



February 15, 2012

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GENERAL SESSION

February 8, 2012

Note: Before the General Session opened, WSLC Executive Board member Hilarie Orman presented a PowerPoint tutorial for the membership regarding the WSLC website and the new WSLC facebook page. The official WSLC website has been updated, and Hilarie guided us through many of its user-friendly features.

To access the new WSLC facebook page, a user must first be a facebook member. We were shown the simple procedures for signing up for a free account and logging on. Users may put as much or as little personal information as they like on their own facebook pages. The new user then types the name, "Women's State Legislative Council of Utah" into the search box to bring up the WSLC facebook page.

A credible facebook page, Hilarie said, should have a minimum of 25 "likes," which a user can assert with the click of a "like" button when she or he likes either the page or a particular "post" or comment. A user on the WSLC facebook page can enter a post about almost anything pertaining to our meetings, our agendas, comments on speakers & issues, or just what's on our minds, Hilary said. We can post photos, share the site with facebook friends, and also link the state WSLC website to our two County Affiliate sites. The enhanced WSLC website and our new presence on Facebook promise to be valuable tools in extending our outreach, as well as expanding our influence within the state.

Program Topic: SB31 Classroom Size Amendments

Presented by: **Education Committee**
Director: **Chris Bray**
Chair: **Donna Murphy**

Speakers: **Sen. Karen W. Morgan (D) Dist. 8; Salt Lake County (Cottonwood Heights); Minority Whip; sponsor, SB31**

Rep. Bradley M. Daw (R) Dist. 60; Utah County (Orem)

Sen. Morgan presented her bill, which would impose a maximum class size for kindergarten through grade three. It would be phased in over a period of four years. **SB31** also "limits the number of students who may be assigned to a teacher who

teaches a core curriculum course in kindergarten through grade three, unless a paraprofessional is assigned to the teacher's class for the duration of the course, and establishes qualifications for a paraprofessional assigned to a class that

exceeds the maximum class size requirement.”

The senator affirmed the early grades are foundational years and their importance to the ensuing academic life of a child can’t be overstated. Research shows, she said, that if children can’t read to grade level by the third grade, they are at risk for underachievement for the remainder of their school years. Sen. Morgan is pleased her bill just passed the senate by a vote of 19-9. It is now on its way to the house.

Rep. Daw stated his appreciation for Sen. Morgan’s intentions, and commended her for good legislation she has brought forth in the past. In particular he mentioned her efforts in opposing the practice of “social promotion” of children who do not meet academic criteria. He also agrees overcrowded classes definitely impact the ability of students to learn, and teachers to teach.

However, rather than a legislative cap, which the legislature may well not be able to fund, Rep. Daw believes districts, school boards, and local administrators are better equipped to create solutions for their individual schools. He said California had imposed a strict cap on class size and then could not provide enough qualified teachers to staff the classes.

Also, he said, mandates tend to stifle creative thinking at the local level. Schools would be better served by the legislature making sure their districts have the latitude

they need to effectively run their own programs.

Responding to questions, Rep. Daw said Special Needs students have a different funding stream, and would probably not be counted in the 20-child cap. He has no problem with the concept of using paraprofessionals in the classroom as supplemental help.

Sen. Morgan countered that California had established a “hard cap.” Her bill would impose a “soft cap,” meaning a teacher’s aid or paraprofessional in the classroom with a teacher would qualify to lower the teacher/child ratio. She agrees there is a place for both local and state responses to needs in education. **SB31** was offered in response to the many calls she received from parents whose children are in overcrowded classes. It is not acceptable, she stressed, that there be 35 children in any K-3 classes. Teachers tell her class size reduction is more important to them than pay raises.

Responding to questions, Sen. Morgan said \$1.3M has already been mandated by the legislature. She argued that the accountability for its use (classroom size only) is built into **SB31**. The fiscal note is just the line item that already exists. She would have supported a larger allocation, but must abide by the fiscal analyst’s findings. As originally conceived, **SB31** would have capped class size at 18 students. The cap was raised to 20 students.

Reported by Pam Grange

General Session II

Program Topic: **SB54 Publication of Education Fund Revenue**

Presented by: Education Committee
Director: Chris Bray
Chair: Donna Murphy

Speakers: **Sen. Benjamin M. McAdams (D) Dist. 2; Salt Lake County (SL/S, SLC/WVC); Minority Caucus Mgr.; sponsor, SB54**

Sen. Lyle W. Hillyard (R) Dist. 25; Cache, Rich Counties; Exec. Appropriations Co-Chair

Sen. McAdams, introducing his bill, said the impetus for it was his concern that education funding in the state has been inadequate for too long. Utah once had a more stable source of revenue (all personal & corporate income tax), supplemented by the general fund. Several years ago, the senator continued, two factors combined to erode this funding. The state constitution was amended to draw higher education funding from the same source as public education. Also, the state income tax code was changed from a progressive tax system, reducing income tax revenues significantly.

Sen. McAdams believes the state's ability to grow its economy and bring in jobs resides in the ability to educate its children. Utah is currently #51 in the nation for per pupil spending. **SB54** would create the means to grow annual education funding over 10 years.

The plan is not to raise tax rates, he said, but to make small changes in the tax code to alter the trajectory of education funding. Year #1 would begin to augment public education funding by a 1% trajectory. This would raise Utah to 50th position. He said it is a modest proposal, but a start. The bill would make changes to the tax code that

would establish a minimum "floor" of funding.

It would raise \$60M in extra funding year in year #1. After the 10 years, the changes in the tax code wrought by **SB54** would be removed. When the floor is reached at year #10, the changes would be automatically nullified.

Sen. McAdams said **SB54** would freeze personal exemption for state income taxes at this year's level of \$2,775 per exemption. The exception would not adjust upward with inflation. Consequently, some families would experience modest tax growth. This change, he said, would produce \$6M in new revenue in the first year, and over \$100M over the full 10 years.

Under current state law, as property values increase, the School Minimum Basic Levy property tax rate decreases. The senator said a second change his bill would make to the tax code would freeze this tax rate. Revenue would then grow as property values recover from the economic recession. This change would raise about \$10 million in the first year, and compound each year. A third change would put 1/3 of new money coming from sales tax revenues into a Prioritizing

Public Education Fund to accrue compounding interest.

Another provision of **SB54**, the senator continued, would require public disclosure of any proposed legislation that would have a negative fiscal impact on revenues deposited into the education fund. Such proposals as devoting local public school funds to Road Development Authority (RDA) projects, tax credits to companies relocating to Utah, or development of state energy resources can divert significant funds from public education.

Sen. McAdams also said **SB54** doesn't specify how the new money would be spent. The bill only directs it into "operations." This should be a conversation, he said, among state & local school boards, legislators, and other education leaders.

Sen. Hillyard, who co-chairs the Executive Appropriations Committee, expressed concerns about the bill. He stressed that every committee has compelling needs for more money. For example, Medicaid is going to consume a growing percentage of

Utah's budget money, due to expanded benefits and expanded coverage.

Reductions over the years in the School Minimum Basic Levy have allowed local school districts some "head room" to implement special programs or reduce class sizes. He believes **SB54** would take away that flexibility. He contrasted Logan and Cache school districts. Logan, with its university population, has more money available to invest in schools. Cache, a rural farming community, does not. This legislation would hinder both districts' right to choose how they allocate funds.

Responding to questions, the senator said he once encountered a senior who resented paying for the education of "other people's children." A young mother replied, "I sometimes feel the same way about Social Security." Sen. Hillyard believes capping the child tax exemptions, as **SB54** would do, is not the best approach. We are all in this together. The educations our children get, the senator concluded, are going to pay for our Social Security.

Reported by Stuart Gygi

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