

HOUSE DISTRICT 45 FEBRUARY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

February 20, 2007

Dear fellow House District 45 residents,

By the end of February, all bills must be passed out of their house of origin. That means that here in the House we will have acted on over 300 bills in about 7 weeks. Action is fast and furious. Days are filled visiting with constituents, fellow legislators, legislative research and drafting staff, executive branch officials, and yes, even lobbyists.

My assignment to the **House Education Committee** has put me on a fast learning curve for the myriad of education statutes in Colorado law. I'm particularly interested in policies that will raise the high school graduation rate (currently about 70%), improving our kids' preparation so they can perform college level work, and increasing the 4-year post graduation rate (currently about 20%). However, it appears the teachers' union is more interested in a power struggle to control every decision in every school.

House Bill-1041 is a great example to share. Sponsored by Rep. Debbie Benefield, (D) Arvada, this bill threatened to make it nearly impossible for local school boards or districts to obtain a waiver from the State Board of Education. In fact, the bill resulted from the Douglas County School Board getting a waiver so that it could license a hard-to-fill teacher position (Mandarin Chinese). The proponents of the measure opined that if Douglas County could do it, others would do it and the teachers' union would lose control over some instructional employees. What a shame...Douglas County created an innovative solution to a problem, and now the union wants to prevent other districts from having that same opportunity to be creative and solve problems unique to their schools.

When the bill reached the floor this past Friday, I spoke out strongly to maintain the waiver option. In fact, the entire Republican caucus as well as 6 Democrats joined with me in successfully defeating this bill. *The defeat of HB-1041 was the 1st Democrat sponsored bill that died on the House floor.*

I also serve on the **House Finance Committee**...that's a second fast learning curve into the finances and budget of the State of Colorado. One of the most important bills considered in this committee so far was HB-1184, by Speaker Romanoff, (D) Denver, to require the Public Employees Retirement Association ("PERA"), as well as all public pension funds, to divest their investments in companies with financial dealings with the Sudanese government. Colorado Taxpayers contribute approximately \$500 million dollars a year into PERA through employer matching. Because of the genocide and atrocities our U.S. government has documented in the Darfur region of Sudan, I became one of the bi-partisan sponsors of HB-1184. I objected strongly to a PERA suggestion that the Colorado taxpayers

pay the fund's divestiture costs. It was unfortunate that a law had to pass in order for PERA to do the right and ethical thing. Fortunately, I was able to pass an amendment that prohibits the state from reimbursing PERA for any costs associated with complying with HB-1184. If you are interested in learning how to divest any investments you may have in the Sudan please visit: www.sudandivestment.org .

Additionally, I am working on a bill to bring new money into education by offering tax-credits to those who have children in K-12. This bill proposes tax credits for tutoring, text books, and other similar direct expenses which parents incur to improve the education of their children. The bill would also encourage private sector investment for "at risk" kids, distressed or declining school districts, or innovative public school programs. I invite any of you with interest in this topic to contact me with suggestions of what might be included.

Finally, the 1st bill that I carried, HB-1064, which provides location technology for those who wander due to a cognitive disability such as Alzheimer's, successfully passed out of the Local Government Committee on a unanimous 13-0 vote. A recent article was published and I welcome you to click on the link below:

<http://denver.yourhub.com/CastlePines/Stories/News/Government/Story~179261.aspx>

Until next month,



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HD 45 includes the following communities: Castle Rock, Castle Pines, Cripple Creek, Divide, Florissant, Franktown, Larkspur, The Pinery, Victor, and Woodland Park