

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

April 14, 2017

Larry Carter, President * Les Landon, Editor

2016 Regular Legislative Session

Now available on the Web at <http://la.aft.org>

Governor calls for unity in opening speech

The 2017 Regular Legislative Session kicked off with K-12 education facing another standstill budget, and higher education confronting a \$17 million budget cut. Not to mention a crumbling infrastructure, the world's highest incarceration rate, a disappearing coastline and myriad other problems that face a governor and legislature in a faceoff over how to deal with years of budget shortfalls.

In his opening address to lawmakers on Monday, Governor John Bel Edwards called for unity with a plea that Louisiana not fall into the kind of partisan division that plagues Washington, D.C. But if the governor and legislature are unable to agree on a balanced budget, Edwards left the door open for yet another special session later this year. It would be the third since his inauguration little more than a year ago.

The governor introduced a tax reform plan (see story below) that is already under fire from a solid block of opponents who believe that further budget cuts, and not more revenue, are the solution to the state's ongoing crisis.

LFT will be closely following the progress of the budget issues, as well as proposals to increase the minimum wage and require equal pay for women.

The legislature has until 6:00 P.M. on Thursday, June 8, to either resolve critical issues or return to Baton Rouge for a special session.

Education mostly on back burner this session, with exceptions

While this year's fiscal legislative session is mostly dedicated to the state budget, and some of the most divisive education issues of past years are in abeyance, there are still some important items facing teachers and school employees in 2017.

Whether or not public education's Minimum Foundation Program will remain protected from legislative shenanigans is the subject of HB 330 by Rep. Cameron Henry (R-Metairie). Currently, the MFP is proposed by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and can only be accepted or rejected by lawmakers.

Rep. Henry's amendment would allow the legislature to change the per-pupil base spending amount in the formula. LFT opposes the change.

Of interest to education organizations is HB 543 by Rep. Beryl Amedee (R-Houma), which would prohibit educators from paying their union dues through payroll deduction. That has long been the

goal of the state's big business lobby, which has failed thus far in its efforts to silence the voices of teachers and school employees. LFT opposes the bill.

The inaccurate and unfair practice of using a value added assessment model to label teachers, schools and school districts would be abolished in HB532 by Rep. Frank Hoffman (R-West Monroe) becomes law.

Rep. Hoffman was one of the sponsors of legislation that created VAM in 2010 and expanded its use in 2012, but he promised that if the experiment failed, he would be the first to advocate for scrapping the practice.

Last year, a compromise reduced the percentage of VAM used to evaluate teachers from 50% to 35%. That's still too much emphasis to place on a failed evaluation model. Look for the big business lobbyists and so-called "reformers" to fight Rep. Hoffman's plan. LFT supports Rep. Hoffman's bill.

Some effort will be made to rein in the proliferation of private and religious school vouchers in the state.

SB 13 by Sen. Blade Morrish (R-Jennings) would limit kindergarten students applying for vouchers to those whose prospective public school is rated "D" or "F". Current law allows those children to receive vouchers if the prospective school has a "C" grade.

Sen. Morrish's SB 95 would curb a voucher scheme that, if left unchecked, could cost the state millions of dollars and provide a tax rebate bonanza to corporations and wealthy individuals.

So-called School Tuition Organizations are back-door voucher programs that accept donations from taxpayers to fund scholarships at private and religious schools. Under current law, those donations are eligible for a rebate of 95% of the donation from the state treasury. When combined with federal tax deductions, corporations and individuals can actually get a profit of up to 128% of the donation.

SB 95 would limit the replace the rebate with a non-refundable tax credit equal to 50% of the donation.

LFT supports both of Sen. Morrish's bills.

Thus far, 47 bills have been assigned to the House Education Committee, and 22 to the Senate Education Committee. Some other bills of interest to educators will be heard in retirement, governmental affairs and fiscal committees. As committees get to work debating the proposals, LFT will publish a complete listing of bills that we are following.

Most Louisiana Families Would Save Under Governor's Tax Plan

(From the Louisiana Budget Project)

The package of [tax reforms](#) proposed by Gov. John Bel Edwards would provide a net tax cut for 95 percent of Louisiana taxpayers, and generate enough revenue to plug the \$440 million shortfall in next year's budget and avoid the 2018-19 fiscal "cliff."

A new analysis of the governor's tax plan, based on [economic modeling](#) by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), found that if all the elements of the tax plan get approved, it would generate \$411 million per year in new, recurring revenue that could be used to finance education, healthcare and other services that are threatened by budget cuts.

The largest effective tax cut would go to the middle 20 percent of taxpayers - households earning between \$36,000 and \$56,000 per year. The richest 5 percent of taxpayers would pay more under the plan.

The governor is proposing changes to the state sales tax, personal income tax and corporate income tax, and would create a new tax on gross corporate sales. The analysis looks at how each of the proposed changes would affect taxpayers at different income levels.

The plan would make Louisiana's tax structure more fair. But this fairness is tied to the changes proposed for the personal income tax, which have to pass both the Legislature and a vote of the people.

[Click here to read the full analysis.](#)