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islature approved — a 3 percent salary increase for all state employees in the state budget for FY 2009.”

Helmick said he had a problem with that veto.

“(Conservation officers) are law enforcement officers, too, just like the State Police,” he said. “They deserve similar pay.”

Other items included in Manchin’s veto message include:

- slicing \$1.25 million combined from three senior citizens funds, including \$500,000 from a fund entitled “Senior Citizen Centers and Programs,” \$250,000 from the **WV Senior Corps** and \$500,000 from a senior citizen account to be used for emergencies as determined by the **Commission on Senior Services**;
- reducing money for fairs and fes-

tivals around the state by more than \$282,000. Ramsburg said a number of fairs and festivals had asked for more money in the coming year, and new festivals were added. She said the governor cut funding for new festivals and ratcheted the spending on established events back to 2007-08 levels. As a result, some fairs lost \$500 to \$1,000, but other festivals, such as the **Matewan Magnolia Fair**, lost \$25,000;

■ cutting an unclassified line item in the **Department of Education** budget to assist four county school boards of education by \$515,000;

■ reducing a **Department of Transportation** line item known as “Unclassified” by \$90,000. The eliminated money was to be used for a new highway authority and additional funding for the **National Railway Historical**

**Society New River Excursion**;

■ removing \$50,000 for the Route 2 I68 Highway authority on the grounds the authority had never been funded before;

■ cutting \$30,000 from a line item for the I-79 Development Council, leaving the group with \$50,000 in state money to work with;

■ and scrapping a \$15,000 appropriation for the **Commission on Holocaust Education**. Manchin said the project could be covered by the Department of Education’s unclassified line item and did not need its own funding category.

In a separate veto message, the governor struck the entire \$24.5 million appropriation relating to teachers switching their retirement accounts. Lawmakers passed a bill earlier this month allowing teachers to volun-

tarily transfer to the **State Teachers Retirement System** if a certain percentage of teachers who are currently contributing to a different, defined contribution retirement system voted to OK the switch.

That vote isn’t slated to occur until later this spring. As a result, Manchin said it was too early for lawmakers to appropriate money to pay for the switch.

“If the required percentage of actively contributing members of the (teachers defined contribution system) affirmatively elect to transfer, I will call a special session to address this appropriation,” he wrote in his message. “However, until the results of the voluntary transfer are known, I do not believe this appropriation should be made.”

# WVSSAC Makes the Call for New Sports Officials

By **DANNY FORINASH**

For The State Journal

CHARLESTON — **Sharon Hayes** works around kids who have made bad decisions.

“Our beds are always full,” said Hayes, human resources director with the **Division of Juvenile Services** in Charleston. “It’s good to also be around kids who are trying to do something good with their lives.”

So, for about 10 years, Hayes has been officiating volleyball, basketball and track matches. She is a referee at the high school, middle school and “bidy ball” levels, and said she officiates between 150 and 200 games a year.

When her son was in the seventh grade, Hayes received a suggestion she should become an official. She decided to go through the training and began officiating games for young children.

“I started enjoying it,” said Hayes, who participated in volleyball, track and basketball when she was a student at **Nicholas County High School**. “I like interacting with kids.”

The **West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission** recently has focused on recruiting new officials to replace officials who might be thinking about retirement.

“It’s an area we have concerns about,” said **Gary Ray**, WVSSAC executive director.

“I’m new this year, and I came in with two goals,” Ray said. “One was the recruitment and retaining of officials.”

The other goal involves improving technology.

“Many officials are reaching an age where they are getting out or are considering getting out,” he said. “And there’s not a lot of younger people coming in.”

Some sports, such as wrestling, have immediate needs. In certain regions, soccer games go on with two instead of the preferred three officials. Rescheduling from time to time is required. Other sports, such as football and basketball, aren’t suffering right now.

“Sports happening at the same time are sometimes stretched to the limit,” Ray said. “... It’s growing into a concern. We don’t want this to become a problem.”

About 3,500 WVSSAC officials work 11 sports for 294 member schools. Several of them officiate in more than one sport, and some work all three seasons.

“That’s still not enough,” said **Richard Messenger**, a veteran official in Weston. “... We need to



involve younger folks, maybe out of high school.”

Messenger is heading a four-person subcommittee of the WVSSAC’s Officials Advisory Committee that is concentrating on recruitment and retaining.

The subcommittee teamed with radio and television networks to tape public service announcements and distributed promotional material to print publications.

“We’ve received quite a lot of responses,” Messenger said. “We realize it’s not going to be fixed this year.”

Hayes has seen a difference.

“Some years we do have a lot of interest. Then some years are slow years. Last year, we did have a good recruiting class. It’s really an issue of retention.”

The WVSSAC also is producing a recruiting DVD, which the Board of Control, school administrators and even college athletic directors will view.

“It’s just a recruiting tool,” Messenger said. “We want to reach senior athletes. ... We’re going to try to hit college-age athletes, too.”

Former athletes, though, aren’t the only prospective refs, Ray said. Sports fans, in general, might have interest.

Messenger has officiated football,

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— **Richard Messenger, veteran official in Weston**

basketball, baseball and track at the high school and college levels for 40 years in north-central West Virginia. He still helps with maintaining track equipment for high school meets.

“It’s the involvement with young folks,” he said. “You get to meet and talk to them, and you can develop a lot of friendships that way. You get to meet a lot of nice people and share experiences with them.”

That’s the selling point. The “obnoxious, abusive” fans represent the bad side.

“It seems like people pay \$5 to get in and feel like they can do whatever they want to do,” Messenger said. “That’s one area we’ve had a problem with. Younger officials have bad experiences with parents and quit.”

Hayes agreed.

“The hardest ones to deal with are the ones who don’t understand the rules,” she said. “... I think the administrations in schools could do a better job with fans. I don’t think we should have to worry about crowds. The administration should be at all games and monitor what’s going on and what’s being said.”

Promoting positive sportsmanship, Ray said, is part of the process.

“I understand fans can be critical, but they can’t be abusive,” he said. “The officials are human. They make mistakes.”

The WVSSAC is designing training programs that focus on mechanics and not only remembering rules for member boards, too.

Prospects must training courses through local boards before they become officials. They then likely will gain experience at lower levels of play. Hopefully, Ray said, veteran officials will take time to work with them.

As independent contractors, they do receive fees from the schools.

“But this is more of an opportunity to give back,” Ray said. “It’s more of a hobby for them. Most officials will tell you they sometimes lose money traveling to games.”