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Rural Schools Association Executive Director David Little joins with education and municipal associations outside the Senate Chamber to inform the press and public about needed changes in the property tax cap prior to its reauthorization.

EXTRA INNINGS!

LEGISLATURE MOVES PAST SCHEDULED SESSION END

When the Yankees are forced to play extra innings, their play by play announcer, Michael Kay is fond of saying “Free baseball!” since fans see more innings played than they expected when they bought their ticket. But it’s tough to muster that kind of enthusiasm when the state legislature extends its scheduled legislative session beyond its expected conclusion. The reason is simple; the result is likely to be anything but “free” for New York State’s schools.

OVERTIME: USE IT OR LOSE IT!

It’s true that extending the time for negotiations allows the legislature the opportunity to pass bills that are important to rural schools, such as legislation to make all threats of violence against a school a crime, rather than just bomb threats. Our state has already had one school community terrorized by continual threats of mass violence, with the only charge available to police and prosecutors being simple harassment. It’s time to bring our laws up to date and recognize that these days, most threats of mass violence don’t come from bombs. The need for this legislation emanated from a rural school district. Let’s not wait for Newtown to come to New York State before we get our house in order. **Assembly Bill 2800-A (Lentol) , Senate Bill 430-A (Gallivan.)**

WILL LEGISLATORS BE DEEMED “INEFFECTIVE”?

More time may also allow leaders to negotiate needed changes to the ever changing APPR system. Legislators were over a barrel when they agreed to the new changes and timeline. Now, without the pressure of the state budget before them, they need to make the system workable. Despite a waiver system established earlier this week by the Board of Regents, rural districts will still need to employ independent evaluators, a needlessly costly, ineffective and time consuming requirement. They’ll also be negotiating under the threat of losing their state aid if their dead-

line isn't met and they can't obtain a waiver. Lawmakers still have the chance to separate what they've already promised local taxpayers in state aid from their new mandates. It's simply unfair to have schools pass a budget based on one state aid figure, only to renege on it due to a negotiating result that may be completely out of the districts' control. **Assembly Bill 7303-A (Nolan).**

EVERYBODY OUT OF THE "POOL"?

Then there's the little talked about but vitally important legislation to allow small, often rural school districts and other employers with up to 100 employees to stay in their health care consortia or trusts. School districts often use a health care consortium to take advantage of the lower "experience rated" rates offered due to a school's typically younger, healthier "rating pool" (mostly folks who are between 25 and 55) rather than a "community rating" that factors in the typically higher costs for seniors and those without insurance. Under the federal Affordable Health Care Act, if New York State doesn't pass legislation, school districts with 100 employees or fewer will be forced to abandon their consortium or trust and move to community rating. That's likely to increase costs by up to 30%. Can you imagine the impact that would have on a small district that is potentially facing a tax cap of 0% next year? This legislation is also critically important to our rural farms and businesses that would be covered under the bill's "stop loss" provisions. Under the bill, schools and businesses would be grandfathered in for two years, giving the state time to conduct a study on this impact. **Assembly Bill 8134-A and Assembly Bill 8300 (Seawright.)**

LET'S TAKE THE OFFENSIVE!

Each of the bills described above are critically important to rural schools and RSA has been working with partners to urge their passage. They are now in the final stages of negotiation and an agreement to make them law rests in your hands. Call your legislator and make sure they know how important these bills are to your district!

PLAYING DEFENSE-PRESERVING THE VICTORY

Extra innings doesn't just present an opportunity to do great new things...it creates the obligation to prevent harmful new state action. There were plenty of reasons to hope that the legislature would conclude its regularly scheduled session without taking action on such things as creating an education tax credit for private and parochial schools, making the tax cap permanent without fixing it, increasing the cap on charter schools and expanding mayoral control of public schools outside of New York City. Currently, the governor and legislature have failed to arrive at agreements on any of these issues and that's good news for our rural schools. The problem? They're coming back next week to try again. These are high profile issues, backed by powerful political donors. They have the potential to erode democratically elected public school governance, public school funding and the ability of communities to contribute an affordable amount toward their schools.

Your service to your local school district is very important, but your effort on behalf of all rural schools is vital! If there was ever a time you thought "I need to call my legislators. They need to know how this will affect us," that time is now! Time is short. Don't let them use the tired old excuse that they never heard from you. Believe me, they're hearing from plenty of others. Your silence would spell the deterioration of rural schools.

HOW TO HELP

CALL YOUR SENATOR AT 518-455-2800

CALL YOUR MEMBER OF ASSEMBLY AT 518-455-4100

CALL THE GOVERNOR AT 518-474-8390

Be Brief, Be Concise, Use Local Examples

As always, thank you for your efforts on behalf of rural school students!



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