April 6, 2015

<http://www.coloradocapitolwatch.com/bill-tracker-votes/0/391/2015/0/>

***"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."***

 ***Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.***

**Days Til Sine Die: 30**

**Just $10 million remains for Colorado's unpassed bills in this year's budget**

*The Denver Business Journal*

Colorado legislators officially introduced the 2015-16 budget bill on Friday, and it is chock full of numbers, such as $10.25 billion in general-fund spending and $216 million in increased K-12 money. But for business leaders watching a host of bills move through the process in the Legislature right now, the most important number is this: $10 million. That is how much room is set aside in the budget for hundreds of bills that are under consideration but have not yet died or become law in this session. That means any business-focused bill that carries a price tag - say, the data-centers tax break proposal or the business personal property tax exemption expansion - is going to have to compete ferociously not only against other business bills but against public-health or public-safety bills that also want a piece of that very limited fiscal pie.

**Senate voices support for budget bill, despite disputed amendments**

*The Denver Post*

A six-hour debate on the state budget bill - replete with tussles about student testing, immunizations and religious freedom laws - ended with more consensus than discord Wednesday as the Colorado Senate gave preliminary approval to the $25 billion spending plan. Republican and Democratic lawmakers voiced overwhelming support for the fiscal year 2015-16 budget bill and a series of related measures after considering more than 40 amendments to redirect money in a tight year. The spending plan - which takes effect July 1 - features $9.6 billion in discretionary spending, a 6.4 percent or $573 million hike from the current budget.

**Pointed words as Colorado Senate gives budget final approval**

*The Denver Post*

A $25 billion state budget crafted by an evenly split committee did little to ease political tensions Thursday in the Senate, where the bill received final approval on a 21-14 vote. Three Democrats broke party lines to join the majority Republicans in approving $9.6 billion in discretionary spending that includes 2 percent pay hikes for most state employees, $187 million in potential taxpayer refunds and $397 million for state construction projects. Republican leaders allowed only three amendments, rejecting dozens of Democratic attempts and even a few GOP measures that split the caucus. Senate Minority Leader Morgan Carroll accused Republicans of shutting out Democrats, saying it was a "good day for party discipline." The objection drew an incensed retort from Senate President Bill Cadman, who accused Democrats of "despicable" rhetoric in the debate.

**Colorado testing reduction compromise, Senate Bill 215, floundering**

*The Denver Post*

Gov. John Hickenlooper stepped to the podium in the Capitol's west rotunda, paused for a moment, then delivered a strong endorsement of carefully crafted bipartisan legislation to trim the number of mandatory state assessments given each year to Colorado students. Business representatives and the head of Democrats for Education Reform in Colorado stood alongside the governor. Top leaders of the Republican-controlled state Senate and the Democratic-led House co-headlined the March 17 news conference. Almost simultaneously, behind the scenes, the fragile coalition holding Senate Bill 215 together was falling apart. How the compromise bill fizzled showcases the increasingly complicated politics of education in America during an era of major changes to how children are tested and teachers are evaluated.

**Questions planned, but no audit, on Colorado tourism program's Gaylord subsidies**

*The Denver Business journal*

A committee of the state Legislature on Monday decided against conducting a full-scale audit into the state's Regional Tourism Act program, which has offered subsidies for the controversial proposed Gaylord Rockies hotel-conference center in Aurora. Instead, the panel has decided to haul leaders from the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) to a meeting in June and ask them to explain how they've decided which projects have gotten funding under the Tourism Act. Opponents of the Gaylord Rockies project, which has been the poster child of controversy for the program, said they were pleased by the decision, believing it will require state leaders to answer questions both publicly and thoroughly on why they approved and then refused to reconsider subsidies for the 1,500-room project.

**Colorado bill to regulate powdered alcohol becomes law**

*The Gazette*

Gov. John Hickenlooper has signed legislation to regulate the sale of powdered alcohol in Colorado. The bill Hickenlooper signed into law Monday gives the state's liquor enforcement division authority to regulate powdered alcohol like liquid alcohol and to tax it. The product called Palcohol is a powder to which water is added for the equivalent of a shot of vodka or rum. This month, federal regulators approved its sale and the company that owns the product says it hopes to start selling it this summer.

**Both parties toast Colorado booze bills at the Legislature**

*The Denver Business Journal*

Democrats and Republicans don't agree on much this legislative session. But they share support for bills that will help the state's craft breweries, distilleries and wineries. Five proposals are going through the Colorado Legislature that would affect these alcohol makers either directly or by aiding the stores and clubs that sell their products. State Rep. Jonathan Singer, the Longmont Democrat sponsoring three of them, said elected officials across the political spectrum recognize the economic benefit of these growing industries.

**Rep. Gordon Klingenschmitt stripped of committee post after "curse of God" comments**

*The Denver Post*

The leader of the House Republicans on Monday stripped Rep. Gordon Klingenschmitt from one of his two committee posts, saying the lawmaker's "curse of God" comments about a woman whose fetus was ripped from her womb were in "poor taste" and "insensitive."

**Hickenlooper tries to find more money for Colorado film incentives**

*The Denver Business Journal*

Colorado's film-incentive program avoided any attempts to strip its funding during state Senate debate on the 2015-16 budget Wednesday, but the increasingly popular three-year-old program is not out of the water yet. Members of the Legislature's Joint Budget Committee members cut Gov. John Hickenlooper's request for $5 million in funding for the three-year-old program in half when preparing the $10.25 billion general-fund budget in recent weeks. That move would leave the film program with only $1 million in available money for next year after subtracting the $1.5 million it already has promised to the Quentin Tarantino movie "The Hateful Eight" that currently is filming near Telluride.

**Editorial: Let Colorado voters decide on marijuana refund**

*The Denver Post*

Two-thirds of Colorado voters approved excise and sales taxes on retail marijuana two years ago with Proposition AA, with the expectation of $70 million in revenue per year. Now it seems voters will have to act again if the state is going to be able to keep any of the first fiscal years’ worth of marijuana state tax collections, which are comprised of a 15 percent excise tax and a 10 percent sales tax. Why? Chalk it up to a peculiar wrinkle in the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights and an innocent-sounding reference to the Colorado state budget in the 2013 Blue Book, which explains ballot measures. The Blue Book mentioned a figure for the total state budget that turned out to be substantially less than the eventual amount, thanks to the strong economy. And TABOR says that error means all of the first year's tax collections must be returned. All of them, mind you. But fortunately, just for the first year.

**Connect for Health Colorado causing friction with CEO nominee**

*The Denver Business Journal*

Less than a day after legislators established a special committee to work with the Connect for Health Colorado board on finding its new CEO, the board announced it had a preferred candidate Thursday - without any input from state officials. And now the chairwoman of the legislative committee overseeing the state-chartered health-insurance exchange is not happy. In fact, Sen. Ellen Roberts, R-Durango, said Thursday that the subcommittee will proceed with a meeting to draw up a proposed compensation plan and preferred qualifications for any potential CEO. And if Bob Malone, the sole finalist for the position who was announced by the Connect for Health board, fits or does not fit those parameters, so be it, she said.

**Governor approves expanded health exchange audit**

*The Gazette*

Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper has signed into law an expanded audit for the state-run health insurance exchange, along with an agreement on funding a program granting driver's licenses to immigrants regardless of their legal status. Hickenlooper signed a total of 13 bills Friday. They include a bill ordering a more thorough review of Connect For Health Colorado. That is the state-run health insurance shopping marketplace, which has already undergone a limited audit that uncovered some improper spending.

**Co-ops to get break on compliance with renewable energy**

*Grand Junction Sentinel*

A bill that has cleared the Colorado Legislature would ease how Colorado's 22 rural electrical cooperatives meet part of their renewable energy requirement. Senate Bill 15-046 cleared the House of Representatives by a unanimous vote this week and now goes to Gov. John Hickenlooper for his signature. "This was a great bill where a lot of different parties worked together to come to something that works for everybody, so I think he would be supportive of it," said Mona Neeley, a spokeswoman for the Colorado Rural Electric Association. The bill addresses a requirement of Senate Bill 252, which two years ago required that by 2020 20 percent of co-ops' sales come from renewable energy sources. While 19 percent of that can come from anywhere, the law requires that 1 percent come from locally produced, "distributed," generation, and that half of that come from the retail side, meaning from sources on the customer side of the meter such as solar panels.

**The Calculator**

**House Bills Introduced: 336**

**Senate Bills Introduced: 263**

**Number of Bills PI'd: 146**

**Bills Signed by the Governor: 88**