

General Session Update from Senator Aaron Osmond

Week 2 – February 1st to February 7th, 2015

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As the 2nd week of the session has completed I feel we are off to a solid start, but there is still a lot to be done. Even though we have a very short session in comparison to other states, as a representative of our great state of Utah, I am proud that we are able to fully utilize this short time to pass the most impactful and important legislation needed in our state, and nothing more.

There were many important issues that were discussed in our committees this week, even though we have not yet spent a lot of time on these issues on the Senate Floor. I am also pleased with the progress we have made on some of my own bills that I am sponsoring this session. More details about those bills are found below.

When sending out my weekly news letters, it has come to my attention that some of those I represent may not fully understand the legislative process, including some of the “lingo” I use in my newsletters. As such, when I send out these letters I thought it would be beneficial to clarify and define some of these items. As the session continues I hope to share other clarifications that will help those in my district better understand the legislative process.

Here are a few explanations to start:

Why a Bill Goes to a Committee?

The committee is the first step in the process of making a new law or changing an existing one. The committee enables the Legislature with an opportunity to review or vet a bill in more detail, because the entire Legislature does not have time to do so. The committee is made up of Legislators who are appointed by their Senate or House leadership. Committee members hear witnesses representing various viewpoints on what is being proposed. These members are often times the most educated or experienced legislators in that particular subject area. Committee members determine what action to take on a bill. They can vote to favorably recommend, amend, substitute, or send back to Rules, or kill the bill altogether. These committee hearings are a critical part in the process where legislators are able to hear public opinion both for and against the bill and get insight from their peers in the Legislature. In fact, if there is a bill you are interested in I encourage you to attend the related committee hearing to experience the process.

What is a Substitute Bill and Why is it Necessary?

When a bill is presented during a committee hearing, the Legislators may make the decision to amend or change a bill or to completely substitute the bill as needed. They can make these changes with or without the support of the bill sponsor if they feel the need to change it. This is possible to do as long as the bill still relates to the original bill name and subject. When a substitution bill is made it keeps the old number (ex. SB116), but is differentiated by a 1st Substitute or 2nd Substitute, etc., at the front. Once an amended or substituted bill is approved by the committee, the bill moves on to the Senate or House Floor for its next vote. Bills may be still be amended and substituted even on the Senate or House floor. A controversial bill may have 5 or 6 substitutes before it is finally passed. It is all part of the process of the Legislature to fully vet and review each bill.

Visitors on the Hill

This week we had some important visitors on the hill and we recognized some high achieving Utahns:

Congressman Jason Chaffetz visited us on Friday. He shared his concerns about the Obama administration's Justice Department decision that online gaming will allow online gambling -- even in states where gambling is illegal. He talked about prison reform legislation from a federal level; the public lands issue; federal bailouts, and congratulated Utah on the state of our fiscal house; he also wants federal gas tax removed, stating that it is an issue that should be dealt with solely on a state level.

Our Own Bingham High Football Team visited us on Thursday! I was able to personally honor them on the Senate Floor for playing in the first ever State Champions Bowl Series played in Boca Raton, Florida during December of 2014. The Miners proudly represented Utah and, though they did not win the bowl series, they played with distinction and courage in their overtime second-place finish. Led by Coach Dave Peck, the Miners have achieved significant national recognition for their outstanding 2014 program both on and off the field, finishing with a number 8 national ranking from a December USA Today poll and for outstanding leadership in the community. We appreciate the team members, the entire coaching staff, and the administration of Bingham High School in attaining these outstanding achievements. A special thank you goes to Coach Dave Peck who is retiring this year after 31 years of coaching High School Football! Thank you Coach for all you have done for our community!

Daybreak Elementary School. I was also pleased to be able to work with the kids from Daybreak elementary and their wonderful administration in proposing SB53, the Domestic Animal of Utah bill. This year I was approached by the 4th grade class of Allie Meyer with the idea of proposing the State Domestic Animal. Although many nay-sayers might suggest there are “better things” to be doing with our time, I am proud of working so closely with her class and fostering an interest in civic engagement. We proposed this bill in Committee on Wednesday and had most of the 4th grade from Daybreak Elementary come up in committee to show their support. The bill passed with favorable recommendation and we now wait for it to be voted upon on the Senate floor. Thanks to all at Daybreak Elementary!

Key Issues Being Discussed Behind the Scenes

Healthy Utah Plan. We are spending a lot of time in our behind the scenes caucus meetings discussing the merits and concerns of various methods to expand Medicaid for those who do not have health insurance. I am personally struggling with what to method to support right now. I have no confidence that the data we are being given is an accurate reflection or forecast of the total potential size of those to be insured or the potential cost to the tax payers. Every other state that has expanded Medicaid has missed their forecasts by large numbers. However, I also recognize the insurance need and potential system wide savings we could realize if those currently uninsured had coverage. I welcome your feedback and comments on this. The bottom-line is this: once coverage is given, we will never be able to pull it back politically. We have to act wisely on this.

Fuel Tax. The other hot topic is Fuel Tax. We are not covering the costs of maintain our roads. Cities are buried under a mountain of costs that they cannot cover to maintain our local roads. Some roads are now passed repair stage because they have never received maintenance and must now be replaced at much higher cost. Our current model of a fixed amount of tax per gallon is not going to work long term. We have to make a change. My personal preference is to eliminate the gas tax and increase the sales tax on gas and all other goods (except food). This will ensure the cost is born by all who use our roads in Utah. I welcome your thoughts on this approach or other ideas.

Property Tax Equalization. This is actually one of my key issues. I am promoting the concept that we need to equalize property taxes throughout the State or we will end up with a Federal Court forcing us to do so in the future (like Arizona just experienced). I believe we need to use the State Property Tax to address this need. We need to use state property tax funds to shore-up those districts in the state who have the highest property tax burden, but the lowest revenue per student. This is exactly what we do with our income tax. The time has come to do this with our property taxes as well. Please send me your thoughts on this as well.

A Sample of Bills We Reviewed This Week

Here is a small sample of the many bills we have reviewed and discussed in our committees this week:

- SB 64 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0064.html> This bill makes changes to tax deductions and credit provisions related to Utah Educational Savings Plan accounts.
- SB 45 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0045.html> makes it legal to use a crossbow during archery hunting season.
- SB 66 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0066.html> was on the consent calendar, which means that there was no debate on the bill because it was one that was approved by a committee during interim. This bill would make it illegal to build campfires on the shores of lakes or rivers when the water is currently low but would someday raise and cover the spot where the fire had been built.

- SJR 10 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SJR010.html> is a resolution that will support and honor Vietnam Veterans.
- Another bill that passed unanimously out of that committee this week was SB 106 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0106.html>. If this bill passes it would add \$10 million to the already allocated \$115 million used to hire additional teachers and classroom help to reduce class sizes and teacher/child ratios.
- SB 92 <http://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/SB0092.html> is being sponsored by Senator Knudsen. This bill deals with qualification of a dentist. Senator Knudsen is a dentist, so he has practical knowledge about the bill. One of the things that makes Utah function so well is that we have a part time legislature and all those serving have regular occupations and jobs the rest of the year, so there is a great deal of "boots on the ground" experience in the vetting process.

Status of My Bills in Progress

In this section I will list those of my bills that have made progress during the prior week (to keep things short in the newsletter). If you want information on any of my bills not listed below, please feel free to email me or my interns:

- **SB 33 – PUBLIC SCHOOL GRADUATION AMENDMENTS** (Status: Favorable recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): Requires public schools to better prepare kids for early graduation by providing an eighth grade student and the student's parent or guardian necessary information to do so. It increases the Centennial Scholarship amount for students who graduate high school early to \$2000.00
- **SB 37 – DATA REPORTING REGARDING FRONT-LINE TEACHERS.** (Status: Favorable Recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): requires the State Board of Education to report data to the Education Interim Committee on the allocation of resources for front-line teachers; and makes the data available on the Internet to the public.
- **SB 38 – BEHAVIORAL TESTING AND TRACKING RESTRICTIONS.** (Status Favorable Recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): eliminates certain references to authorizing behavioral testing or tracking in public schools; and makes technical changes.
- **SB53- STATE DOMESTIC ANIMAL.** (Status Favorable Recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): This bill designates the Golden Retriever as the State Domestic Animal. This is the bill that was created with the help of the children of Daybreak Elementary. I also appreciate Maureen Kilgour who brought Gus her Therapy and rescue Golden Retriever to help bring awareness to this bill and to the many great organizations throughout the state that help our furry friends find homes.
- **SB114- This bill: BOARD OF EDUCATION COMPENSATION AMENDMENTS.** (Status Favorable Recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): Addresses the compensation of members of the State Board of Education until the Legislature sets that compensation in an appropriations act; requires the Legislature to consider recommendations, if any, on the compensation of members of the State Board of Education made by the Elected Official and Judicial Compensation Commission.
- **SB117- INTERVENTIONS FOR READING DIFFICULTIES PILOT** (Status Favorable Recommendation, waiting on Floor vote): Bill creates a pilot program to provide interventions for students at risk for, or experiencing, reading difficulties, including dyslexia for students in kindergarten through grade 5 who are at risk.
- **SCR 001- CONCURRENT RESOLUTION TO CHANGE UTAH'S DESIGNATED TIME ZONE AND OBSERVANCE OF DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME** (Status Sent back to rules for re-consideration): This resolution calls for the change of Utah's designated time zone and observance of daylight saving time. The change would be the switch of the designated time zone from Mountain Standard Time to Central Standard Time to enjoy the effective of 1 additional hour of light all year long.

Well, that's it for now. Thanks again for your support. I so appreciate the honor and opportunity to serve you!

My best to you and your family,

Sincerely,

Senator Aaron Osmond

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