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School Board Advocate: February 24, 2017

Volume 28, Number 4



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The Grind

As the 2017 Colorado legislative session rolls on, the reality of the state budget is starting to force legislators into some hard decisions. The competition to fund transportation, education and social services, among other things, with an ever-shrinking pool of funds leaves few options for lawmakers to consider. This has led some legislators to begin talking about how Colorado might do things differently.

Rep. Dan Thurlow, R-Grand Junction, and **Sen. Larry Crowder**, R-Alamosa, have introduced [HB 1187](#), which if approved would change how the revenue limit in the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) is calculated. It would move the calculation from inflation plus population growth to a measure using statewide personal income. HB 1187 would put the following question in front of voters in November:



“Without raising taxes, may the state increase the amount of money that it annually retains and spends under the voter-approved revenue change from 2005 by allowing an annual adjustment to the amount based on the recent average change in Colorado personal income instead of an adjustment for the population change and inflation?”

Since this question is a statutory change and not a constitutional one, it would require only a simple majority vote of the legislature to be referred to voters (not a 2/3 majority, as we stated incorrectly in a previous communication).

Also, a group of legislators led by **Reps. Millie Hamner**, D-Summit County, and **Bob Rankin**, R-Carbondale, along with **Sens. Owen Hill**, R-Colorado Springs, and **Andy Kerr**, D-Lakewood, is gathering input on a bill that would create a statewide committee to study the future of K-12 education in Colorado. The bill has not yet been introduced, but potential bill sponsors are gathering input on the issue based on questions like:

- Are you satisfied with the achievement outcomes of all the students in your district?
- What are the top challenges for local schools?
- What groups should be involved in the discussion?

The biggest challenge to this proposed bill, or any legislation, is money. The state continues to face a significant funding shortfall, a problem that shows no sign of abating in the near future. The CASB advocacy team will get you details as they emerge.

Recap of CASB’s Winter Legislative Conference

We wrapped up a successful and informative conference with a trip to the Colorado Capitol on Friday morning. Members met with legislators and then got a briefing on the federal picture from Amirah Salaam, government relations counsel from the National School Boards Association.

Highlights from Thursday’s session:

Michael Griffith: State and School District Budgets in an Era of Change

Griffith, a school finance strategist with the Education Commission of the States, has a claim to fame that few can match: He has read and pored over the state funding formula for each of the 50 states – and lived to tell about it.

He provided a national perspective on school finance but also said that much remains uncertain. Regarding the new administration in Washington, he said: “I don’t know anyone who has any idea of what’s coming.” On matters ranging from vouchers and school choice to the Every Student Succeeds Act, he said the education community is in a “holding pattern.”

Since the Education Commission of the States is based in Denver, Griffith said he felt comfortable digging into school finance in Colorado. He said the state’s school funding formula is not perfect, but the formula itself is not the problem. It is the lack of funding.

He likened Colorado’s situation to a house: The plumbing is fine, but it’s a lack of water pressure. “You don’t have a sufficient number of dollars flowing through the system.”

Natalie Mullis: Rain or Shine? A Look at Colorado’s Cloudy Fiscal Future

Mullis, the chief economist for the Colorado General Assembly, finished her talk by saying, “And with that happy news ...”

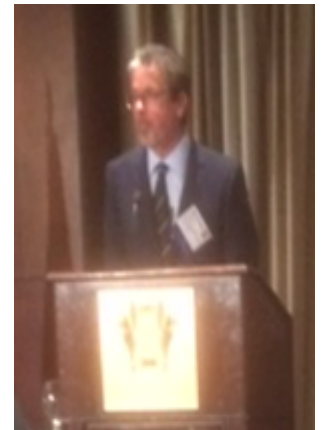
That valiant attempt at levity followed a summary of the state’s fiscal condition that is all too familiar to school board members. Even though “we are in the middle of an economic expansion,” Colorado will face another painful budget year, and school districts in particular will feel the pain.

One factor this year will be the recalculation of the residential assessment rate. In 1982, it was 21 percent (set by the Gallagher Amendment). This year’s rate will not be set until April, but it is likely to be 6.56 percent. That will reduce the amount of local property tax revenue statewide, which in turn will require the General Fund to backfill many school district budgets.

Mullis’ long-term forecast: Budget problems will persist, and legislators will continue to look hungrily at education funding “because they go where the money is.”



Arlan Van Ry, Christien Haslett and Rep. Donald Valdez



Constitutional Convention: A Conversation

Ken DeLay, Kathleen Sullivan, Sen. Pat Steadman, Brenda Morrison and Jane Urschel

Ken led a fascinating discussion about a constitutional convention – what is it, who participates, what can be accomplished? Panelists provided these insights:



- **Kathleen Sullivan**, CASB's chief counsel, explained that authority for a state constitutional convention is covered in a single paragraph of the Colorado Constitution. The constitution requires legislative action and a series of elections, but it lacks specifics on timing, election requirements and how delegates would do their work.
- **Sen. Pat Steadman** said he has evolved from thinking a convention would be an "entertaining idea" to being, perhaps, Colorado's "best hope." But he said the legislature would be wise to set some parameters and guardrails to give a convention a fair chance of success. For instance, the scope could be confined to fiscal matters so that delegates don't get lost in a maze of social issues. "I would like to see the General Assembly step up so that we can have this conversation," he said.
- **Brenda Morrison**, a partner in Engaged Public and a veteran of many statewide campaigns, provided a brief history of constitutional conventions in Colorado and other states. Colorado legislators put a convention measure on the ballot in 1915, 1921 and 1929; each one failed. Later, in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, Colorado leaders and community groups convened for mock conventions and other attempts at setting statewide priorities.
- **Jane Urschel**, former CASB chief lobbyist and deputy executive director, described her experience as a delegate to a mock constitutional convention, and she added perspective based on her affection and respect for school board members. At a mock convention in 1987, in the pre-TABOR era, topics ranged from "bears to booze." Now, 30 years later and with conflicting fiscal restrictions embedded in the constitution, she thinks a constitutional convention represents the "unfinished business of the people of Colorado." She also thinks current and former school board members would be "excellent" delegates. "Matters are ripe," she said, "not to repeal but to modernize, so that we can educate our children. Don't we need to talk – now?"

CASB Advocacy Tools

- [CASB Bill Tracker](#)
- **CASB Legislative Conference Call**
Tuesday, March 14 at 8 a.m.
Dial 877-240-8466
PIN: 8115970342#
Presentation available at <http://join.me/mattcookcasb>
- **CASB Members at Education Committee** – [Sign up here](#)
- [CASB Days at the Capitol](#)



Our next Day at the Capitol is Wed., March 1. Join us at CASB for a briefing with our advocacy team, followed by a visit to the Colorado Legislature to see the House and Senate in action. To find out what's scheduled, visit the [Colorado General Assembly website](#).

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