

WINDOM GALLIHER

MONTGOMERY UPDATE

FEBRUARY 5, 2016

First week of session passes quietly

Agenda items take first priority, but committee vote on Common Core looms

The opening week of the regular session of the Alabama Legislature was clearly about agendas – translated, the Senate and House of Representatives started to unveil legislation that represent their respective agendas for 2016.

Also, Gov. Robert Bentley got his opportunity to speak on his agenda with the annual State of the State address Tuesday night.

The first week of the session is usually for handshakes, smiles, and presentations on budgets outlooks. This year's first week was no different.

The biggest news of the week was Gov. Bentley's announcement of his plan to close at least three men's prisons and Tutwiler women's prison. His plan is to build new prisons to replace the existing ones – to be paid for by a bond issue. Gov. Bentley and Finance Director Bill Newton say the debt service payment will be less than the maintenance cost for the current facilities.

The House Republican agenda – Right for Alabama – follows a similar trail that it has in the past. On Wednesday, House committees quickly passed four of the planks of the platform. They will be eligible for debate Tuesday afternoon when the legislature returns to work.

Rep. Kyle South (R-Fayette) is carrying HB36, which provides a tax credit for small businesses that add employees. Rep. Mark Tuggle (R-Alexander City) is bringing HB38, which creates an independent taxpayer advocate within the Department of Revenue. Rep. Arnold Mooney (R-Birmingham) is handling HB37, which would make the state's "Right to Work" law an amendment to



SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE MIKE HUBBARD (R-AUBURN) WILL HAVE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DEBATE A SMALL BUSINESS TAX CREDIT AND MORE ON TUESDAY

the state constitution. Rep. April Weaver (R-Brierfield) is sponsoring HB45, which prevents anyone from selling the remains of unborn children but allows the parents to donate them for research.

Senate Republicans are focusing their efforts on preventing child abuse, streamlining economic incentives, suicide prevention, a teacher pay raise and a prison construction that echoes Gov. Bentley's plan.

Senate Pro Tem Del Marsh (R-Anniston) has worked most of the off-season trying to fashion legislation to incentivize teacher pay, and has tinkered with tenure reform. His latest statements, though, indicate he will downplay the tenure issue for now.

With the Education Trust Fund collections indicating that there will be additional dollars for the next year's budget, the House, Senate and Gov. Bentley are

in agreement on the desire for a teacher pay raise. The amount is in question. Gov. Bentley, for his part, called for a state employee pay raise as well, but the cash-strapped General Fund doesn't appear to have room for that.

The Senate will be in position Tuesday to deal with two bills related to child abuse. The first is SB23 by Sen. Clyde Chambliss (R-Prattville), which heightens the penalties for child abuse on a child under the age of 6. Sen. Tom Whatley (R-Auburn) is carrying SB22, which clarifies that child abuse that results in death of a child constitutes murder.

Another hot button issue received plenty of discussion Wednesday, but was not voted on by a Senate committee. The bill, SB60, by Sen. Rusty Glover (R-Semmes) aims to repeal so-called "Common Core" curriculum standards. In

(Please see COMMON, Page 2)

Common

(from Page 1)

Alabama, the curriculum is known as the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards.

The committee room was filled to capacity and flowed into other rooms, as the Senate Education Policy Committee conducted a two-and-a-half hour public hearing on the bill. Conservative and Tea Party activists testified in favor of the bill, while the education and business communities defended the state's curricu-

lum, which was adopted by the State Board of Education. Sen. Glover introduced the bill last year, but it gained no traction. It will have another opportunity Wednesday as committee chair Sen. Dick Brewbaker (R-Pike Road) has placed the bill on the agenda for a vote.

The baseline discussion for the state's budgets began with presentations by Finance Director Newton as well as the Legislative Fiscal Office, but began in earnest with proposed budgets issued Wednesday by Gov. Bentley.

Fresh off his effort to raise \$541 million in new revenue in 2015, Gov. Bentley is

eschewing taxes and advocating moving money around. His plan is to move \$181 million from the Education Trust Fund budget to the General Fund. To say that the Governor's budget is "dead on arrival" would be an understatement.

Rep. Alan Harper (R-Northport), one of two Republicans to get introduce a "clean" lottery bill, will put in front of the House Tourism Committee, which he chairs, for a public hearing on Wednesday. Sen. Jim McClendon (R-Springville) introduced the Senate version, but he hasn't indicated when he intends to push it.

WWW.WINDOMGALLIHER.COM

WINDOM, GALLIHER & ASSOCIATES

334-241-0078

Note: The Windom Galliher Montgomery Update publishes weekly during the legislative session, monthly in the off-season, and as events warrant otherwise.