



## LEGISLATIVE UPDATES



April 25, 2025

Update No. 16

I'm out of song lyrics and legislative trivia, but that's ok: the Legislature seems to be grinding to a near standstill as we reach the final week or two. At least the Senate expects to work through Saturday as they try to wrap up by the end of next week. Several of the big budget bills have been pushed out this week, but they're taking far longer than they should, as the fight over individual line items extends to the floor debate. SB 2018, the budget for the Department of Commerce, was debated for nearly an hour and a half on Thursday night, as Representative Koppelman moved to divide the amendments into SIX different questions, which would have required six separate votes on each individual part, and then a final vote on the amended bill itself. However, the speaker ruled that divisions A, B, and C could not stand alone, so they were not separated out, and instead remained in the "what's left of the bill" division (Division F) when divisions D and E were separated out. So, that left the House with debates and votes on Division D, Division E, and Division F, and then the vote and the amended bill. In the end, every division passed, as did the bill. So – an hour and a half of debate and four votes for what could have been accomplished in two. I hope the new chairs installed in both chambers this session are more comfortable than they look.

On late Wednesday afternoon, the Governor issued vetoes on two bills that had received a lot of press – HB 1540 and SB 2307. **SB 2307** was a bill that sought to require school and public libraries to remove content deemed "sexually explicit" to areas not easily accessible to children. It also proposed that local state's attorneys investigate and prosecute violations. State funds could be withheld from schools or libraries found to be in violation. Governor Armstrong admonished the bill as overreaching and censorship and took issue with the process the bill prescribed to complain about a library book that *"would give more power to an aggrieved individual than anywhere else in Century Code – more than a criminal victim, a civil plaintiff or defendant, or a fired state employee."*

**HB 1540** was one of two school voucher bills working its way through the legislative process. The bill would have established Education Savings Accounts for private school students only. In vetoing the bill, the Governor expressed support for **SB 2400**, a second school voucher bill that would allow public dollars to be used for private school tuition but also would establish Education Savings Accounts for public school and homeschooled students. Shortly after legislators received word of the veto, chatter was that there would be attempts to amend SB 2400 in the House Appropriations committee to make it more palatable to those who favored HB 1540. A motion to "hold the bill over one legislative day" during Thursday evening's floor session failed. It appeared this was to the surprise of House leadership, or at least to their displeasure. Holding the bill would have given bill supporters more time to garner the favor necessary to advance the bill to the appropriations committee, as it had come out of the policy committee with a strong

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do not pass recommendation. However, it seems that supporters of HB 1540 could not be convinced that SB 2400 was workable, and opponents of vouchers were ready to seize the moment and put the issue to bed. Without an extra day to garner support, the bill died 14-78. Today, the veto on HB 1540 was sustained by the House in a 45-48 vote, essentially ending the debate on vouchers for the 2025 Legislative Session.

The conference committee on **HB 1176**, one of two remaining property tax bills, met on Tuesday, twice on Wednesday, Thursday, this morning, and has a meeting scheduled for this afternoon. It appears they are getting close but are still stuck on how to sort out capping the school districts in a way that provides measurable relief without wreaking havoc on the K12 funding formula. They've found agreement (verbally, at least) on the maximum dollar amount for the primary residence tax credit (\$1650), but not on the 75% cap (the "skin in the game" amendment). The Senate appears to be holding **HB 1168**, the other property tax bill, in Appropriations for now.

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### **UPDATES FROM ICBND'S PRIORITY TRACKING LIST**

We don't have much left on our list after this week, but I do have two quick updates:

The House concurred with the Senate's amendments to **HB 1584** this week. As a reminder, HB 1584 is the bill that regulates pharmacy benefits managers. Both ICBND and the NDBBT opposed the bill because it seeks to preempt the ERISA protections currently provided to self-funded insurance plans. We believe HB 1584 will increase pharmaceutical costs for users of our plans and drive-up premiums for employees and employers. Because the House concurred (approved by a 92-0 vote), the bill will now go to the Governor for signing. We had a little bit of hope that there could be the possibility of a veto but given the lack of opposition to the bill in either House or Senate, I think it is unlikely that the Governor will do so. Governors tend to be very hesitant to issue vetoes when they are certain they do not have the votes to sustain them. That seems to be the case with this bill.

On Thursday, the House passed **SB 2014**, the North Dakota Industrial Commission budget bill. This bill includes the Bank of North Dakota's budget, funding for programs like PACE, Ag PACE, other revolving loan funds, and a multitude of other things, as evidenced by the 30-minute plus floor speech it took Representative Keith Kempenich to explain the contents of the bill. Upon finishing his explanation, Rep. Kempenich said, "Well, that's pretty much it." with a chuckle, and received a standing ovation. The bill will likely head to conference committee to work out the House and Senate differences.

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### **NEXT WEEK'S HEARING SCHEDULE**

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#### **Monday, April 28**

No committee hearings currently scheduled at this time.

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#### **Tuesday, April 29**

No committee hearings currently scheduled at this time.

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#### **Wednesday, April 30**

No committee hearings currently scheduled at this time.

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#### **Thursday, May 1**

No committee hearings currently scheduled at this time.

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#### **Friday, May 2**

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No committee hearings currently scheduled at this time.

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**LEGISLATIVE DEADLINES**

May 9                      Session limited to 80 legislative days.

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Legislator contact information can be found at <https://ndlegis.gov/contact-my-legislators>, and you can check on any legislative activities through the Legislative Council's web page at [ndlegis.gov](https://ndlegis.gov).

Thank you for your participation in the legislative process. Please call, email, or text me with any questions or concerns. If you'd like to be taken off this distribution list or if there are others in your organization that should be receiving these updates, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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