

Events under the dome have just got to make one wonder...

A lot of folks are wondering how it can get much crazier up here. We read the same press coverage as everyone else and then we get our daily bill packet from the statehouse and even we have to admit that on occasion the jaw drops!

Take, for example, a bill that has just lit up social media the past few days, Senate Bill 158. This bill creates a new tier of foster family to be known as a CARE family. (We aren't quite sure what CARE means but it is always capitalized.) These CARE families must meet nine criteria:

- (1) A husband and wife team married for at least seven years, in a faithful, loving and caring relationship and with no sexual relations outside of the marriage;
- (2) submit to a background check on the husband and wife;
- (3) no current use of tobacco by anyone in the family's home;
- (4) no history of unlawful drug use by anyone in the family's home;
- (5) no alcoholic liquor or cereal malt beverages in the family's home;
- (6) both the husband and wife have attained at least a high school diploma or equivalent;
- (7) either the husband or wife, or both, does not work outside the home;
- (8) the family is involved in a social group larger than the family that meets regularly, preferably at least weekly; and
- (9) provide the secretary at least three references from people that personally know the family well.

The bill has a significant fiscal note as well. It states that "the secretary shall pay each CARE family at a rate substantially higher than that of other foster care homes." Beyond that, the bill grants CARE families an amount of money equal to the statewide average

state aid per pupil should the CARE family decide to send this child to a private school.

This, of course is proposed at the same time Governor Brownback has announced millions of dollars in cuts to public education funding and the Senate is considering legislation to not fully fund the LOB equity dollars required by last year's school finance bill.

This week marriage is a big topic or more accurately, divorce is a big topic. There is a bill to put hurdles in front of couples seeking a divorce; hurdles intended to make it much more difficult to end a marriage.

Add to that Governor Brownback's decision to rescind policies that prohibit state agencies from discriminating against gay and lesbian public employees. These policies were put in place eight years ago. Now they are gone.

If you are anything like us, you're probably shaking your head and asking why our legislature is so concerned about a beer-drinking foster parent or a couple seeking to end a failed marriage or whether or not some state employee might be gay and not appearing to be particularly concerned about a tax policy that is bankrupting the state and forcing important state services like schools, highways, and the social service safety net to be slashed.

And then it hit us. Maybe this Governor and his allies, in crashing the state budget, are doing exactly what they wanted to do. To paraphrase Grover Norquist, perhaps our Governor and his allies really do want to "shrink government to a size that can be drowned in the bathtub."

Doing that is more difficult than they anticipated because the cuts hurt real people and real families every day. These cuts are making people mad. The Governor's education cuts have given him nothing but bad press for some time.

Maybe the goal of all this other stuff is simply to bump the economic failures of this administration off the front page, replacing them with things that will distract their natural opponents and inspire their natural political base.

Like the great magicians they are, they wave LGBT rights to distract us from the major damage they are doing to the services we all depend on and value.

Our advice to you? Don't let them.

Senate proposes wholesale elimination of public employee rights

As if the attack on teacher bargaining rights was not enough, two bills were introduced in the Senate today that will destroy collective bargaining rights for all public employees.

Senate Bill 176 addresses the Professional Negotiations Act which applies to teachers and faculty at community and tech colleges; SB 179 does the same thing to all other public employees - police, firefighters, correctional officers, and all other state and municipal employees.

You will be told by legislators that they still have collective bargaining rights but here are a few details:

Negotiations for teachers are limited to "the minimum amount of salaries and wages, including pay for duties under supplemental contracts." For municipal and state employees negotiations are limited to "the minimum amount of salaries and wages."

Both bills eliminate mediation and fact finding; the bill applying to state and municipal employees also eliminates arbitration and grievances.

Under current law employees under the Public Employee Employer Relations Act (PEERA) requires the board or council to vote to allow bargaining but the bill would require that vote to occur and then require a vote of the public.

Also eliminated is the Public Employee Relations Board, currently a labor/management group that addresses conflicts. Under SB 179, all power would be given to the Secretary of Labor.

While Dave Trabert's anti-teacher collective bargaining bill only applies to K-12 teachers, SB 176 would apply to K-12, community colleges, and technical colleges.

Senate Education Committee working bills

The Senate Education committee met today to discuss SB 32 requiring districts to complete efficiency compliance audits and SB 60 allowing home school students to participate in KSHSAA activities regardless of attendance in school.

Senator Arpke who added a balloon amendment to SB 32 to stipulate that 6 districts

would pilot the audits and that these districts would be chosen by the School Efficiency Task Force. Senator Hensley asked if a requirement that a diverse sampling of districts participate in the pilot would be included, but Chairman Abrams replied that they would not.

Senator Melcher then offered an amendment to SB 32 requiring participating districts to pay for 50% of the cost of the audit stating that it would "require them to have skin in the game," motivate them to keep costs down and participate responsibly. After a motion to vote on SB 32 was offered by Melcher and Seconded by Arpke, Senator Pettey asked to back up and allow her to offer her amendments. Chairman Abrams asked Melcher if he would recall his motion. Melcher was not willing to recall his motion and Pettey's amendments died on the spot without any hearing. SB 32 and both Arpke and Melcher amendments passed 5-4 vote as reported by the chairman.

SB 60 discussion began with a review of the bill and amendments offered by Senator Pettey. Her amendments included a requirement for home school students to show some commitment in order to participate in KSHSAA activities. That commitment was defined as "participation in at least one credit course" in the school where the activity takes place, but that the course participation could include online or distance courses.

Additionally, Pettey offered amendments to require a specific age cap on participants at 19 and that homeschool participants would be required to pay all applicable participation fees. Senator Melcher asked Pettey what problem she was trying to solve with her amendments. Discussion became bogged down when concerns over FTE and credit weighting came into question. Dale Dennis expertly navigated the committee through those questions.

A motion was made to table the bill and amendments for further discussion later. More discussion occurred however, after which Chairman Abrams summarily ended the committee hearing. Senator Schmidt objected noting that she had nine amendments of her own to be introduced. Chairman Abrams then responded, "We're going to meet tomorrow."

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