




LAE's CAPITOL CONNECTION

Your weekly legislative update from the LAE lobby team

May 6, 2011

THE 2011 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS: TWO WEEKS DOWN, SEVEN TO GO!

The 2011 Legislative Session is underway and the LAE Lobby Team is keeping you up to speed on important issues related to education, retirement and state funding. Be on the lookout for the *Capitol Connection* every Friday for weekly legislative recaps. Also, be sure to check out the LAE website - www.lae.org - for additional updates and alerts. If you're interested in keeping a closer eye on bills being discussed, you can view committee meetings online. Go to www.legis.state.la.us and scroll down to the section, "Today at the Louisiana Capitol," to view committee agendas. Click on the TV icon () to view the LIVE House and Senate broadcasts. If there is no TV icon next to a meeting in progress, that meeting is not being broadcast.

BILLS TO WATCH

LAE Government Relations Specialist Shane Riddle and the entire lobby team will be keeping a close eye on the following bills:

Education Legislation

- New School Letter Grading System: **SB 35** and **SB 201** would delay implementation of the new letter grading system developed by BESE. **LAE supports this legislation.**
- RSD Takeovers: **HB 499** would place a moratorium on state takeovers of public schools in Louisiana by the Recovery School District. **LAE supports this legislation.**
- School Bus Driver Tenure: **HB 101** sponsored by Rep. Ricky Hardy would remove due process rights for bus drivers. **LAE strongly opposes this legislation.**
- Extended Sick Leave and Sabbatical Leave: **HB 454** sponsored by Rep. Joe Harrison would allow school boards to suspend compliance with the granting of extended sick leave and sabbatical leave when districts do not receive the MFP increase of 2.75 percent. **LAE opposes this legislation.**
- Charter Schools: **HB 421** sponsored by Rep. Steve Carter would encourage corporations to partner with charter schools by allowing half of the seats in the school to be filled by children of the corporation employees, a minority percentage of the seats on the boards that govern the charter schools, and the corporations to provide "a facility or land to the charter school." **LAE opposes this legislation.**

Retirement Legislation

- Retirement benefits: **HB 530** would increase the employee contribution rate for higher education employees. **LAE opposes this legislation.** **SB 12** would increase costs and reduce benefits for active participants of the TRSL. **LAE opposes this legislation.**
- Retiree Return-to-Work: **HB 151**, **HB 369** and **HB 417** would allow retirees to return to work as substitute teachers without loss of retirement benefits. Limitations would be placed on earnings. **LAE supports this legislation with amendments on earnings limitations.**
- Higher Ed Return-to-Work: **HB 150** would allow a retiree to return to work as an adjunct professor without loss of retirement benefits. Limitations would be placed on earnings. **LAE supports this legislation with amendments on earnings limitations.**

The LAE Lobby Team will regularly update these bills for your reference. Go to www.lae.org/cms/2011+Legislative+Session%3A+Bills+to+Watch/212.html to track the progress of each bill.

BESE BOARD MEMBER PUSHES TO ELIMINATE TEACHER TENURE

Late last month, Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) District 6 member Chas Roemer sent letters to all BESE members and state lawmakers asking for a written pledge stating their commitment to working towards ending teacher tenure. Mr. Roemer's plan to eliminate tenure could cause thousands of teachers to lose their jobs and give a merit raise only to the top 25 percent of public school teachers in the state. **LAE** leaders believe that Mr. Roemer is on the wrong track. His belief that education is a simple world of just two variables diminishes the complexities of all schools and undermines the craft of teaching in the midst of a multi-variant system. Tenure is not the guarantee of a job for life; it is simply a right to due process and provides job security for teachers who have successfully completed a rigorous and closely monitored process. **LAE** lobbyists have and continue to challenge Mr. Roemer's proposal to punish thousands of hardworking teachers in Louisiana in order to capture nearly \$115 million in salaries only to redistribute this money to the top 25 percent.

GOVERNOR JINDAL CALLS FOR PLAN TO PRIVATIZE THE STATE OFFICE OF GROUP BENEFITS

Governor Bobby Jindal is proposing to hire a private company to run the state worker and retiree health insurance program. The Office of Group Benefits (OGB) currently provides health and life insurance to nearly 150,000 current state workers and retirees and more than 107,000 of their dependents. The proposal has angered current and former state employees and lawmakers who say the OGB runs its insurance programs with low administrative costs. Some are calling the privatization plan a bid to raid the \$510 million trust fund filled with premiums paid by covered employees.

Lawmakers, who need to approve pieces of the privatization plans, questioned how a private company with a profit motivation would keep state costs low and suggested an outside firm would have to either raise premiums or reduce claims payments to make the numbers work. The governor's 2011-12 budget proposal anticipates saving more than \$10 million next year from laying off group benefits workers and shrinking the office size, but it doesn't include the use of any one-time money generated by the sale, estimated to be up to \$150 million or more.

RETIREMENT: "RETIRE-REHIRE" BILLS

House Bills 151, 369 and 417 were discussed in the House Committee on Retirement this week. The bills, also known as "Retire-Rehire" bills, address the rehiring of certain reemployed retirees in the TRSL system to receive retirement benefits during reemployment. These bills offer school districts more flexibility in their ability to hire qualified substitute teachers. While **LAE** supports these bills, our leaders feel as though some of the requirements need to be modified. As they stand, the bills propose a pay cap of 25 percent of the teacher's retirement benefit. **LAE** leaders would instead suggest that the bill take into consideration capping employment at set number of days in order to clearly define the process to those retirees who chose to serve as substitutes after retirement. HB 369 and 417 passed through committee and will move onto the House for a vote, HB 151 failed in committee.

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When **LAE** has a pressing political issue, we use the Capwiz XC online advocacy e-mail system to draw attention to the issue. By using this system, **LAE** can distribute urgent messages to members quickly and make immediate requests for action. Whether we are pushing members to sign a petition or requesting for members to contact legislative representatives, Capwiz is an integral part of **LAE's** legislative success. Please sign up for Capwiz today! Go to the website, www.lae.org and click on "Capwiz XC" to register. Please note, if you've signed up for Capwiz in the past and haven't used the system recently, you must go on and signup again. Please be sure to share this information with any colleagues who may be interested in receiving Capwiz updates!