



Senate District 15 — Session Update — Week Three - 2016

The Capitol during session is extremely fast paced and last week was no exception. Legislative calendars are full with committee meeting hearings, legislative meetings and Capitol day events. Like every session, there is no lack of debate with the many issues currently up for discussion. Gambling measures, religious freedom and gun control are just a few of the issues under consideration this year.

House Passes 2016 FY Amended Budget

Thursday, January 28th, the House voted unanimously to pass the amended state budget for fiscal year 2016. The amended budget allocates nearly \$23 billion, which is about \$1.1 billion larger than the budget we originally adopted last year. Approximately 85 percent of the “new money” comes from the 2015 Transportation Funding Act and an increase in lottery sales. The budget includes nearly \$110 million to pay for enrollment growth in K-12 public schools and \$758 million for transportation projects. The amended budget now heads to the Senate for further consideration. We are expected to vote on budget in the next couple of weeks.

Horse Racing Bill Moves Forward

Senate Bill 264, which would legalize pari-mutuel betting on horse racing moves forward as it cleared the Senate Regulated Industries Committee on Wednesday. The Committee also approved Senate Resolution 135, a constitutional amendment that, if passed, would eventually allow citizens to vote on horse racing during the general election in November. Revenue generated from horse racing will be designated for education funding. What the funding formula from generated revenue will be is unclear, as there is debate on whether the money should be put towards “merit-based” scholarships or “need-based” scholarships.

Campus Carry

Thursday, January 28th saw the introduction of House Bill 859, which would make it legal to carry firearms on college campuses. The bill would not allow guns in “buildings or property used for athletic sporting events or student housing, including, but not limited to, fraternity and sorority houses.” The bill has been referred to the House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee for further consideration.

Religious Freedom

As expected, Religious Freedom legislation aimed at strengthening First Amendment rights on the state level are on the rise. Thus far, we have seen a number of bills brought forth. We can expect heated debate regarding these issues to carry on through the close of session.

Religious Freedom Continued...

SB 129- RFRA is intended to provide the same level of protection of religious freedom from state and local governments that the Federal RFRA offers from the federal government.

SB 284- FADA is intended to prevent the government from discriminating against any person on the basis of their sincerely held religious belief in traditional marriage.

HB 757- Pastor Protection Act would ensure that Pastors/Rabbis are protected from being forced to perform same sex marriages.

HB 756- Protect Religious Freedom Act would allow businesses to refuse event participation that would violate their religious beliefs.

HB 816- Student Religious Liberty Act would protect those who want to voluntarily participate in prayer during certain school activities.

As you can see, with only 28 days left in the 2016 session, we have our work cut out for us! In close, I want to thank you for allowing me to represent you. I also want to personally thank those of you that have offered kind words and encouragement throughout my time in office. As we make our way through session, your support means a great deal and reminds me daily of my primary task- ensuring that YOU have a voice at the Capitol. If you ever need anything, please reach out to me at anytime.



Ed Harbison
Senator of the 15th