

Week 11:

We are now roughly 2/3rds of the way through the 2017 montane legislative session.

The pace of the session has picked up considerably, and so have the short tempers. There is a lot of wheeling and dealing going on among the various members of the legislature, as well as by and between the legislature and the governor's office.

The legislature is starting to get into the major bills of the session. This past week, the House of Representatives passed its version of HB 2, the bill which funds the general operations of Montana government. The Senate has now started considering that bill.

In addition, the House this week passed legislation to up the state tax on gasoline by 8 cents in order to fund infrastructure projects. However, the House rejected a bill to allow localities to pass local option taxes.

In terms of MWGA legislation, matters are progressing nicely. To wit

1. The grizzly bear delisting resolution – our resolution requesting that our congressional delegation introduce legislation to delist Montana's entire grizzly bear population easily passed the House of Representatives. This past week, the Senate Fish and Game Committee took testimony on the bill. Dave McEwen and I testified in favor of the resolution. The usual suspects were in attendance to oppose the resolution. We were hoping to have the resolution passed by both the House and Senate in time for our trip to Washington DC this coming week. However, it appears Senate Fish and game will act on that resolution this coming Tuesday. I expect the resolution to pass all the way through the process.
2. SB 73 – a bill to fund the livestock loss board through 2021. This legislation has passed the full Senate. The bill had a good hearing earlier this month in House Agriculture. The bill has overwhelming support. For an unknown reason, the committee has yet to consider and pass the bill.
3. Funding for the wool lab – the senate is currently considering its version of HB 2. As you will recall, we were able to secure \$120,000 for the wool lab during the 2015 session. We have been working with the appropriators to secure funding for the wool lab again this session. This is one of those scenarios that we will know the outcome until the very last minute. We are also working to lessen the proposed drastic cuts for MSU extension and MSU Fire service training.

Other developments;

The legislature is moving legislation to do an interim study of the benefits of building a combined lab complex, which could include the diagnostic lab and the wool lab. The legislature has appropriated roughly \$120,000 for this purpose.

Also, the appropriators have, in HB 2, legislatively reorganized the Board of Livestock. If the bill passes, the diagnostic lab would no longer be a quasi-independent entity. Rather, the lab would be placed under the purview of the animal health division of the board. In addition, the bill calls for eliminating the central services manager position, i.e. George Harris' position.

No word yet from the Governor's office on the reappointment of Nina Baucus to the Board, further, no word yet on any nominations to fill the open positions on the Livestock Loss Board.

SB 155 – the bill to ensure that regulation of seeds is only done at the state level, and not locality by locality, has passed both the House and Senate, and is now on its way to the Governor's desk for signature or a veto.

This week, the MWGA opposed a bill to regulate and license pet breeders. MWGA opposed the bill, HB 582, on the grounds that the bill is so broadly written it could treat ranchers as pet breeders, and require them to get licenses to raise working dogs.

Upcoming Hearings

Monday – March 27 – Legislative Day 64

Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs – Room 422, 9am

SB353 – Revise laws concerning ambulance services (Edward Buttrey)

SB355 – Revise distribution of lodging tax to convention and visitors bureaus (Dee Brown)

SB362 – Requiring transparency in health care pricing (Edward Buttrey)

Senate Education and Cultural Resources – Room 317, 3pm

HB376 – Establish public charter schools (Jonathan Windy Boy)

Senate Finance and Claims – Room 317, 8am

HB2 – General Appropriations Act (Nancy Ballance)

Senate Local Government – Room 405, 3pm

HB445 – Revise local government subdivision review laws (Edward Greef)

Senate Natural Resources – Room 303, 3pm

HJ9 – Resolution supporting the release of certain wilderness study areas (Kerry White)

Senate Public Health, Welfare and Safety – Room 317, 3pm

HB142 – Revise insurance law to give mental health coverage parity with physical health (Laurie Bishop)

HB389 – Generally revise tele-medicine laws for physicians (Kirk Wagoner)

HB430 – Create exception to liquor quota system for residential senior facilities (Adam Hertz)

HB458 – Oversight of care for former MDC patients (Kirk Wagoner)

Senate State Administration – Room 335, 3pm

SB366 – Generally revise driver's license and state identification laws (Jill Cohenour)

SB368 – Generally revise campaign practices laws (Tom Richmond)

Senate Taxation – Room 303, 9am

SB354 – Revise tobacco, nicotine, and tobacco product taxes for healthcare services (Mary Caferro)

House Appropriations – Room 102, 8am

HB473 – Revise highway revenue laws (Frank Garner)

HB511 – Revise income tax laws related to businesses (Rob Cook)
HB638 – Fund direct care worker wage increases in developmental disability services (Jon Knokey)
HB639 – Revising funding for health care services (Rob Cook)
HB652 – Generally revise healthcare laws (Rob Cook)
HB658 – Revise lease-purchase laws regarding state buildings (Bradley Hamlett)

House Energy, Technology, and Federal Relations – Room 472, 3pm
HB624 – Establishing a coal transition working group (Janet Ellis)
HB625 – Requiring an owner of a coal-fired generating unit to provide a bond (Janet Ellis)
HB633 – Provide for optional local interstate pipeline impact fee (Jeff Essmann)

House Human Services – Room 152, 3pm
SB193 – Provide for licensing of board certified behavior analysts (Duane Ankney)
SB208 – Generally revise Medicaid waiver laws (Mary Caferro)
HJ20 – Interim study of transparency in health care pricing (Kathy Kelker)

House Judiciary – Room 137, 8am
HB580 – Provide for primary seat belt law for minors (Bradley Hamlett)
HB581 – Establish an uninsured motorist victims restitution fund (Matt Regier)
HB600 – Generally revise victims' rights laws (Frank Garner)
HB611 – Generally revise state laws related to immigration and refugees (Derek Skees)

House State Administration – Room 455, 10am
HB626 – Constitutional amendment to revise legislator term limit laws (Ray Shaw)

Tuesday – March 28 – Legislative Day 65
Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs – Room 422, 8am
SB365 – Generally revise laws regarding business and occupational licensing (Tom Facey)
HB564 – Revise 'sports pools' to allow range of buy-in amounts (Jimmy Patelis)

Senate Energy and Telecommunications – Room 317, 3pm
SB374 – Revise laws related to utility line extensions (Duane Ankney)

Senate Finance and Claims – Room 317, 8am
HB2 – General Appropriations Act (Nancy Ballance)

Senate Fish and Game – Room 422, 3pm
HJ7 – Interim study on economic impacts of outdoor recreation (Ellis Hill Smith)

Senate Highways and Transportation – Room 405, 2:30 or upon adjournment Senate floor
SB358 – Revise laws regarding removal of highway encroachments (Jill Cohenour)
HB528 – Restrict use of light bars on vehicles (Tom Welch)
HB562 – Exempt certain cell phone use from local ordinances (Casey Knudsen)

Senate Judiciary – Room 303, 9am
HB478 – Prohibit use of tanning devices for person under 16 years old absent consent (Ellie Hill Smith)

Senate Taxation – Room 303, 9am

SB364 – Revise tax exemption laws for certain nonprofit pharmacy operations (Albert Olszewski)

House Business and Labor – Room 172, 8:30am

HB653 – Revise laws relating to service of process with the commissioner of insurance (Matt Regier)

HB657 – Phase out use of Styrofoam in food-related businesses (Shane Morigeau)

HJ26 – Study living wage in Montana (Mary Ann Dunwell)

House Fish, Wildlife and Parks – Room 152, 3pm