

Legislation Update – June 10, 2015

OPERATING BUDGET

Last Friday, as we discussed, budget negotiators reached a “tentative” agreement on the 2015–17 Operating Budget spending level (the so-called “size of the box”). That agreement is no longer in place. On Monday, Sen. Braun, Vice Chair of the Ways & Means Committee and one of the budget negotiators, stated there never was an agreement. Questions remain: Was there a tentative agreement, but the caucuses rejected it? Did the governor’s office simply misunderstand the conversation? Was rumor of a tentative agreement intentionally leaked to push legislators towards the finish line? We’ll probably never know, but it seems very clear there is NO agreement in place today—on a spending level, on how to achieve the spending level, or the individual program allocations within the budget. Negotiations continue.

H.S. ASSESSMENTS, HB 2214

There are still attempts to act on HB 2214, either as a full package or a scaled-down version to address the Biology issue. In terms of process, remember that at the close of any session (regular or special), all opposite house bills are returned to their original house. HB 2214 passed the House on the day before the end of the first special session and died, lacking any action, in the Senate Early Learning & K–12 Education Committee. When the first special session adjourned, HB 2214 was returned to the House. It sits on the House’s Third Reading Floor Calendar, ready to be moved at any time.

It is our understanding that House members have been called into town tomorrow, Thursday, and are scheduled to take action on at least one bill, perhaps more. The one bill on the docket appears to be HB 2214. (The House Rules Committee is meeting now to pull bills to the floor, so we’ll know the potential list of bills later.) Sen. Litzow continues to say he has no intention on acting on the bill, but will have a “discussion” on high school graduation “after the Legislature completes its special session work.” He likely will not budge, so the strategy now is to shift the conversation from a policy issue to a budget issue. Remember, the bill is embedded in the House budget and they have “booked” a \$29 million savings. By attempting to focus on the budget aspect of the issue, the hope is the bill can be moved around Litzow—without “rolling” him or making him look bad.

COMPENSATION/LEVY REFORM

Following the introduction and public hearing of the Senate’s bills on compensation & levy reform (SB 6109 from the Republicans and SB 6102/6103/6104 from the Democrats), Sen. Dammeier and Sen. Rolfes, among others, came back together and have been working to craft a bi-partisan, consensus package. Their new bill was to be unveiled several weeks ago, but it continued to be reshaped. The new bill, released today and numbered as [SB 6130](#), is scheduled to receive a public hearing in the Senate Ways & Means Committee tomorrow, 1:30. The bill has not yet been scheduled for executive action, so it is unclear if the Senate intends on moving the bill or if this hearing is simply a public display to show that work continues. Regardless, the House continues to be firmly opposed to adopting a comprehensive solution right now, so it may be a moot point. House Leadership continues to advocate for a continued dialogue, presumably via the “plan to plan” bill, HB 2239.

Representative Hunter, who generally understands the issue and wants to solve it, says the Senate plan is too complicated and controversial, with too many moving parts, to be adopted this session. However, he is also concerned that just continuing to talk (HB 2239) will not appease the Supreme Court. He has discussed a “middle path” that would begin to address the compensation issue quickly, yet take a more reasoned, long-term approach to building a new compensation system and addressing the local levy issue. Bill Keim, along with Nancy Moffat, WASBO, sent an “open letter” to legislators about the issue and also submitted the piece to the Olympian as an op-ed. The Olympian published the piece yesterday:

<http://www.theolympian.com/2015/06/09/3765648/progress-on-a-school-funding-plan.html>.