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2016 Utah Legislative Session - February 24

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We have passed the halfway mark in the 2016 Utah Legislative Session! The pace becomes a bit more fevered and frantic from now to the end as the looming specter of the March 10 deadline approaches. We are shepherding bills for multiple clients at various stages of the legislative process. One client's bill, the client being the Utah Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine, is already sitting on the Governor's desk awaiting a signature (yahoo!), and bills for two other clients will have their initial committee hearing this week.

My job is often as much about time management as the nuts and bolts of the political process. In a short session like we have in Utah (and in Idaho and Wyoming) the clock is just as much a factor as fiscal notes and political opposition. Whenever possible, early introduction of a bill is the best way to go, but for a variety of reasons that isn't always possible. Then, the lobbyist's job is to push, pull, and sometimes drag the bill to the finish line!

The other major factor that will impact a few clients this week is the announcement of final revenue projections. In Utah, budgets are based on revenue projections, but actual funding allocations are based on the final report that will be released this week of how much money exists in the Education Fund, General Fund, and in one time vs. on-going accounts. Rumors are already flying that earlier predictions of a relatively thin surplus in the General Fund has evaporated and predictions of growth have not materialized. The Education Fund, in contrast, appears to have adequate funding for student growth projections and for a modest increase of 2.5% to the WPU (the weighted per pupil spending unit that is the mechanism for public education funding). Since my spouse is a teacher, this is relatively good news for my household!

A quick update on the most popular topic this session - Medical Marijuana. The more modest CBD-oil only proposal by Sen. Evan Vickers, SB89, passed the Senate 2nd Reading Calendar 26-3-0 (Senators Adams, Dayton and Madsen voting no) after lengthy debate. It still has one more vote on the 3rd Reading Calendar before it advances to the House for committee and floor debate. Sen. Mark Madsen's more expansive medical marijuana bill, SB73 was debated on Friday, but time ran out before a vote could be called. Debate on the bill resumed on Monday.

Here is the list of bills that might impact our clients. Please feel free to contact me if you want to discuss any bills or legislative concerns that may affect your clients.

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