

Louisiana Federation of Teachers

Weekly Legislative Digest

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2015 Regular Legislative Session

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2015 legislative session kicks off with Jindal speech

Lawmakers hoping that Gov. Bobby Jindal would provide a pathway out of the fiscal crisis facing the state were disappointed when the governor gave short shrift to the issue in his brief – 20 minutes – speech.

The governor spoke about the state's "booming economy," but said little about the \$1.6 billion budget shortfall facing lawmakers as the fiscal session begins.

In a nod to the crisis, Jindal blamed what he termed "corporate welfare" as he spoke of rolling back some of the billions of dollars in tax credits that the state hands out every year.

His plan to alter 12 credits would net the state about \$536 million. Most of that, some \$372 million, would come from a change to the inventory tax credit, which raised the ire of businesses.

The plan would devastate local governments, which rely on the inventory taxes to fund bonds and other operations. According to the Louisiana School Boards Association, it would exempt an entire class of property from local property taxes. That could:

- Reduce local property tax revenues used to provide public education.
- Increase property tax millage rates on residential property and business property tax payers to support existing bonded indebtedness.
- Potentially, cause unknown fluctuations in the state funding formula for public schools in the MFP.

The governor did not talk about the challenge facing colleges and universities, which are threatening to shutter whole departments, lay off professors and eliminate programs unless proposed cuts are reversed.

In discussing education, Jindal devoted most of his comments to Common Core, which he called "an issue I care deeply about," and which he vowed to abolish in Louisiana.

Perhaps a reflection of the governor's low standing in opinion polls and the perception that he is now more concerned with running for president than in running Louisiana, response from lawmakers was muted, with few of the spontaneous outbursts of applause that usually accompany a governor's address to the legislature.

Payroll deduction bill to be heard April 30

A bill that has been called an "existential threat" to public sector unions will have its first hearing in the House Labor Committee on Thursday, April 30. The meeting will begin as soon as the House of Representatives adjourns for the day.

HB 418 by Rep. Stuart Bishop (R-Lafayette) would prohibit union dues from being deducted from public sector payroll checks.

The bill is one of three anti-union bills that have been introduced in the House and Senate, and it is the one that the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry is pinning its hopes on in order to silence the voices of teachers and school employees.

LFT urges members to send an-mail to their Senator and Representative and ask them to oppose any legislation that would revoke the right to pay dues through payroll deduction. [Click here if you have not already contacted your legislators.](#)

In addition, members can send a letter to the editor of their local daily newspaper [by clicking this link.](#)

LFT, LAE and other unions unite in face of threat

Joint Tele-townhall meetings on April 21 and April 28

With assistance from the AFT and its national partners on the Labor Round Table, LFT is working with the Louisiana Association of Educators, the Louisiana AFL-CIO, Firefighters, Police, AFSCME and SEIU to combat HB 418. Like us, these unions all are threatened by LABI's threat to revoke payroll deduction of dues.

On Tuesday, April 21, LFT and LAE will jointly sponsor a tele-townhall, briefing members on HB 418. There will be an opportunity to ask questions about the issue.

Following the tele-townhall, members of both unions will have the ability to "patch through" to their State Representatives' office phones for a period of four days.

Then on Tuesday, April 28, a second LFT/LAE tele-townhall will take place, after which members can immediately be patched through to their Representatives' phones.

Separately, LFT will sponsor a robocall campaign to targeted voters, asking them to contact their legislators about HB 418.

This fight represents the first time that LFT and LAE have worked so closely together. We hope the collaboration can continue after the legislative session so that we can pool our resources in the upcoming fall elections.

New LFT legislative director hits the ground running

Susan East Nelson, our new Legislative Director, is a Baton Rouge native and long-time veteran of Louisiana politics. She holds a JD from Southern University Law Center (with honors), and BA in English and Political Communications from LSU. She has over 20 years of experience in politics, messaging and legislative drafting. She is a product of East Baton Rouge Public Schools and her parents were both educators.

Former Legislative Director Mary Patricia Wray has formed her own company, Top Drawer Strategies. She will be working closely with LFT on retirement issues during this session.

Senate Ed holds first meeting

With a short list of bills in a fiscal year session, the Senate Education Committee considered only a few bills in its first meeting of the year.

LFT was watching SB 28 by Sen. Troy Brown (D-Napoleonville), a rather innocuous bill that requires schools to alert parents to the free homework assistance services provided by the Louisiana State Library. Surprisingly a number of school choice, voucher recipients and LABI lobbyists were on hand to oppose that legislation. Luckily, common sense prevailed and the bill was reported favorably.

A contentious bill, SB 267 by Sen. Claitor (R-Baton Rouge) that essentially requires Charter Schools to provide services for children with exceptionalities (not including gifted), was approved by the committee. An amendment to delay that bill for a year was rejected, and the bill now goes to the house floor in its original form. LFT will continue to watch and support the legislation.

A bill to reauthorize the Department of Education, SB 52 by Sen. Conrad Appel (R-Metairie), was reported favorably.

Retirement bill may post threat

LFT is closely monitoring a retirement bill that could threaten the future viability of the Teachers Retirement System of Louisiana.

While short on details at this point, SB 18 by Sen. Robert Adley (R-Benton) is expected to provide for removing higher education faculty from TRSL and remove higher education systems' responsibility for TRSL's unfunded accrued liability. In the worst case scenario, the bill could cause the legacy costs to TRSL to skyrocket.