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BELL POLICY CENTER CALLS 2007 LEGISLATIVE SESSION “A STRONG PUSH FOR OPPORTUNITY”

The Colorado Legislature and Gov. Bill Ritter worked together this year to pass dozens of bills that improve the state of opportunity for thousands of Coloradans, says Wade Buchanan, president of the Bell Policy Center.

“The 2007 session will be remembered as a strong push for opportunity,” Buchanan said. “Legislators worked hard to pass bills that prepare our kids to compete in the global economy and help families join and stay in the middle class.”

Among the session’s highlights:

- SB 2 uses the Amendment 35 tobacco tax increase (2004) to extend Medicaid health coverage for kids 18-21 who are emancipated from the state’s foster care system.
- SB 36 requires insurance companies to cover certain mental illnesses and disorders just as they do for physical illness and injury.
- SB 59 creates the Smart Start school breakfast program. This program eliminates reduced-price school breakfasts and makes them free for kids. As many as 3,000 more Colorado kids from low-income families will benefit from the school breakfast program.
- SB 148 creates a pilot program for high school students in districts with low graduation rates to earn their diploma and a college associate’s degree or technical certificate at the same time.
- SB 199, the \$5.1 billion School Finance Bill, raises the per-pupil spending base by this year’s required 4.6 percent, adds 2,000 slots to the state preschool program for the 07-08 school year and requires school districts to plan for potentially phasing in all-day kindergarten. The bill contains Gov. Ritter’s mill levy stabilization plan, which curbs the imbalance between state and local funding for K-12 education and reduces statewide inequity in property tax mill levies.
- SB 235 requires the Department of Local Affairs to post a self sufficiency standard for each county on its web site. This accurate, county-by-county planning tool shows the income that families of different sizes need to get by without charitable or public assistance.
- SB 239, the \$7.2 billion Long Bill, included appropriations for key education programs: a \$6.9 million increase in student financial aid, a boost to College Opportunity Fund stipends from \$2,580 to \$2,670 per full-time student, and \$200,000 in expanded support for family literacy programs.

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- HB 1355 bars health insurance companies from adjusting premiums for small businesses based on past claims or the health of the company's workers.
- Gov. Ritter created the P-20 Council by executive order. The P-20 Council will work on integrating the education system from preschool through college or technical training, and focus on student success. It removed the need for SB 53, which would have created a P-16 Council, and HB 1098, aimed at helping low-income and minority kids succeed in college.



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The session also contained a few disappointments:

- The legislature declined to consider separating the state's Earned Income Tax Credit from TABOR surpluses. A state EITC would build on the federal EITC, the single most effective program in the country for helping working poor families get a foothold in the middle class.
- HB 1302, which would have increased the state's General Fund reserve account from 4 percent to 8 percent, died in the Senate Finance Committee. Colorado needs to be saving more money in the good times so budget cuts don't have to go so deep in the hard times.

"Overall, 2007 was a productive session that opened the door to opportunity for more Coloradans. There's still some unfinished business we'll continue to push for next year," said Buchanan.

The Bell Policy Center will publish a more detailed summary of how opportunity-related bills fared in the 2007 session in an early edition of its free e-newsletter, *The Opportunity News*, to be released next week. It compares the session's accomplishments with the agenda laid out last year in the *Bell's Blueprint for Opportunity* document. For more information, visit www.thebell.org.