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Legislative News - Week Ten 3/21

During this time of year there is so much uncertainty about hearings, budgets, wrap up that what I say here may change tomorrow, but here's a start:

1113: The third education bill is to be introduced Friday morning with a hearing Friday afternoon. If this bill passes the Senate floor early next week, the budget committee will then develop one of the last budgets prior to going home. If the bill doesn't pass it is likely that the budget committee, JFAC, will develop a budget based on revenues with most of the funding going to the discretionary line item for school board trustees to allocate. Hard to say what is going to happen?

197: The budget stabilization bill that is important to Blaine, McCall Donnelly, Avery and Swan Valley school districts is awaiting a hearing in the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee.

99% rule: Currently school districts can budget for 99% of their previous year's funding if the district suffers from a 10% drop in enrollment. Work is on-going to try to recover some of this funding for the rural school districts that are small and can be devastated by a mill closure, etc. Perceived as "double dipping", the opposition does not want to "fix" this.

222: The bill allowing for firearms on school campuses passed the House this week and is on its way to the Senate. I opposed this bill along with all the colleges and universities in the state as well as a very compelling letter from Lori Haas who is the mother of a survivor of Virginia Tech. Ms. Haas submitted a letter in opposition from herself and over 50 of the parents of survivors and non survivors indicating that this interferes with existing law enforcement, how do the police know who the "shooter" is if several have guns, campus dynamics are

changed for everyone with the introduction of guns on campus. I was also concerned about guns and alcohol and the concealed weapon hoops that each sheriff enforces in his/her county. The fact that they are all different does not give me comfort.

Grandparents' visitation: The bill was returned to sponsor in the House Judiciary and Rules Committee because of inconsistencies and the fear that a "fit" parent would have to go to court to justify involvement from grandparents of a deceased spouse. The bill is being re-worked by the opponents and should be back to committee and the House and Senate before we go home.

Advertising on school buses: The bill was returned to committee because it was felt that advertising on buses can create a safety issue, that the schools are competing with the private sector, the PTA could drive advertising to the buses "for the schools" and create an uneven playing field, especially in our small towns and that the bill was too vague.

Urban renewal: House bills 95 and 110 have gone to the amending order in the Senate after two days of very lengthy hearings. Ketchum City Administrator Gary Marks testified.

269: The bill makes nutrient management plans confidential. I will be voting "no" for two reasons: Gooding County Planning and Zoning needs to review the NMPs to assure that duplicate fields are not being land applied with manure from the CAFOS. A letter from the EPA indicates that their regulations do not allow confidential NMPs for NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit Regulation) permits. They can't be confidential so says the EPA since the NMP contains effluent data which has to be public information according to their rules and the Court of Appeals.

Tax Commission: Hopefully the budget committee will approve a partial phase 3 of the program by the Tax Commission to continue to fill the tax gap between taxes collected and taxes owed. The proposal plans to backfill the current workforce so they will no longer be taking furloughs which seems to me to be a misallocation of resources. The Tax Commission effort has about a \$7:\$1 return on investment.

1067: DNA database funding expansion to all felons. The initial startup of adding all the felons to the database is \$748,000. Implementation and funding would not be until next year's budget. I strongly believe that this needs to happen, but was not able to vote "yes" as I don't think it is fair to approve something with no funding (like the education bills) and a future implementation date. It also puts a program in the pipeline for funding when we do have money, possibly ahead of something

else which is of a higher priority at that time. Tough vote as I know that these databases are critical to law enforcement.

260: This is the bill that outlines the savings that must be made in the Medicaid budget to meet the revenues that we have this year without raising any new revenues. I voted "no" on this bill. Health and Welfare cuts as well as Medicaid are creating situations where locals are picking up the costs. A study of the adult mental health division indicated that 35.55 positions have been cut from this division. This resulted in the necessary reduction of 452 open adult mental health cases. Of the former clients for whom the study was able to collect information:

9 were reported as having been incarcerated

48 have had at least one hospitalization

2 have completed suicide

These numbers strike a picture of what has been going on in a very compelling fashion. These budgets are before JFAC, the budget committee Friday.

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