

“Takin’ It To The House...”

A Calendar And Commentary From The Golden Dome

From: Representative Jim Wilson – HD 60

March 25, 2018

Every year about this time in the legislative session, I am reminded of ABBA’s November 1976 single: “Money, Money, Money”. Between the state budget bill (known appropriately as the “Long Bill”) and the School Finance Bill, everything is about Money, Money, Money. This year the budget for the state of Colorado is projected to be north of \$30 Billion. The March revenue forecast indicates there will be \$1.29 Billion in additional revenue over last year.

The big two – Transportation and Education are slated to receive the lion’s share of the new revenue. Approximately \$500 Million has been earmarked for transportation bonding. It will take around \$265 Million to meet the statutory obligation to education over last year. In addition, another \$150 Million is scheduled to reduce the Budget Stabilization Factor (formally known as the “Negative Factor”). \$8 Million is designated for addressing the teacher shortage and \$7 Million is earmarked for school safety. Another \$4 Million will fund 1,000 additional ECARE (early childhood) slots. PERA appears to be receiving \$225 Million – 60% going toward educators and 40% going toward state employees. Do the math – that about covers the entire \$1.29 Billion increase!

By statute, we have to balance the budget each year in the state of Colorado. (It would be good if the federal government had to do the same, but that is a different story...) Balancing the state budget in lean years is a challenge. However, in a surplus year like this one, with a projected increase of over \$1.29 Billion, all sorts of ideas surface to claim part of the dollars. I must note here that the intent already in statute to fully fund Kindergarten has been ignored once again. Over \$1.29 Billion in new revenue and not one cent set aside to address a prior obligation – what could be wrong with that picture?

During the debates over the Long Bill, committee work will pretty well come to a standstill. However, one bill of state-wide interest that I am carrying was heard on Monday -- SB 18-143: Parks & Wildlife Measures To Increase Revenue. SB 18-143 passed the Senate on a 35-0 vote, so I do not anticipate much opposition. Another one of my bills, HB 18-1284: Disclosure Of Prescription Costs At Pharmacies, is calendared for Thursday. HB 18-1284 would give the consumer the option of paying the insurance price (which would apply to the deductible) or the cash price – whichever is less. Currently, pharmacies are prevented from informing the consumer that a lower price may be available.

Bills are moving through the process and heading for the Governor’s desk on a daily basis. Two more of my bills have made that journey. HB 18-1186 (a continuation of

the Colorado Youth Advisory Council) passed the House 52-10 and SB 18-099 (Align Early Childhood Quality Improvement Programs) passed on a 39-22 vote. I also signed on as a co-sponsor of SB 18-104, another rural broadband bill on the way to the Governor.

As the ranking minority member of the House Education Committee, I will be partnering with Rep. Petterson (the committee chair) in carrying the School Finance Bill this session. K-12 and Higher Ed. Funding make up roughly 1/3 of the entire state budget. As was set forth earlier in this column, a lot of new money is proposed to flow into education. New money – new interest – new battles...it will not be a boring adventure!

Friday will mark the 80th day of the Second Regular Session of the 71st General Assembly for the state of Colorado. The session will be 2/3's completed, but bills continue to be filed. Legislators have an initial limit of 5 bills each, but the majority party can grant additional bill titles to individual legislators. Each session averages between 650 – 700 bills filed. This year, the number of bills being filed seems to be right on target. Traditionally, about 1/3 of all bills filed are heard in the final 2 – 3 weeks of the session. From this point forward, the pace quickens, nights get longer and tempers get shorter. Reading about it might be entertaining, but participating – not so much...

Please stay in touch as the session heads down the final stretch. My office number in the Capitol is 303-866-2747, or you can e-mail me at: wilsonforhd60@gmail.com or james.wilson.house@state.co.us if you have questions about bills or committee hearings, or would like to schedule a visit to the Golden Dome.

Yours for HD 60,

Representative, Jim Wilson