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Under the Dome, Week 8

Highlights of the Week

The House and Senate floor engaged in lengthier floor debate this week in an effort to clear out their lengthy calendars. In the House, the floor unanimously passed legislation that would give school districts the flexibility to determine if English language learners should take reading language assessments in their language of instruction or their native language. The House also gave initial approval to **HB 1193** which aims to speed up the roll out of wireless broadband technology by updating statutory definitions and expediting local government permitting processes. The bill was developed after an almost yearlong stakeholder process between industry, local governments, and other organizations. The Senate passed **SB 027** which increases fine for texting and driving but clarifies that someone cannot be penalized for texting if they are stopped at a stop sign or stop light. The bill was amended in the Senate State Affairs Committee to clarify this point and also reduced the maximum fine from \$500 to \$300.

Committees churned through many hours of work as well. The Senate Finance Committee considered legislation that would eliminate the tax credit for alternative fuel vehicles and put a question on the ballot asking voters to retain that money for transportation funding. The Colorado Oil and Gas Association, a Nissan dealer, and the Colorado Motor Carriers Association, and CACI testified in opposition. Committee members amended the bill and advanced it to the Appropriations Committee. As amended, electric vehicles would lose their tax credit immediately and CNG vehicles and AFV trucks face an early sunset of the incentive in two years. The House Finance Committee met this week as well and approved on a 12-1 vote to reauthorize the existing child care tax credit for low income families (HB 1002). It also gave the first stamp of approval to legislation aiming to change TABOR's growth factor.

HB 1187, sponsored by Grand Junction Republican Dan Thurlow, would tie revenue growth to personal income as the measure to cap revenue collections as opposed to the current population plus inflation. The proposed formula is considered a more accurate indicator of economic strength or recession. HB 1187 passed the House Appropriations Committee when it met on Friday, as did HB 1181 which replaces the current 9th grade CMAS test with the PSAT

and HB 1184 regarding computer science education. Of note, HB 1187 did not receive support from any of the GOP members of the House Appropriations committee.

The JBC continued to work their way through figure setting this week tackling big divisions within the Department of Human Services and contemplating potential legislation to orbit the budget Long Bill when it's introduced at the end of March. The JBC unanimously voted to provide the Department of Human Services enough money to hire 67 new child welfare caseworkers throughout Colorado's counties. The Joint Budget Committee also voted 4-1 with one excused to set aside \$3.6 million for future legislation that implements the mental health holds taskforce recommendations (this bill was actually introduced Friday – SB17-207). There were many big ticket items though that the JBC set aside for later action including provider rates, state employee salaries, funding for the Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), a footnote that caps the existing drivers' license program for undocumented individuals, and whether or not to run legislation that would affect statewide mill levies and the senior homestead exemption. On deck for next week is figure setting for county administration, the Department of Higher Education as well as the Department of Education. All Departments will have an opportunity to bring back ungranted requests on March 17th after the quarterly Revenue Forecast is presented to the committee.

The week wrapped up with the Governor announcing a **new Executive Director of the Broadband Office** – Anthony Neal-Graves. In this role, he will be responsible for developing and executing Colorado's broadband strategy through private public partnerships. Previous to this position was a Vice President at Intel Corporation and spent more than 20 years working for AT&T Bell Laboratories and Lucent Technologies.

Bills of the Week

Sales And Use Tax Simplification Task Force - The bill creates the sales and use tax simplification task force made up of legislative members and state and local sales and use tax experts. The bill requires the task force to study sales and use tax simplification between the state and local governments, and in particular between the state and home rule jurisdictions

Halting the Marijuana Gray Market Colorado has led the nation in legalization and regulation of recreational and medical marijuana. However, due to loopholes in Colorado's current medical marijuana laws, a "gray market" has surfaced across the state leading to illegal diversion of marijuana out of state, human trafficking, dangerous marijuana home grows, and lack of certainty from law enforcement about their ability to respond to these areas of concern. The Governor's Office with the support of law enforcement, the public health community, Colorado counties, cities, and child protection organizations like the Kempe Foundation and Children's Hospital, introduced two pieces of legislation to close the loopholes. HB 1220 will clarify that only 12 plants whether recreational or medical can be grown in a residential house. If caregivers want to grow up to 36 (or 99 with a waiver) plants they will need to rent or use a

commercial facility. HB 1221 creates a grant program for law enforcement of communities under 200,000 people to use for marijuana enforcement purposes. Both bills have bipartisan sponsorship and will be heard in the House Finance Committee on Monday, March 6th at 1:30pm.

The Patient Safety Act On Wednesday, the House Health Insurance and Environment Committee met into the evening listening to the proponents of HB 1121. The bill is sponsored by Representative Janet Buckner. HB 1121 requires a finger print background check for doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers authorized to prescribe controlled substances. Colorado's current law only requires self-disclosure of past criminal convictions from doctors. Some providers are seeking amendments to limit the state's powers over employers as the bill advances. The bill passed the committee on a vote of 6-4 and will next head to the House Appropriations Committee.

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