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Highlights of the Week

Although it was only a four day week due to MLK celebrations on Monday, the Capitol was still plenty busy. Various committees took up bills for the first time, and quite a few bills were killed on party line votes in both chambers. The Senate Health and Human Services Committee heard two pieces of legislation, SB 019 and SB 052, related to Colorado's health insurance exchange. The exchange, known as Connect for Health Colorado, has been under a microscope after reports of the website canceling insurance plans because of a flawed design and a number of bonuses/raises awarded to exchange executives. The Senate Health and Human Services committee unanimously approved SB 019, an audit of Colorado's exchange. The bill was supported by the state's auditor and Connect for Health. SB 052 on the other hand passed down partisan lines, with Democrats voting against it and no support from Connect for Health. The legislation sponsored by Republican Senator Larry Crowder required that all salary increases, benefit increases or bonuses for Exchange employees be approved by the Health Benefit Exchange Implementation Review Committee.

Not many new bills were introduced this week, but that's expected to change next week since the final deadline to submit legislation without a waiver from leadership was Friday. An average of 600-700 bills are introduced annually, which means that with 234 introduced so far, there is still many more to come and a majority of those will be read across the desk in the House or Senate next week. The Joint Budget Committee continued their supplemental request process this week and there was plenty of controversy surrounding their decisions. On Wednesday, the JBC rejected on a 3-2 partisan vote, an increase of \$166,000 to the DMV to continue staffing temporary employees to handle the workload brought on by allowing undocumented Coloradans access to drivers licenses. Rep. Dave Young, a Democrat, was not present for the vote. After the initial vote failed, a rally was hosted outside of the JBC Thursday to pressure the JBC to reconsider the vote. On Friday, with all six members present, the motion was reconsidered and once again failed on a party line (3-3) vote. Currently, the DMV has five locations that provide undocumented Coloradans with IDs. They now will likely have to consolidate to one location, cutting a significant number of temporary staff. The JBC will continue supplementals next week and then take up figure setting for the FY 2015-16 budget the first week of February.

Bills of the Week

Telehealth Authorization On Thursday, the House Health Insurance and Environment Committee heard HB 1029. The bill removes the population restriction on receiving telehealth and precludes a health benefit plan from requiring a person to have an in-person visit when telehealth is appropriate. HB 1029 will help consumers in rural areas who have to travel long distances often for 5 minute appointments. The legislation was sponsored by Republican Representative Perry Buck and Democrat Representative Joann Ginal. The three hours of testimony were extremely positive and the legislation passed the committee unanimously.

Limit on Credit Card Interest SB 034 by Senator Ulibarri and Representative Lebsack, caps the maximum interest on an unpaid credit card balance or supervised loan to 12.5%. Interest is currently capped at 21%. The bill was assigned to the Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee. It has already received strong opposition from the business and banking communities. The bill is scheduled to be heard in committee on Monday.

Occupational Reciprocity Legislation was passed previously to allow a military spouse to practice an occupation or profession during the person's first year of residence in Colorado, if the individual is authorized to practice in another state. Senator Hill is sponsoring legislation to expand this one year reciprocity to all individuals who have moved to Colorado. In the past, business organizations and professional associations have opposed the legislation because it results in out of state professionals competing against Colorado residents, who are required to be licensed. SB 031 is assigned to the Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee and will be heard on Wednesday.

Permanent Tuition Cap on Higher Education Institutions Last session's SB 001 capped higher education institution's tuition increases at 6% for two years. This year, Senator Kerr introduced legislation, SB 062, to make the 6% cap on tuition permanent. The bill did have provisions for a higher education institution governing board to request permission from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to raise the cap for one year only. The bill was debated in a lengthy committee hearing Thursday. Many college students testified in support of the bill. The Colorado Department of Higher Education had a neutral position on the bill but did express concerns. SB 062 was ultimately defeated on a party line vote, with Democrats supporting Kerr and Republicans voting against.

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