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## School Board Advocate: March 1, 2016

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## Unintended consequences

The boom and bust cycle is no stranger to Colorado. Gold, silver, oil and natural gas have all at one time or another caused hundreds of thousands of people to head west in search of their fortune. The latest group of folks to hitch up their wagons and point them toward Colorado are here for legal marijuana. The impacts have been acutely felt in the San Luis Valley. Lured by cheap land, few prying eyes and the enticement of legal weed, these marijuana immigrants have arrived with their families. Their arrival has brought a

whole host of new challenges for local schools in the area.

Students whose parents brought them to the Valley often have multiple needs that have stretched local districts' abilities to serve them. Districts

have seen significant increases in requests for special education and mental health services. In addition, the transient nature of these students means that just about the time local officials have a handle on how they may be able to help, the students move on, only to be replaced by new families in search of legal marijuana riches.

Working with our member districts in the San Luis Valley, CASB has begun conversations with state legislators about how best to help these students and the districts they attend. In an era of scarce resources and the continuing impact of an \$830 million negative factor, there are no simple answers. It will require additional resources and a cooperative plan to best serve all of the students in need. One thing is certain, the prospect of legal pot will continue to draw folks to Colorado, and Colorado schools will serve their kids.



Students from high schools in Akron and Otis attended a recent Day at the Capitol on Wednesday. The students saw the House in session and got a personal briefing from their representative, Tim Dore, center, in this picture. Details on upcoming Days at the Capitol below.



## A lot of energy at Winter Legislative Conference

CASB's Winter Legislative Conference had many informative and thought-provoking moments. Here are some vignettes we thought were worth sharing:

### A handshake

Near the end of a discussion about Referendum C, Andrew Romanoff and Henry Sobanet shook hands. It was just a moment, but they clasped hands warmly and exchanged smiles.

Why take note of a handshake? Simply put, it was clear evidence of how times and attitudes have changed. Romanoff was speaker of the Colorado House, the state's top Democrat in 2005, and Sobanet was a chief deputy of Gov. Bill Owens, the state's top Republican. Together, they crafted Referendum C, the last successful bipartisan effort to deal with Colorado's tangled fiscal situation.

The need for Ref C arose because the state, recovering from a recession, could not fully bounce back because of restrictions in the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR). The "ratchet" had locked in state spending at recessionary levels. At the same time, the recently passed Amendment 23 required increased spending on K-12 education.

"It was like we had one foot on the brake and one foot on the gas," said Romanoff. "The economy was recovering, but not the state budget," added Sobanet, who was Owens' budget director.

People on both sides of the aisle could see that Colorado was headed for trouble.

That's why the handshake was symbolic. Romanoff and the Democrats and Owens and the Republicans came together. On Friday it seemed clear that they were still proud of that accomplishment, that collaboration.

Sobanet and Romanoff, responding to a question from Ken DeLay, said that crafting a solution required compromise on both sides. Romanoff and the D's would have pushed to eliminate TABOR or to make Ref C permanent, and Owens and the R's wanted a five-year time limit, with some assurances that transportation would receive funding. They agreed on Ref C with a 10-year limit and a companion measure, Ref D, that was supposed to help with transportation funding (it failed).

All parties agreed that a "central tenet" of TABOR was the expectation that, from time to time, voters would be asked to make a decision regarding taxes. Today they said such talk is often characterized as attacking TABOR.

Romanoff credited Owens on this point. "Bill Owens circulated petitions to get TABOR on the ballot," he said, and yet the governor was willing to ask voters for more money for the state via Ref C. Voters, he said, didn't truly understand the complexities of Ref C, but they respected and trusted neighbors and leaders who supported it.

### Speaking of ballot measures ...

Reeves Brown, project manager for Building a Better Colorado (BBCO), provided an update on potential ballot measures.

Citing the need for a ballot measure on fiscal reform, Brown said, "TABOR continually decreases state revenue relative to the size of the economy because of the (spending) limit. It puts the state budget on fiscal auto pilot, and that is not sustainable."

Brown said that BBCO's organizers are not seeking to undo TABOR. Rather, as with the Ref C effort, they want to connect with the state's voters and build support for the idea of retaining revenues above the TABOR limit.

Brown said BBCO conducted several polls and is working to attract bipartisan support before a campaign is launched. Community meetings were conducted across the state, and people were allowed to express their thoughts online. In all, more than 10,000 Coloradans were part of the fact-finding effort.

Those efforts influenced the drafting of language for a measure. The measure is likely to state that much of the revenue above the TABOR limit will go to education and transportation, with smaller amounts designated for mental health programs and long-term care for seniors. The polls and community meetings make it clear that Colorado voters want guardrails on the additional revenues, Brown said.

The groundwork of statewide meetings and deliberate efforts to line up bipartisan support were essential, Brown said. "If we fail at this this fall, it will be hard to cross this line in the future."

Brown said that "having 10,000 Coloradans already involved in the conversation" will be a key to the measure's success. School board members, he said, are trusted members of their communities and they will play an important role in building support.

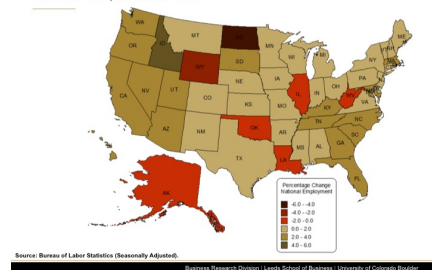


## State's economy chugging along

Richard Wobbekind, one of the state's leading economists, provided an overview on the state and national economies. He is executive director of the business research division at the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado, and he was the speaker at the CASB Winter Legislative Conference's opening session.

Wobbekind said Colorado's economy is performing well on a number of measures, ranging from job growth to household wealth to low unemployment to corporate profits. On the other hand, there are challenges to Colorado's economy as a result of the downturn in oil and gas, stagnating median household incomes, not enough qualified workers and a slowdown in the national and international economies.

**State Employment Growth**  
Year-over-Year, December 2015

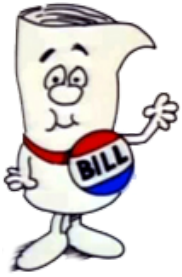


## Dome dealings

We understand that the long anticipated bill to resolve the Hospital Provider Fee debate will finally be introduced in March. Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman has issued a formal opinion that moving the Hospital Provider Fee to a State Enterprise would not violate TABOR. [The AG's opinion is available here.](#)

CASB has also heard that two much anticipated bills will soon debut. Sponsors of the Student Data Privacy bill hope to address the many concerns of parents while at the same time try not to hamstring a teacher's ability to use technology in the classroom to drive student achievement. Sponsors of the "All Students are Equal" Education Opportunity Act will look to equalize mill levy funding for students at charter schools. Look for a vigorous debate from both sides of the aisles on both bills.

## Bill update



**SB037 "Public Access to Digitally Stored Data under CORA"** was killed by the senate's State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee last week. CASB testified in opposition to the bill as there were many concerns about how it would impact our member districts.

**SB035 "The Public School Fund"** and **SB072 "Annual Increase BEST Lease- Purchases Payment Cap"** continue to make their way through the legislative process. CASB is in support of both in a effort to strengthen the BEST (Build Excellent Schools Today) program.



## Join us for CASB's Days at the Capitol

The next [Day at the Capitol](#) is Wednesday, March 2. Each CASB region is assigned a day, but members are encouraged to attend whenever it is convenient. Board members will gather for a breakfast briefing with CASB's advocacy team and then visit the Colorado Legislature to see the House and Senate in action and attend education committee meetings.

Many issues important to public education will be up for discussion and debate this legislative session, and local school board members must make their voices heard.

No one can speak for local control of public education like board members – and that means you! If you have never attended, this is a good way to get an introduction to what goes on at the Capitol.

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*School Board Advocate is CASB's semimonthly newsletter on our advocacy efforts and the latest developments at the state capitol that impact K–12 education. During the legislative session, we share this newsletter with CASB member districts and affiliates, board members, superintendents, superintendent secretaries, secretaries to the board, legislators, the governor's office, various statewide organizations, BOCES executive directors and the Colorado Council of School Board Attorneys.*

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