

This weeks sample of LobbyUp's most viewed bills was taken from over 2400 unique views of a period of five days. Some of the bills go with trends but there are a few surprises.

Senate Bill 96 by Senator Jim Hendren would approve the continuance of the Private Option and establish a task force to study Medicaid Expansion and make a recommendation at the end of this year. This bill was easily the most important and most talked about bill of perhaps the entire session. Surprisingly the bill was nowhere on our Top 10 list, meaning that mainstream media coverage effectively conveyed the progression and policy of the bill to the public. Friday Representative Josh Miller filed House Bill 1262 which mirrors the Senate Bill that would repeal the Private Option that failed in committee last week.

Keeping with the theme of the high engagement level by those in the education field, Senate Bill 113 by Joint Budget, The Teacher Retirement System Appropriation, is the most viewed bill of the week. While it is a simple appropriation bill, any bills containing the words "teacher" and "retirement" always top the interest of any other bills.

Recently filed is Senate Bill 176 which modifies the requirement for the Commissioner of Education by Senators Clark and English. The bill radically changes the requirements to become Commissioner of Education. The language modifies the requirements from someone who has had 10 years experience as a teacher, 5 of which are in an administrative role to someone who has had 10 years working directly or indirectly in the field of education including but not limited to a teacher, administrator or policy maker. One can only infer that there is a wanted candidate for this position that doesn't meet the current qualification.

House Bill 1077 was the most talked about bill on social media this week. Rarely does a bill receive its own hashtag on twitter. According to posts using the hashtag #hb1077, there were several misconceptions on the bill. Representative Collins said that the number one concern in the world was parents who feared for their children's safety while they were away from home. He looked at data from such incidents as Columbine and the movie theater shooting in Colorado and found that 95% of these killers don't just "snap", they spend months planning and they target gun free zones so that they can control the environment until law enforcement or someone with a weapon arrives. There was a lot of passion on both sides and the bill failed in committee getting only 10 of the 11 votes needed to get to the house floor. Several questioned sending the bill to the House Education Committee where Democrats have their largest margin, the 10 votes needed to kill a bill. The committee voted along party lines.

Other Bills of Interest:

Representative Greg Leding as promised delivered his package of four employee rights bills. He's taken to his twitter account to discuss these concepts for quite some time and after much research and visiting with folks from both parties with diverse ideologies we finally see these policies in the form of legislation. Leding has stated that he wanted Arkansas to be more progressive and in line with other states and countries. House bill 1275 gives a tax credit to an employer who gives paid family and medical leave. House bill 1277 considers employee termination, stating that when employees are terminated they must be compensated for wages

earned immediately. If the after 7 days the employer fails to pay earned wages the employer is required to begin paying wages to the former employee for up to 60 days. House Bill 1276 requires more detail on pay stubs for someone who has more than 4 employees. Leding feels that his package of bills rewards companies for being a good corporate citizens and is not burdensome to these companies.

There were several religious freedom bills filed. HB1272 by Justin Harris deals with students, prohibiting discrimination against students who choose to write and draw religious themes for class assignments. The bill also states that if a student group wishes to have a religious event on campus, the school does not have to sanction the event but must let the students participate. HB1228 by Rep Bob Ballinger creates a penalty for those violating or abusing religious protections.

SB180 by Eddie Joe Williams deals with snow days and makes sure school districts get funding when they have to let out early or start late due to inclement weather. It gives the school district more flexibility to deal with public safety and helps take away the financial aspect and ramifications for adjusting to inclement weather.

This week marked the passage of the continuance of the private option as well as Governor's tax cuts. These issues were expected to take all session. Now that these issues have been dealt with on the front end we predict that the legislators as well as the special interest groups will begin pursuing their own agendas, meaning many more interesting bills will be filed in the weeks to come. The majority of special interest groups had planned on playing "defense" this session due to the few large but contentious issues that needed to be addressed. Now that these issues have been put to rest in the first 30 days of session, the field is wide open.