

Week 10:

The legislature has completed its 56th day of the 90 day legislative session. The talk at the legislature is that the legislature will adjourn April 14th roughly two weeks early in order to allow at least 14 days should there be a need for a special session later in the year. There have been 989 or so bills introduced to date.

The house just passed HB 2, the big budget and spending bill for the session. That bill cleared the house floor in only one session, which is unheard of. The bill will move to the senate early next week for that body's consideration.

I have attached herewith a copy of the page contained in HB 2 that sets forth the appropriations for the department of livestock

What is interesting to note about that document is that it contemplates adding a new position to the department, which such position is described as a 'deputy executive officer'. I have no idea what this position is, or what its responsibilities will be, but it is budgeted for \$120,000. I presume this may be a legal position?

The budget contemplates some \$11,714 million in spending authority for the department

This past week was a relatively quiet one for the association in terms of substantive legislation.

The Association testified in favor of a few bills this week, including

* SB 155, which is a bill to prohibit government regulation of agricultural seeds. The bill is designed to make sure that seeds can only be regulated at the state level, and not county by county or city by city.

The bill passed out of the house committee rather quickly, and is now headed to the house floor. That bill should end up on the Governor's desk.

* HB 97 -- the MWGA also supported legislation to increase the block management landowner payment cap from \$12,000.00 to \$15,000.00.

* HB 433 -- the association also testified in favor of HB 433. This bill would prohibit Montana municipalities from condemning water rights held by agriculture producers for use for city water purposes. This is an issue that will surely arise as cities such as Missoula and Bozeman and Kalispell continue to grow in population.

The Association also monitored the confirmation hearing of ben Thomas as head of the department of agriculture. As you will recall from our dc meetings, ben used to be senator baucus' agriculture liaison in DC. The confirmation was passed out of senate agriculture unanimously. The confirmation now awaits senate floor action

In addition, there has been no legislation to confirm nina baucus or any other member of the Board, which is a bit unusual.

AS TO MWGA BILLS

1) sb 73 -- our bill to fund the livestock loss board had its hearing in house agriculture earlier this month. The hearing went well. I expect the bill to pass easily out of Committee. We are just awaiting that committee to take action to vote the bill out of committee. I am hoping that happens this coming week.

2) Hj 15 -- this is our grizzly bear delisting resolution. This resolution passed out of the House and is now awaiting a senate hearing. That hearing will take place this coming Tuesday, March 21 at 300. Dave and I will testify.