) and Riley still show up dressed alike, in the work shirts their mother sewed for them.

walked on up the street. Rush said he come in his shop up there, and he just looked at him real funny. He said, 'Well, if a man wants to cut my hair that bad, I'll let him have a try.'" The twins soon found notoriety. They brought that dreaded omen of juvenile delinquency, the flattop, to War. "The barbers around here, they'd rather see a snake come in as a flattop. And that was right up our alley," Rush said, his blue eyes glinting. "Buddy, it wasn't long, we had all the high school kids." His expert eye fell on a man lounging in one of the old theater seats, his hair obviously coiffed by a beautician. "Incidentally, you'd look good with a flattop," he offered. An older patron, Manuel Collins, saved the other man's hair style by deciding it was time to dance. He hopped out of his theater seat and began to flatfoot, his arms swinging loosely as the bottoms of his old sneakers brushed a soft rhythm on the tile floor. "If I lose track of the music, I can feel it in my feet," said Collins, who is famous around War for his flatfooting. No music was playing in the barber shop. "Hey," Rush said, sliding out of his barber chair. "Can you do this?" His gleaming wingtips pounded out a hard rhythm. Collins stopped dancing, stared at Rush's feet, then sat down. "We love to dance," Rush said, hoisting himself back into his chair. "We danced to some of the big bands. Sammy Kaye when he came to Wheeling. Tommy Dorsey came to Bluefield once. Lawrence Welk at the Argon Ballroom in Santa Monica." "We do the jitterbug, polka, all them," Riley said. "When rock 'n' roll started, that's just not our thing."

Surviving long hair

Rock 'n' roll was one thing. But what really annoyed Rush

and Riley was the flower-child era — and the long hair that went with it. "The hippies just about put us out of business," Riley snorted in disgust. "We had to get out and do carpenter work. "We redone the power company, the hotel. Papered, paneling, whatever they needed. If you're not lazy, you can find something to do." In the corner of the shop, a 50-year-old "Oster Airjet" handheld hair dryer reposed, a thick layer of dust marring its shiny silver art-deco lines. "No demand for that now," Riley said of the hair dryer. "We used to do it all. Scientific rest facials, mud pack 75 cents. We used to give each other facials." Rush and Riley don't sweep up until the end of the day. On the floor between the two barber chairs, some clippings of African-American hair mingle with the straighter strands. It wasn't always that way. The

*"Our mother'd cut our hair, she'd pull half of it out. When we were 12 years old, we decided to trade haircuts."*  
-Riley Justice