

Under the Dome, Week 2

Highlights of the Week

The Colorado General Assembly only met for four days this week, taking off Monday to celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Another 113 bills were introduced throughout the week increasing the bill total for the 2016 legislative session to 230. With final bill deadlines approaching, a slew of additional bills are expected through the end of January. Many of the bills introduced this week were “zombie bills” that have been introduced and defeated in prior legislative sessions. Senator and Representative Neville reintroduced a scaled back version of the Parents Bill of Rights (HB 1110), legislation was introduced to prohibit abortions (HB 1113), and the ever popular ban on red light cameras is back. Committees started to pick up the pace and in addition to department and sunset reviews began to take testimony and vote on bills. Senate and House floor work remained fairly light this week, and the Senate took time to introduce and pass a resolution in honor of the Denver Broncos upcoming AFC championship game. Regional organizations Club 20, Progressive 15, and Action 22 flooded the Capitol on Thursday and Friday to discuss issues important to areas outside of the Denver metropolitan area. Themes included transportation funding, education, the budget shortfall and the potential of turning the Hospital Provider Fee in to an enterprise.

The Joint Budget Committee began their full time work in November, and has completed about 1/3 of their annual work. The JBC began voting on supplemental requests this week, and will decide on adjustments to the current year budget for the Department of Education, the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, and the Division of Child Welfare next week.

The JBC also began setting the budget for the coming year with an initial vote on common policies and provider rates. The committee ratified the Governor’s recommendation for common policies: no across the board increase and no merit pay increase at this time. The JBC did express an interest in revisiting the decision on merit pay if future revenues allow. The Governor requested a 1% provider rate decrease for FY 2016-17 to help cover the budget deficit. However, the JBC rejected his proposal and instead backed their staff recommendation to keep the provider rate constant – an impact of about \$46 million in total funds. This decision puts the budget out of balance and will require significant reductions in other areas or other changes that free up state revenue.

Bills of the Week

Repeal Mutual Consent Representative Salazar introduced legislation this week to repeal the mutual consent provision that was part of the landmark teacher evaluation legislation passed in 2010. The bill, urged on by the Colorado Education Association, will require each school district to assign or dismiss with due process each teacher who is unable to secure a mutual consent assignment and who remains on unpaid leave as a result. HB 1099 faces steep opposition.

Drug Pricing Transparency HB 1102, patterned after legislation backed by health plans in numerous other states, would add reporting requirements for pharmaceutical manufacturers selling a drug for

which the wholesale acquisition or treatment cost exceeds \$50,000 per year. If above this threshold, manufacturers would need to submit specific financial information to the Colorado Commission on Affordable Health Care and empowers the Commission to release the information and make recommendations to the legislature. The bill has bipartisan sponsors.

Employer Record Deregulation Liberal Senator Jessie Ulibarri and Conservative House Minority Leader Brian DeGrosso have partnered to introduce two pieces of legislation in the House and in the Senate. SB 076 and HB 1114 both eliminate a handful of employment verification standards including requiring each employer to attest that the employer has verified the legal work status of each employee. The bills were assigned to the Senate Business Committee and the House Business Committee respectively.

Retail Hydrogen Fuel System Regulation HB 1053 by Rep. Kraft Tharp and Sen. Hill was the first bill to pass out of the House Transportation Committee unanimously this year. The bill requires the Division of Oil and Public Safety to promulgate rules concerning the retail sale of hydrogen fuels for vehicles by January 1, 2017. The rules must establish minimum design, construction, location, installation, and operation standards in order to ready the market for hydrogen fuel vehicles.