

## Under the Dome, Week 5

### Highlights of the Week

The capitol was abuzz with excitement after the huge Broncos win. On Tuesday, the Senate and House concluded floor work early so legislators could walk across the street and celebrate the Broncos victory with 1 million other Coloradans gathered for a parade and rally. Business resumed in the afternoon with a full schedule committees, but work was interrupted by a bomb threat that cleared the capitol for the rest of the day. Everyone was back to work Wednesday, and the House debated the budget supplemental package on the floor. This year's supplemental discussion was much tamer than last year, when several supplemental bills were caught up in political controversy. Due to over projections of K-12 enrollment, prison inmate beds, federal mineral lease revenues and under projections of local assessed property values, this year's supplemental package decreases state spending for FY 2015-16 by \$100 million. The reduction alleviates pressure facing the Joint Budget Committee as they begin figure setting for FY 2016-17. The supplementals will be heard in the Senate next week and then sent to the Governor's desk. This week also saw the House engaged in heated debate over legislation which would require the state to develop a Climate Action Plan. Republicans argued the legislation would disproportionately affect industry and Colorado's economy while proponents insisted that a state based solution was better than accepting a federal plan for Colorado. Coincidentally, HB 1004 passed down partisan lines Tuesday, the same day the US Supreme Court voted 5-4 to halt President Obama's Clean Power Plant regulation. The suit was brought by 27 state Attorney Generals including Colorado AG Cynthia Coffman.

Budget conversations took an interesting twist this week when a legal opinion compiled by Jon Anderson, former Chief Legal Counsel to Governor Bill Owens, and Trey Rogers, former Chief Legal Counsel to Governor Bill Ritter, stated that moving the hospital provider fee to enterprise status is legal under the Colorado Constitution. The outside legal opinion took a broader look at the legal question than the legislative legal staff opinion, and was cheered by groups interested in seeing this change to free up funding for transportation, K-12 and higher education. Former Attorney General John Suthers, a Republican and the current mayor of Colorado Springs, publically called for the legislature to address the way the hospital provider fee is accounted for in the budget. Governor Hickenlooper has requested a legal ruling from current Attorney General Cynthia Coffman. Her opinion is pending at this time.

### Bills of the Week

**Transportation Commission Membership** HB 1031, a bill from the Transportation Legislative Review Committee, requires TLRC to study current transportation commission districts to determine whether the number and boundaries of districts should be modified. The House Transportation Committee, all of whom are also members of the TLRC, debated the bill on Thursday. Two amendments were added to remove the fiscal note on the bill by requiring legislative staff to conduct the study instead of TLRC traveling through out the state to conduct the study. The bill as amended passed 12-1 to the appropriations committee.

**Repeal Employment Verification Standards** This week the Senate Business Committee considered legislation to repeal certain employment verification standards. The bipartisan bill sponsored by Senator Ulibarri in the Senate and Minority Leader DelGrosso in the House eliminates the requirement that each employer attest it has verified the legal work status of each employee within 20 days, the mandate that each employer submit documentation to the director of CDLE to demonstrate they are in compliance with federal employment requirements, the authority of CDLE to conduct random audits of employers to ensure compliance with federal employment verification laws, and the ability for CDLE to fine an employer for failing to provide required documentation or for providing fraudulent documentation. The business community came out in strong support of the bill in the Senate Business Committee this week. There were extensive questions around the provision of CDLE to audit federal requirements and documents so the bill was laid over until those questions could be answered.

**Ability to Audit State Historical Funds to Limited Gaming Towns** This week the Senate Finance committee considered legislation which would give the state auditor the authority to audit the three towns that receive limited gaming funds: Cripple Creek, Central City, and Blackhawk. SB 073, brought forward by the City of Cripple Creek, is aimed at ensuring the towns are spending the money they receive as specified in Colorado's constitution. There has been disagreement among the towns about whether they others truly do that. The bill did receive support from Blackhawk after an amendment was added to place a ten year sunset on the audits and not allow any audits in the interim of scheduled audits. The bill passed committee unanimously and will be heard on the Senate floor next week.

**Financial Literacy in Schools** Senator Todd sponsored legislation to include financial literacy in Colorado's Academic Standards. SB 045 specifically directed that standards for the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the financing of higher education or other career-related postsecondary education and retirement planning. The bill also encourages school districts to include opportunities to learn how to manage student loan debt. The Senate Education Committee heard testimony on the bill last week and took action on Thursday. The bill died down partisan lines and was postponed indefinitely. Republicans on the committee felt this education was already occurring and legislation would only place an unnecessary mandate on schools and districts.