



Fill the bills

Last week's first house passage deadline

at the Nevada Legislature sharpened the focus on progressive policy that may be achievable this year. We already knew after the first big deadline—first committee passage—that the Democratic leadership was not interested in capping the interest rates of predatory payday lenders since they refused to provide an opportunity for workers whose personal finances have been ruined by payday loans to tell their stories. Other states have capped the interest rates these companies charge and driven the worst actors out of town. In Nevada, we might as well send them an engraved invitation to come take advantage of our vulnerable populations.

The same “no hearing” fate precluded any discussion of Nevada’s troublesome death penalty laws or its lack of a comprehensive, science-based sex education program in our schools—a tragic misstep at a time when Nevada leads the nation in primary and secondary syphilis cases, and its HIV rates are increasing.

After last week’s deadline, we know that Nevada won’t make any progress towards providing terminal patients with a mechanism for ending their lives with dignity. SB 165 died on the “Secretary’s Desk,” a technical means of killing a bill on the Senate Floor without forcing members to vote on it, thus depriving constituents of learning how their particular Senator viewed the legislation.

A similar action occurred in the Assembly with the demise of AB 281 on the Chief Clerk’s Desk. The bill appeared on the fast-track to passage when it was showcased on April 15 as part of Nevada Immigrant Coalition Day, celebrated for limiting law enforcement’s ability to place immigration holds on people in jail unless there is probable cause. Democrats apparently got cold feet once Republicans, led by failed gubernatorial candidate Adam Laxalt, began a social media campaign falsely claiming the bill was connected to the promotion of “sanctuary cities,” a movement that has been virtually ignored in Nevada.

There were many good bills that survived, however. Renters may see some relief if the Assembly advances SB 256, Senator Yvanna Cancela’s bill to strengthen tenant rights, and Senator Julia Ratti’s bill, SB 398, which authorizes local governments to be more pro-active in tackling the affordable housing crisis.

Democrats continued to fortify their gun safety measures when the Assembly approved AB 153, creating a misdemeanor crime for negligently storing a firearm where there is a substantial risk that a child can access it. They also passed AB 291, banning bumpstocks and giving local jurisdictions the ability to enact tougher gun regulations if they desire.

The Senate passed SB 450, a bill that makes recall elections much tougher in Nevada in response to the attempt to recall three female Senators last year for no reason other than they voted as Democrats—an effort led by former Republican Senator Mike Roberson, who hoped to capture those seats in a special election. Washoe County’s

Republican Senators Ben Kieckhefer and Heidi Gansert voted for the bill, perhaps as a way to redeem themselves after their complicity in the failed recall. But it’s a shame nothing was done to strengthen campaign finance law to deter corruption and self-enrichment.

AB 66, a bill sponsored by the Washoe Regional Behavioral Health Policy Board was unanimously approved, creating a financially sustainable framework for crisis stabilization services for those suffering from mental illness and substance abuse. These services would address the person’s housing and other basic needs along with treatment as a means of stopping the cycle of homelessness, mental illness and addiction affecting so many Nevadans.

For the most part, it’s a good start to a successful session of progressive policy for Democrats and for more moderate Republicans, like Reno’s Assemblywoman Jill Tolles, who voted for automatic restoration of voting rights to ex-felons. □

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