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## 2004 COLORADO LEGISLATURE: Savor Small Victories

We had a one-year reprieve after the huge service slashes of 2003. Future service cuts loom, however, as future state revenues ratchet down under TABOR restrictions. Generally, services cut last year were not restored, with a couple notable exceptions: The cap on new enrollment in the Child Health Plan was lifted and prenatal services for pregnant women under Child Health Plan will be restored. While legal immigrants are scheduled to be dropped from Medicaid at the end of the year, those under 19 will become eligible for the Child Health Plan.

### GAINS

Those on Old Age Pension, Aid to the Needy Disabled and certain other types of public assistance will get help with their heating bills next year. Residential customer will be charged 25 cents per month to fund the program. They can choose to opt out. Funds for energy assistance would have otherwise dropped, since this was the last year of funding through settlement of the Public Service Company's Fort St. Vrain Lawsuit.

Women on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families will be more likely to be allowed to attend vocational and post-secondary education under a new law. Since the 1996 Welfare law passed, fewer women on welfare could pursue education and training because states and counties worried about meeting their quotas for the percentage of the caseload that needed to be in the workforce. Women in all counties will be able to transition from TANF child care subsidies to the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program subsidies automatically in the future. This prevents the need to miss work to submit an application for child care assistance after a woman has been off welfare for a year. Evaluation of Colorado welfare program will continue for another five years. Evaluations from the first five years led to many program improvements, such as the efforts above.

Those who cannot get health insurance due to a medical condition can get health insurance from CoverColorado. Individuals must pay a premium quite a bit above the average cost of health insurance- so this is not a program for the poor. The program is established by the state, but last year lost most of its state funding. An extra surcharge on insurers helped subsidize the cost for program participants. This year the program received support from the CAPCO tax credit program for insurers. It also will receive a steady portion of the State's unclaimed property fund.

In other small victories, victims of domestic violence can no longer be evicted for calling law enforcement. Women are now explicitly allowed to breastfeed anywhere a woman has the right to be. Pregnant women on TANF who a fighting an addiction will be able to receive treatment for substance abuse for a year post-partum, rather than the current two months post-partum.

Two improvements to the sex offender registry passed. Sex offenders from out of state must register if they spend more than a couple weeks here. Also the criminal justice system will track on the registry offenders who are in the criminal justice system. Sex offenders cannot be hired as prison guards. Those currently employed who are convicted of sex offenses cannot be left unsupervised with inmates.

## **HOLDING THE LINE**

Legislation that was proposed, but defeated, offered some of the biggest victories:

-No new abortion restriction passed this year. New clinic licensing, new parental consent provisions, and required pre-abortion "information" and waiting periods were all defeated.

-A move to eliminate all affirmative action not federally or court ordered lost by a single senate vote.

-The senate also defeated a measure to allow the governor to enter into contract with the federal government to have state employees act as immigration officers.

-The house defeated a resolution in support of U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave's proposed constitutional amendment banning same sex marriage. And a proposal to limit parental rights to only the one parent whose name is on a birth certificate or adoption certificate was defeated. (Colorado law does not allow both parents in a same-sex couple to sign on to birth certificates or adoption certificates.)

## **PROGRESS DELAYED**

On the flip side, there were no advances in equal rights for Lesbians. A ban on employment discrimination was defeated. Legalization of same sex adoption was defeated.

Rape survivors might still go to hospital emergency rooms and not be told how to avoid becoming pregnant because of the rape.

Colorado's unemployment insurance still will benefit less than 40% of the unemployed. Measures to allow domestic violence victims to receive unemployment when they have either a police or medical report OR are in counseling were refused. Domestic victim survivors must still meet both qualifications. Fewer than 50 Colorado domestic violence survivors qualify per year under this provision. Other measures to allow UI for those who seek part time work after past full time work was defeated, even though we have allowed long time part time workers to collect unemployment seeking part-time work. A measure to allow a laid-off worker to count the most recent quarter of work was denied. This hurts more recent entrants into the workforce. Existing law was written to exclude the most recent quarter only because, before computers, it took that long to compile the data.

But progress delayed helps lay the plans for next year's legislative advocacy.