

House Highlights

By Tom Loertscher

After being in session for two days this year one of my colleagues told me it felt like we had been in session for two weeks already. I'm not sure what that says about how things went this week, but I would say that that the interim seemed to me like it went by rapidly.

I get asked a lot about what to expect this year, and if the first few days are an indication of what is to come, it won't be dull by any means. Governor Otter didn't hesitate to declare that we have weathered the storm and predicted almost a six percent increase in revenues but only wants to spend about five percent of that. I have been told that our forecasting committee is not quite so optimistic. The State of the State message was brief this year and he did not give many specifics for his budget requests.

The minority party has wasted no time posturing on several issues but the most drastic is a sales tax bill to increase revenues by a mere 400 million dollars. It would reduce the sales tax rate to five percent but would eliminate a list of exemptions. I haven't had time to go through the specifics yet but the most glaring is that when you buy a new or used car you would be taxed on the gross sales price with no allowance for your trade in. It doesn't leave much to the imagination to see what that would do to auto sales.

Then the bill goes after nine categories of services, professional, (attorneys, accountants, etc.) personal, (beauticians, barbers, house cleaning, etc.) business, construction, (building a house, repairing your house, etc.) and repairs of all kinds including getting your car fixed. The list is too long to go through here so I would suggest you take a look at the statement of purpose for House Bill 345 and let your imagination wander. And most amazing of all is that they think they will be taxing a whole new group of folks. But in reality it is you, the consumer, the ones who buy this stuff who would be footing the bill. Our housing industry is still in the tank and there is thought that this would help things by increasing the cost? I guess I don't quite catch the vision of how this would help the taxpayers.

Another topic that will be debated extensively will be the Health Insurance Exchanges. Every state has been told that if we do not have an exchange in place, the federal government will set it up for us and we will pay the costs. The two schools of thought on this matter are that it would be better to have a state program than a federal one and we would pay the costs, and if federal government sets it up for us, we will be required to do what we are told to do and we will pay the costs. Looks like we get soaked either way. Oh, I almost forgot. If the plan we come up with on our own is not acceptable to the federal government, they will require us to fix it to their liking and we will pay the costs. Confused yet? I'm sure you can see how much debate this will generate.

So it looks to be another busy session with a dab of controversy mixed in. My only hope is the session goes by as quickly as the interim seemed to escape. We'd be done in record time. What a dreamer I am.