



## BRIEFLY

The February 15<sup>th</sup> deadline for non-budget bills to pass from one legislative chamber to the other has passed. With the revenue forecast due February 17<sup>th</sup>, action on budget issues should move into the open.

# Bill Roundup

The February 15 deadline for bills other than fiscal measures to pass from one chamber of the Washington Legislature left stranded several issues of particular interest to the Washington Research Council.

Only one of the bills we've written on, the Senate's public utility district (PUD) telecommunications bill, SB 6675, was voted out by Feb. 15, the deadline for bills to pass from one chamber to the other.

Bills that died included three designed to save the individual market for health insurance, one that would have converted the position of state Insurance Commissioner from an elective to an appointive post, and one that would have authorized the creation of up to 20 charter schools.

While the PUD telecom bill passed the Senate and headed for the House Technology, Telecommunications & Energy Committee, the House version of that bill, HB 2880, died on the House floor without a vote.

SB 6675, requested by Gov. Gary Locke, would allow PUDs and rural port districts to provide wholesale telecommunication services (see "PUD Telecom Bills Pass First Hurdle," Feb. 10)

Some telecommunications companies, including GTE, are now working with the House committee co-chairs on amendments to the bill. Of those, the most significant are one that would strictly limit PUDs to developing telecom infrastructure in rural areas only, and one that would require the state Auditor to review the revenue and expenditures of PUD electrical, water and telecom operations and yearly to report on PUD telecom construction activities.

Even though the individual health insurance market in Washington has all but collapsed, legislators failed to reach agreement on any measure to rescue it.

The House Health Care Committee considered two bills, one sponsored by Republican co-chair Linda Parlette, the other by Democratic co-chair Eileen Cody. According to various accounts, Parlette's bill was acceptable to the insurance industry, but Cody's was not. Neither bill, however, emerged from committee. (See "Hope for Market-based Insurance Reform," Jan. 31)

Meanwhile, the Senate Health & Long-Term Care Committee considered a bill sponsored last year by Republican Sen. Alex Deccio, SB 6067. (See "Legislature Fails to Agree on Health Care Bill, April 29, 1999.") The committee gutted the bill, replacing its language with a short list of health-insurance principles. The idea was to use what then was Second Substitute SB 6067 as a "place-holder" for a measure that was passable. The bill failed to pass out of the Senate's Rules Committee by deadline, but because it affects the budget, it was not subject to the cut-off.

Another bill sponsored by Deccio, SB 6114, would have converted the state Insurance Commissioner's post into an appointive position. It died in the Senate's State & Local Government Committee. Last fall, in its report "Time to

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Reorganize Insurance Regulation,” the Research Council plumped for moving insurance regulation to the state Department of Financial Institutions.

More recently, the Research Council reported favorably on this year’s bill that would have authorized a pilot trial of 20 charter schools (see “House Action on Charter Schools Expected,” Feb. 2). The bill made it out of the House Education Committee on Feb. 1 only to die without having been brought up for a vote on the House floor.

With the revenue forecast due today, action on budget issues should move into the open. This year’s supplemental budget, complicated by the governor’s ambitious education plan and the fallout from I-695, may also provide a vehicle to clarify some of the issues we raised in our brief, *Fiscal Proposals Threaten Spending Limit*.

