

## Under the Dome, Week 1

### *Highlights of the Week*

The 2016 legislative session started with the swearing in of a new House member and the resignation of another. With former Representative Jack Tate selected to replace outgoing Senator David Balmer in SD 27, a house vacancy committee chose Cole Wist to serve in HD 37. Representative Wist grew up in Paonia where his father worked as a coal miner. He practices law as a partner with Holland & Hart. Elected just last year to serve in the House, Representative Jon Keyser announced early in the week that he intends to resign from his house seat and enter the Republican US Senate primary field with the intent to challenge US Senator Michael Bennet if he wins the primary. A vacancy committee will form in HD 25 to replace Representative Keyser in the next few weeks.

The feeling within the House and the Senate chambers on opening day was starkly different. Though President Cadman and Senator Guzman didn't agree on priorities for the 2016 session, both were congenial, respectful, and incredibly gracious towards one another. Speeches by leadership in the Senate were positive in nature with President Cadman reflecting on his ups and downs in 16 years under the gold dome and bipartisan accomplishments during his first year as Senate President. Minority Leader Guzman projected her hope for an equitable Colorado where the American Dream is attainable to all, no matter what your race or socioeconomic background. In contrast, leadership speeches in the House were tangibly contentious. Speaker Hullinghorst pledged to introduce and pass legislation turning the Hospital Provider Fee in to an enterprise to solve the state's budget woes. She stressed the significance of ensuring equal pay for women in the workforce. Minority Leader DelGrosso referred to any attempt to change the status of the Hospital Provider Fee as unconstitutional and made it clear his caucus wouldn't support it. DelGrosso instead asked for support of bonding as an alternative to pay for Colorado's deteriorating roads and expressed his determination to finally pass legislation to limit the burden on small businesses caused by state agency penalties. One hundred and seventeen bills were introduced on Wednesday and the feeling of partisanship took hold immediately after the Senate President assigned 15 of the 17 bills introduced by Democrats to the Senate's "kill committee" State Affairs.

The Governor's State of the State address on Thursday clearly articulated where he stood on big issues facing the Colorado General Assembly. He gave a strong nod of support to construction defects reform, 9<sup>th</sup> grade testing, the Colorado Climate Plan, increased broadband access through out Colorado, and suicide prevention. He communicated strong opposition to bonding for transportation projects, marijuana edibles that resemble convenience store candy, and partisanship. His starkest message of the speech was reserved for those who oppose enterprising the Hospital Provider Fee – he stated that if the legislature can't make a change to the Hospital Provider Fee, the only choice left on the table is to completely reopen the constitutional TABOR amendment directly.

The legislature is adjourned in recognition of Martin Luther King Day on Monday and will be back to work at 10am Tuesday.

*Bills of the Week*

**End of Life Choices** This year, sponsors Representative Court, Representative Ginal and Senator Merrifield have introduced two bills (SB 025 and HB 1054) to allow Colorado citizens the option of ending their own life via a prescription from a doctor, in the case of terminal illness. Last year the bill died in the House with bipartisan opposition. Both bills were drafted to mirror similar legislation in California, although they are not identical. The House version of the bill is already scheduled to be heard by the House Judiciary Committee on February 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Eliminate 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Testing** Last year the Colorado General Assembly passed landmark legislation to reduce testing by more than 30 hours and maintain accountability in Colorado schools. The measure, approved on the final day of the 2015 legislative session, maintained testing in 9<sup>th</sup> grade despite vigorous opposition. Senator Woods and Senator Marble introduced legislation on the first day of this legislative session that would prohibit statewide testing in all subjects in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, SB 005. Other bills reducing or changing the provisions of last year's compromise (HB15-1323) are expected.

**Equality in State Contracting Practices** Both the Speaker and the Senate Minority Leader identified one of their top priorities in 2016 as promoting equal and fair pay between all individuals. HB 1001 aims to do that via state contracting. The bill requires a business that bids for a contract with a governmental body to submit with its bid certification that it is in compliance with state and federal equal pay standards and laws. The legislation would not apply to businesses that have 50 or fewer employees. The entire House Democrat caucus signed onto the legislation as co-sponsors. There are no Republican sponsors or co-sponsors.

**Continuation of the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District** President Cadman, Senator Steadman, Speaker Hulinghorst, and Representative Lawrence are sponsoring legislation (SB 016) to submit a ballot question in 2016 to authorize the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD) to continue levying the sales and use tax that is set to expire on June 30, 2018. Since 1989, the SCFD has distributed funds from one-tenth of one percent sales and use tax to scientific and cultural facilities through out the 7-county Denver metro area.