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Highlights of the Week

Life under the Gold Dome is in full swing! Committee schedules were packed this week with long hearing agendas, many meeting late into the evening. Around 90 new bills were introduced this week including the much anticipated proposal referred to as “death with dignity” by proponents and “assisted suicide” by opponents – HB 1135. On Monday, the House Education Committee heard multiple bills related to early childhood education. Legislation by Representative Wilson to fund full-day Kindergarten passed on a 12-1 vote, though a fiscal note of \$236M with no fund source currently identified means that the bill will likely sit in the Appropriations Committee until the budget debate. HB 1024, which would increase the Colorado Preschool Program by 3,000 slots, will move to the Appropriations Committee on a vote of 7-6. Freshman legislator Alec Garnett and House Education Vice-Chair Brittany Pettersen got their proposal to create the Early Childhood Educator Development Scholarship, which incentivizes ECE teachers to receive higher degrees, through its first vote as well. The House Finance Committee gave initial approval to a bill to allow teachers to take a \$250 state tax deduction for school supplies and materials they pay for out of their own pockets – another bill that will now be on the Appropriations agenda. The Joint Education committee received a presentation on the much anticipated recommendations from the HB 1202 K-12 Assessments Taskforce. For almost four hours, the Joint Education committee poured over the recommendations and peppered presenting taskforce members with questions. Committee members were concerned about everything from maintaining equity in education via measuring student growth and permitting an accountability “time-out” for schools that may see a drop in test participation due to parent opt outs. Wednesday’s discussions was a preview of one of the session’s hottest topics. Now that the HB 1202 taskforce has officially filed their recommendations with the legislature, it is up to the General Assembly to decide the next steps. Many bills to reduce testing have already been introduced this session, and the State Board of Education voted Friday to support one such measure, HB 1125, which would end Colorado’s participation in Common Core and PARCC, and direct the state to create new standards within a prescribed timeframe and with specific provisions on the frequency of assessments.

On Thursday, the House said goodbye to one of their members, Assistant Minority Leader Libby Szabo. Two weeks ago, Representative Szabo was tapped to serve as one of the three Jefferson County Commissioners. **A vacancy committee was formed to appoint her replacement, and yesterday Lang Sias from Arvada won the vacancy election. Next week, the House Republicans are going to hold leadership elections to select their new Assistant Minority Leader.** The House and Senate held a joint session on Friday for their annual military appreciation day. Veterans from World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam, and the Gulf Wars joined the General Assembly to be honored by a series of resolutions. Two freshman legislators, Representative Jon Keyser and Representative Patrick Neville, served in the Middle East and spoke of their experiences. Next week will bring a *deja vu* of sorts. Legislation to repeal the gun control measures of 2013 and 2014 will be heard in their respective Senate and House Committees on February 2nd, Groundhog Day. The JBC will continue figure setting for the FY 2015-16 budget and the Joint Health Committees will be briefed on marijuana regulation and health impacts since marijuana's legalization in 2012.

Bills of the Week

Internet Sweepstakes Cafes Simulated Gambling For the second year in a row, legislation has been introduced to prohibit the operation of internet sweepstakes cafes with gambling simulations. In October, the Attorney General released an opinion that these facilities were illegal and must be shut down. However, law enforcement and the gaming industry have asked for more clarity on these types of businesses. The bill specifies that if any of the simulated games in the cafes contain the three components of gambling: risk, consideration, and prize, they should be shut down. After two hours of testimony for and against the legislation, the bill passed the House Business Committee 12-1.

Interchange Fee Representative Jon Becker and Representative Garnett are sponsoring legislation to prohibit the collection of an interchange fee. An interchange fee is defined as a fee established by a payment card network for the purpose of compensating the issuer of a debit or credit cards for its involvement in an electronic payment transaction. The bill provides for a two year grace period to allow for the continuation of existing contracts and software. The bill has a diverse list of co-sponsors in the House and the Senate. It is assigned to the House Finance Committee.

Sales and Use Tax Refund for Data Centers HB 1158 by Minority Leader DelGrosso and President Pro Tem Pabon was introduced, bringing back a measure that failed to secure funding last session. The legislation allows a sales and use tax refund to the owner, operator or tenant of a qualified data center. Colorado is considered a hub for the IT industry, however, proponents argue that the state is losing out on opportunities to host data centers due to our lack of tax credits or incentives.

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