

WOLFE
FROM PAGE 1A

"[He] is the epitome of a truly, deeply engaged educator," said Bishop, who is a 2001 Milken Educator from Virginia. "His ability to show students how classroom projects translate to real life is outstanding, and his students are gaining valuable, hands-on experiences within their community before ever leaving high school."

From engineer to educator, then back again

Wolfe wasn't always a top-tier teacher. He is a second-career educator.

His journey as an engineer began in 2010, after earning a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the West Virginia University Institute of Technology and a master's in civil engineering from Vanderbilt University in 2012. He also earned a master's in educational leadership from Salem University earlier this year.

He said he was called to teach after feeling uninspired in engineering. But he "got cold feet" about a teaching career and retreated back to a full-time engineering job.

It was when his employer sent him to the Clay Center to present to students at an Engineering Day that he knew where he needed to be: In the classroom.

A lone Wolfe

The Barbour County native is the 80th Milken Educator Award recipient from West Virginia and the only winner in the state this year, out of 42 winners nationwide. What makes him a Milken Award winner?

Since returning to education, he has worked to



Adam Wolfe, an engineering and math teacher at Nitro High School, is called to the gym floor after being announced as a 2024-25 Milken Educator Award winner, one of 42 in the country and the only one in West Virginia.



Rachael Tucker, 17, a Nitro High junior, said she has learned leadership because of Wolfe pushing her to create the school's InvenTeam, a nationwide initiative to help guide future inventors and entrepreneurs.

make the school and region a better place while standing out as a Mountain State educator.

His achievements include:

- Coordinating a mentor program for ninth-grade students to better transition to higher grade levels
- Working with the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission on a mathematical model to redefine athletic classifications among the state's high school basketball programs
- Facilitating summer student internships with outside engineering firms
- Coaching the math field day team
- Organizing Nitro High's first robotics team

According to a statement from the Milken Foundation, Wolfe was chosen because he cultivates a culture of innovation and continuous growth for his students by giving them real-world problems to solve. For example, his classes have:

- Designed a crosswalk

with lights for a local elementary school

■ Developed a partnership with the West Virginia State Parks system to design and sell Christmas ornaments

■ Rebuilt a local community pool's swim team record board

'The best teacher'

Wolfe's classroom reflects his hands-on philosophy. His engineering workshop features everything from handsaws to a laser cutter. In this lab, students tackle ambitious projects, including a motorcycle restoration.

"They had to take the carburetor apart and rebuild it," Wolfe said with a smile. "We may or may not have [ridden] it around the room a little bit."

While it may seem like fun and games, 17-year-old



Junior Blake Smith, 16, said his favorite project was making wood crafts that were sold at West Virginia State Park gift shops. "He's probably the best teacher in the school," Smith said of Wolfe.

Rachael Tucker said she has learned a lot about leadership because of Wolfe pushing her to create the school's InvenTeam, which is a nationwide initiative

designed to help guide future inventors and entrepreneurs. It is funded and coordinated by the Lemelson Foundation, with grant funding administered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's School of Engineering.

According to Tucker, they're working on a safety project for powerline lineman. "[Wolfe] had me create the team, so I'm the team leader," she said. "He's really inspired me to motivate everyone on our team to do the work."

Sixteen-year-old Blake Smith, who also is on Nitro's InvenTeam, has been Wolfe's student since he was a freshman. Smith recalled his favorite project, making wood crafts that were sold at West Virginia State Parks gift shops. Since he began classes with Wolfe, Smith has become proficient with different tools, especially the laser cutter.

Smith noted that, while his teacher is shy, he is also deserving of an honor like the Milken. "He's probably the best teacher in the school, but he doesn't think he is," Smith said. "I would say [his] classes, they're really easy to learn, but not because they're easy, but because Mr. Wolfe really teaches you how to do it the whole time. He'll walk you through it step by step, and you really take a lot out of the classes in the end."

Sierra Marling covers health and education for the Charleston Gazette-Mail. Contact her at 502-783-6738 or smarling@hdmediallc.com.

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NLRB
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Donald Trump will now have the chance to fill two open board member slots — instead of one — after his inauguration in January.

Worker advocates expect that will mean a faster end to the pro-labor orientation the board has had under Biden, whose administration boasted a doubling of workers filing for union representation since Biden took office in January 2021.

Sens. Joe Manchin, I-W.Va., and Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., voted in the slim majority in a 50-49 tally against advancing the McFerran renomination or the nomination of labor attorney Joshua Dittelberg to fill a Republican seat on the board, known as the NLRB.

Manchin attributed his critical opposition as a perceived "swing vote" in the Senate to the McFerran-led NLRB seeking to implement a rule viewed as employee-friendly that would have set a lower threshold for entities to be considered joint employers of a group of employees.

The NLRB issued the rule in November 2023, considering alleged joint employers' authority to control essential terms and conditions of employment, whether or not such control is exercised, and without regard to

whether any such exercise of control is direct or indirect.

McFerran called the move a "legally correct return to common-law principles."

Manchin asserted in a statement provided by a spokesperson Thursday that the rule would have imposed "unnecessary regulations jeopardizing thousands of small businesses, their employees, and the communities they serve."

"I came to the U.S. Senate to empower small businesses to do what they do best, create jobs and grow our economy, and that's why I voted against her nomination," Manchin said.

A Texas federal judge vacated the rule in March, and the NLRB later dropped an effort to restore it.

Capito claimed in a statement provided by a spokesperson that McFerran was responsible for "failed leadership" with a tenure "marked by mismanagement of resources and partisan initiatives."

A Capito spokesperson pointed to a 2023 NLRB Office of Inspector General (OIG) report that found a regional NLRB director based in St. Louis mismanaged a mail ballot election and a 2024 OIG report that regional offices weren't consistently complying with NLRB mail ballot election procedures.

AFL-CIO: Manchin, Capito 'voted against the working people'

But unions had backed McFer-

ran's renomination and lamented its narrow defeat in the Senate.

"Today, 50 senators didn't just vote against Lauren McFerran's reconfirmation — they voted against the working people of this country," AFL-CIO president Liz Shuler said in a statement. "Make no mistake: This vote had nothing to do with stopping Chair McFerran's renomination and everything to do with reversing generations of progress workers have made toward building a fairer and more just economy."

The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers had urged the Senate to confirm McFerran, praising the NLRB under Biden in a July statement for being "unmistakably pro-union and pro-worker" and seeking input on:

- Allowing unions to organize appropriate bargaining units
- Strengthening workers' rights to engage in concerted activities
- Extending protections to workers through a redefinition of independent contractor status

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce cheered the Senate's rejection of McFerran.

"The NLRB should be focused on promoting fairness, not tipping the scale in favor of a select few in organized labor at the expense of workers and businesses alike," U.S. Chamber senior vice president of employment policy Glenn Spencer said in a statement, asserting McFerran's ten-

ure was "characterized by contentious decisions and legal challenges."

Union activity on the rise

In what's been viewed as another blow for worker rights, Trump-appointed U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Judge Trevor McFadden ruled last week that administrative law judges' protections against being fired by the president violate the U.S. Constitution.

"[I]n short, the agency can now remove judges who side with unions more than it wants," Slate senior writer and legal analyst Mark Joseph Stern said in a website post last week. "The decision basically creates a road map for the NLRB's incoming Republican majority to build out a bench of administrative law judges who are rubber stamps for management."

In October, the NLRB reported a 27% spike in union election petitions received from fiscal years 2023 to 2024, with 3,286 received from Oct. 1, 2023, through Sept. 30, 2024.

Unfair labor practice charge filings rose 7% from 19,869 in fiscal year 2023 to 21,292 in fiscal year 2024, according to NLRB data. The NLRB said its field offices received a total of 24,578 cases, the highest total case intake in over a decade.

"The surge in cases we've received in the last few years is a testament to workers knowing and exercising their rights under

the National Labor Relations Act and to our board agents' accessibility and respectful engagement with them," NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo said in a statement, referring to the 1935 law that protects employees' rights to organize and bargain collectively.

The Communications Workers of America called the data release proof that the increase in worker organizing its union had seen since the start of the Biden administration was "part of a national movement," flipping a decades-long decline.

"Workers across our country are coming together to exercise their rights at work and organize for a better future," the union said in a statement.

But with the NLRB's member configuration and recent federal court decisions leaning against union advocates, workers' rights may require more work to secure under the incoming Trump administration than before.

"The labor movement was born out of the fight for the very rights the NLRB protects," Shuler said, "and we won't stop until every single worker in America has a fair and free shot to join a union and better our lives."

Mike Tony covers energy and the environment. He can be reached at mtony@hdmediallc.com or 304-348-1236. Follow @Mike_Tony on Twitter.

CONGRESS
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budget year's spending levels to a new Republican-led Congress and President-elect Donald Trump. The continuing resolution generally continues current spending levels for agencies.

Passage of the measure is one of the final actions that lawmakers will consider this week before adjourning for the holidays and making way for the next Congress. It's the second short-term funding measure the lawmakers have taken up this fall as they struggled to pass the dozen annual appropriations bills before the new fiscal year began Oct. 1, as they typically do.

The bill will provide \$100.4 billion in disaster relief, with an additional \$10 billion in economic assistance for farmers struggling with low commodity prices and high input costs.

"We have to be able to

help those who are in these dire straits," said House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters.

Net farm income is projected to decline 4.1% this year after falling 19.4% the year before from the record highs reached in 2022. Johnson indicated more farm aid could be delivered in the next Congress, saying "we can't do all it right now."

"Congress is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances, and I think it will be a big boost for the industry," Johnson said.

Rep. Glenn Thompson, the Republican chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, said he was hoping for more economic relief for farmers, but "it's a great start."

"I think it's going to send the right signal to the markets that most farmers and ranchers are going to be able to get eligible for the credit they need to borrow in order to plant a crop or raise a herd," Thompson said.

President Joe Biden has sought about \$114 billion in



House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., speaks to reporters at the Capitol on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024.

disaster aid, submitting a \$99 billion request in November, telling lawmakers the funding was "urgently needed." The administration subsequently updated its request to include funding to repair federal facilities damaged due to natural disasters.

The largest share of the money, about \$29 billion, will go to the main disaster relief fund at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The fund helps with debris removal, repairing public infrastruc-

ture and providing financial assistance to survivors. About \$21 billion goes to help farmers who have experienced crop or livestock losses.

Another \$8 billion will go to help rebuild and repair highways and bridges in more than 40 states and territories. And some \$12 billion would go toward helping communities recover through block grants administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. About \$2.2 billion would go

to low-interest loans for businesses, nonprofits and homeowners trying to rebuild after a disaster.

As it typically does, Congress is expected to act just before another shutdown deadline. House Republicans generally give lawmakers 72 hours to review text of the legislation, which would push a vote on final passage to Friday if they follow through on that rule. The Senate is not known for acting speedily, but many lawmakers are anxious to adjourn for the year and make way for the next Congress.

Since the bill is the last must-pass legislation of the current Congress, lawmakers have worked to get certain priorities included. On the health care front, the legislation seeks to extend coverage of telehealth appointments for Medicare enrollees and rein in how much money pharmacy benefits managers — the companies that negotiate how and what drugs are covered by insurance plans — make off those deals.

The bill also includes provisions focused on countering China, including expanding on a Biden executive order that seeks to restrict investments into countries that pose a national security threat to the United States. Blocking China's high-tech ambitions is one of the few issues that enjoys broad support in Washington from both Republicans and Democrats.

There's also a provision to transfer the land that is the site of the old RFK Stadium from the federal government to the District of Columbia, which could potentially lead to a new stadium for the Washington Commanders.

The legislation also provides full federal funding to rebuild Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, which collapsed when struck by a cargo ship that reported losing power just before the crash. Federal taxpayers will be reimbursed through proceeds from insurance payments and litigation.