

## Under the Dome, Week 4

### Highlights of the Week

This week all the legislature could focus on was the upcoming Broncos Super Bowl. To say “Bronco Mania” took over the capitol is an understatement. The House and Senate calendars were colored orange and blue all week, the Broncos cheerleaders made a visit to the House and Senate, and members were allowed to break dress code and rock their Broncos jerseys, t-shirts, or other gear all week long. The casual atmosphere didn’t prevent some legislative work from getting done however, as the House and Senate combined introduced 71 new bills. Many of these bills have been introduced in prior years, including the Homeless Bill of Rights, Prohibition of Conversion Therapy on Minors, Allowing Concealed Carry in Public Schools, and legislation to allow individuals on Family Medical Leave to access a stipend from the unemployment insurance trust fund. The Joint Budget Committee also introduced a handful of bills recommended by staff including changes to the high cost support mechanism (HB 1223), allocation of the senior property tax exemption money (HB 1161), and higher education financial obligation repayments (HB 1229) The bill total for 2016 now sits at 353. However, with officially under a hundred days left of session, many of the hot button legislative issues are still waiting for introduction and consideration. Still expected are proposals including construction defects reform, anti-oil and gas industry legislation, and most critical, a path forward for Colorado’s budget.

The Senate State Veterans and Military Affairs Committee as well as the House Judiciary Committee tackled the incredibly emotional issue of assisted suicide legislation. SB 025 and HB 1054 were presented before their respective committees of reference on two consecutive days. Proponents and opponents filled the Capitol to express their opinion on the bills. The Senate version of the bill was killed down partisan lines after five hours of debate on Wednesday. The House Judiciary Committee heard testimony late into the evening Friday and then began debating numerous amendments that were offered. Witnesses were extremely passionate on both sides of the issue. The organization Compassion and Choices, the driving force behind the legislation, opened up the hearing and closed it with a video recorded by Death with Dignity pioneer Brittany Maynard. The disability community came out in extremely strong opposition to the legislation, fearing it could result in unintended consequences. Members of various faith communities spoke out in opposition as well. Emotions were high as the committee began to review and consider ten amendments that were offered and debated very late in the evening. The sponsors offered amendments to resolve concerns of the mental health community and coroners. The sponsors also accepted amendments from committee members to increase guardrails and protections within the bill. Eight of the ten amendments passed down partisan lines. Around midnight, the committee members spent time reflecting on the day, the issue, and what this means moving forward. The “End of Life Options” proposal had its first success, passing the House Judiciary Committee with all six Democrats voting for the bill and the five Republicans voting against it. HB 1054 will next proceed to the House Floor where it will certainly spur heated debate.

## **Bills of the Week**

**Adjustments to Educator Performance Evaluations** Although Colorado's teacher evaluation law passed in 2010, there have been attempts each legislative session since to roll back various provisions of the law. SB 105 by Senator Merrifield and Senator Marble is one such effort. The legislation eliminates the requirement that 50% of a teacher or principal evaluation reflects student growth. Instead, the bill specifies that no more than 20% of a teacher or principal's evaluation can be tied to student growth. SB 105 is assigned to the Senate Education Committee and is co-sponsored by Senator Todd, Senator Kerr, Senator Woods, and Senator Martinez Humenik. The legislation faces an uphill battle because of strong opposition from the education reform and the business community.

**County Power Initiatives** Only Monday, the House State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee heard legislation that would have granted initiative powers to the voters of every county or any special taxing district created by a county. HB 1071 created great consternation for the business community, community bankers, counties and specifically the oil and gas community which has been fighting off local initiatives to restrict oil and gas production and exploration in the area. The bill, brought by Republican Representative Windholz, died unanimously in committee and was postponed indefinitely.

**CDOT Accountability** The Colorado Department of Transportation was in the hot seat most of the summer after a scathing audit was released of how it managed FASTER transportation funds. Legislators raised concerns after CDOT announced they bonded millions of dollars for new administration buildings without prior approval after opposing a bonding measure to fund additional transportation projects in the 2015 session. This week, the legislature introduced two measures aimed at increasing accountability and oversight at the Colorado Department of Transportation. If passed, SB 122 would require more frequent at-risk audit of CDOT and stricter oversight of lease-purchase agreements among other items. HB 1172, a bipartisan measure from the Legislative Audit Committee, would require the Transportation Commission to reestablish a standing efficiency and accountability committee that was dissolved by former Director Hunt and will seek ways to maximize the efficiency of the Department of Transportation.

**Exemption from Child Support Requirements** The Colorado Child Care Assistance Program helps low-income families access child care so they can gain employment and begin the path to leading an independent life. However, under current law, a teen mother or a domestic violence survivor must first take the child's biological father to court or obtain administrative action for child support before they can access the Child Care Assistance Program fund. HB 1227, which boasts an impressive list of bipartisan co-sponsors in the House and Senate, will exempt teen moms and domestic violence survivors from the child support engagement requirement as a condition of receiving Child Care Assistance. The bill is assigned the House Public Health Care and Human Services Committee and is backed by Florence Crittenton Services, the Colorado Children's Campaign and Mile High United Way.