

Slow Friday, Busy Week Ahead

It was deathly quiet under the dome today, but there is a full schedule coming up next week with bill hearings and possible action on a number of bills in committees.

As we reported yesterday, Senate Education still needs to finish up work on SB 60, the bill allowing homeschoolers and private school students to participate in public school sports and activities. Senator Vickie Schmidt still has one amendment to go.

On Wednesday, Senate Education will hold a hearing on SB 176, the bill to strip collective bargaining for teachers of mediation and fact finding and to limit negotiations to minimum salaries and supplemental contract pay.

The House Education Committee has a packed schedule including taking action on HB 2232, personal financial literacy as a graduation requirement; HB 2078, requiring school districts to adopt school safety and security plans; SB 2262, providing a compliance deadline and penalties for non-compliance with the student data privacy act; SB 2174, tax credits for low income students scholarship act amendments; and HB 2199, opt-in to sex ed programs.

They will have hearings early in the week on most of the bills above and will also be holding hearings on HB 2234, prohibiting college employees from using their titles when writing in the newspaper, and HB 2207, promoting ethnic studies.

There will be continuing discussions on KPERS issues but no bills are listed for debate as of today. The House Education Budget Committee will be making their recommendations of the Department of Education. The Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee will be hearing a bill that would prohibit policies that prohibit public employees from carrying concealed weapons at work providing they have a permit. The last time this came up, insurance companies announced that they would not provide liability insurance to school districts that allowed employees to carry guns.

Are we devolving?

Those among us lucky enough to have been youthful in the 1970's will remember that the

decade was kicked off with the shooting of 13 students by the National Guard on the campus of Kent State University in Ohio. Four students who observed the tragedy of that day formed a band called DEVO.

Devo was shorthand for "De-evolution." The band members suggested that the campus shootings they had witnessed, were indicative of the de-evolution of society. They may have spoken 45 years too soon.

We have now spent 239 years allowing representative democracy to evolve but it seems that evolution is now turning. Are we really seeing in the Kansas legislature the de-evolution of democracy?

The last few years of "legislating" have been interesting in the way the process has devolved from the respectful sharing of ideas and seeking of compromise to better serve all the citizens of the state to a radical consolidation of power and the adoption of a "dissent is treason" attitude.

This year, anti-public school lobbyist Dave Trabert publicly opposed a bill because it was the result of a compromise. Compromise - to Trabert and his followers - is bad; tantamount to treason.

At one time we thought this had reached its apex when the Governor conned moderate Republican senators into supporting his reckless tax cuts and then actively campaigned to throw those same Republicans out of the Senate in the next election.

We were wrong.

Then last April, we thought the apex was the adoption of HB 2506. At that time the legislature in the wee hours of the morning cobbled together as much anti-education legislation as they could and crafted a jam-packed school finance bill that would begin to privatize public education and strip teachers of the right to a fair hearing on the grounds for a dismissal. These ideas had either failed to be adopted by the appropriate legislative committee (corporate tax credits) or had never been introduced as a bill or subject to a public hearing at all (the elimination of teacher due process).

We were wrong again.

Which leaves us wondering if this year will be the apex of the de-evolution of democracy

in Kansas.

What have we seen so far this year?

- The introduction of a bill to give heterosexual, non-smoking, teetotaling, non-working, church-going married couples preferential treatment if they wish to be foster parents.
- A bill to turn non-partisan local elections into partisan, dark money political circuses. At the hearing on this bill, local opponents of the bill had driven hours to testify but the committee chairman (and bill sponsor) let the committee time be taken up by the proponents and suggested the opponents who could not stay over another night could just try to find a committee member in the hall.
- Four education organizations representing school boards, superintendents, administrators, and teachers crafted a bill amending the Professional Negotiations Act at the urging of the legislature only to have their bill rejected by the House Education Committee in favor of radical changes proposed by a lobbyist with no experience as a teacher, administrator or school board member.
- Hearings on marriage conducted by a committee chairman concerned about "the degeneration of the culture" featured invited speakers who agreed with the chairman and wound up with harsh words for single-parent families.
- The reversal of policies that prohibit the termination of a LGBT state employees; protections that had been in place for seven years.
- Hearings on constitutional amendments to end merit selection of Supreme Court justices, either turning them into political appointees or subjecting them to popular partisan elections.
- A bill (which gets a hearing next week) that would prohibit college professors from using their titles when writing in a newspaper. There have been some college professors who have written columns critical of the Governor, the Legislature, and the income tax cuts.
- A bill to criminalize K-12 teachers for the use of materials a parent might find objection with even when those materials are part of the district's approved curriculum.

Okay, NOW this is starting to sound like an apex!

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