

House hears tuition tax credit bill

Last Friday, the House Education Committee held a long and contentious hearing on House Sub for SB 22, a left-over from last year that would establish a voucher program through corporate tax credits. A corporation could establish a fund to grant private school "scholarships" for students willing to leave the public schools. The state would provide those corporations with a 70% tax credit for their effort. A \$10,000 contribution for scholarships would reduce the corporate tax bill by \$7,000. The bill would allow for up to \$10 million in lost revenue to Kansas.

The usual proponents and opponents appeared before the committee. Supporting the bill were the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Kansas Policy Institute, the Northfield School in Wichita, and the Superintendent of the Catholic Diocese in Wichita among others. Opposing the bill were KNEA, USA/Kansas, KASB, the Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators, Game on for Kansas Schools, The Kansas PTA, and the MainStream Coalition.

The hearing went very long and there was no time for discussion or action on the bill.

Pensions Committee nixes defined contribution bill

The House Pensions Committee opted not to advance a bill - HB 2519 - changing KPERs from a defined benefit pension system to a 401k-style savings plan. The bill was strongly opposed by KNEA and the other members of the Keeping the Kansas Promise Coalition.

One of the motivating factors in the decision was the fact that such a change would increase the state's obligation to what would be two public employee retirement systems. The state would still have its full obligation to current employees plus paying of the unfunded liability while at the same time supporting a new system.

The sponsor of the bill, Representative Rubin, commented that he felt it important to debate the bill in committee because he feels ultimately defined contribution needs to happen. The issue likely goes nowhere in the 2014 session, but it will probably be back in the future.

In other Pension Committee action today HB 2539 (COLA bill) failed on a voice vote. HB 2596, furlough protection bill which makes state worker's pensions whole if they are furloughed on a regular basis passed on a voice vote. The other bill up today to be worked, the Iran divestiture bill will be considered Wednesday when the committee plans to meet again.

First meeting of the Senate Pensions Committee

Senate Select Committee on Pensions met today to hear an update from the KPERS staff and to outline the work for the committee. Chairman Senator King stated that the committee would have a very narrow scope and would most likely be limited to five meetings. The topics the committee are set to cover is HB 2533 which is a bill to adjust the benefits to the Tier 3 Cash Balance plan and to discuss the Tier 2 Corrections Officers and explore putting that group in the KP&F section of KPERS. The committee is next schedule to meet next week on Wednesday.

House Education Committee takes up sex ed bill

The House Education Committee decided to work HB 2620, the bill changing participation in sexuality education programs to a mandatory opt-in. Currently local school boards determine whether the program will be opt-in or opt-out.

There was a lot of debate today and three amendments to the bill were made. The first was a technical amendment to fix a drafter's error. The second amendment deleted the words "health and" in every reference to health and human sexuality. Legislators wanted to be sure not to force families to opt in to the health education class, only the human sexuality portion of such a class. The third amendment would put in statute that such programs would be opt-out.

There was much confusion by the end of the meeting and it was decided that the Revisor would be tasked with drafting the bill with the amendments before it would be taken up tomorrow.

So, they'll be back at it tomorrow afternoon!

Drug testing and fingerprinting to be examined in Senate Ed

The Senate Education Committee met briefly today to consider SB 355, the Drug

Testing/Finger Printing bill. There are amendments being brought to the committee by Senator Arpke and Senator Schmidt so the committee will continue working on the bill tomorrow. There was discussion regarding whether the bill would run afoul of the Americans with Disability Act in its current form (probably according to the Revisor) and the fact that there are loopholes in the bill which need to be addressed, such as licensed teachers who work in private schools, so the committee will continue working on the bill tomorrow.