

August 2011 Government Affairs Report

Hanging on to summer....while some are talking about the shortest summer on record, rest assured we still have a number of weeks to go before it is officially over. However, school is starting and Kalispell area legislators are going to be very busy in September.

Legislators in the Flathead valley hosted a new select committee meeting this month. The 642 **Select Committee on Efficiency in Government** met at Flathead Valley Community College on August 22-23. The committee, chaired by Sen. Jon Sonju is seeking technology-driven efficiencies to improve state government. Members will develop over the course of the next year a set of recommendations for the 2013 Montana Legislature. According to chairman Sonju, "If we can get all of government working toward that and getting a technology roadmap together, I think we'd see tremendous returns for the taxpayer."

Presentations from Medicare and Medicaid stakeholders and technology experts attempted to highlight what state government is doing today efficiently and inspire committee members to consider new ways government (state and local) can improve efficiencies and save money. Dick Clark, Chief Information Officer for the State of Montana mentioned a few ideas such as systems to handle electronic signatures and looking for multistate and regional IT solutions.

The committee will hold 10 meetings that will explore government savings and efficiencies in the areas of budgeting, natural resources, technology and Medicaid.

On Aug. 23-24 in Helena, the **Economic Affairs Interim Committee** reviewed four licensing boards and further discussed the creation of a state health insurance exchange. Montana, along with many states has resisted a state-run insurance exchange. However, Montana may have more options than originally pitched. Marguerite Salazar, a regional director of the Department of Health and Human Services, presented to the legislative committee and suggested that options for states may exist instead of a full-fledged exchange. Under the health care law, the federal government will impose its version of the exchange on states that don't set up their own exchange. Montana may be allowed to take over a federally run exchange after it is designed over the next two years.

The EAIC committee also heard from the Indian Health Services and discussed Medicaid eligibility and expansion of healthcare insurance coverage due to federal reform.

September will be a busy month for legislative committee work. All meetings take place in Helena unless noted and interested parties can watch the committee work on line at www.leg.mt.gov.

Law and Justice will meet Friday, Sept 9 (Rep. Lavin)

Water Policy Interim Committee meets Tuesday, Sept 13 and Wednesday, Sept 14 (Sen Vincent-Libby)

Environmental Quality Council meets Wednesday, Sept 14 and Thursday, Sept 15 (Sen. Vincent-Libby and Rep. Bennett-Libby)

Energy and Telecommunications meets Friday, Sept 16 (Sen. Jackson)

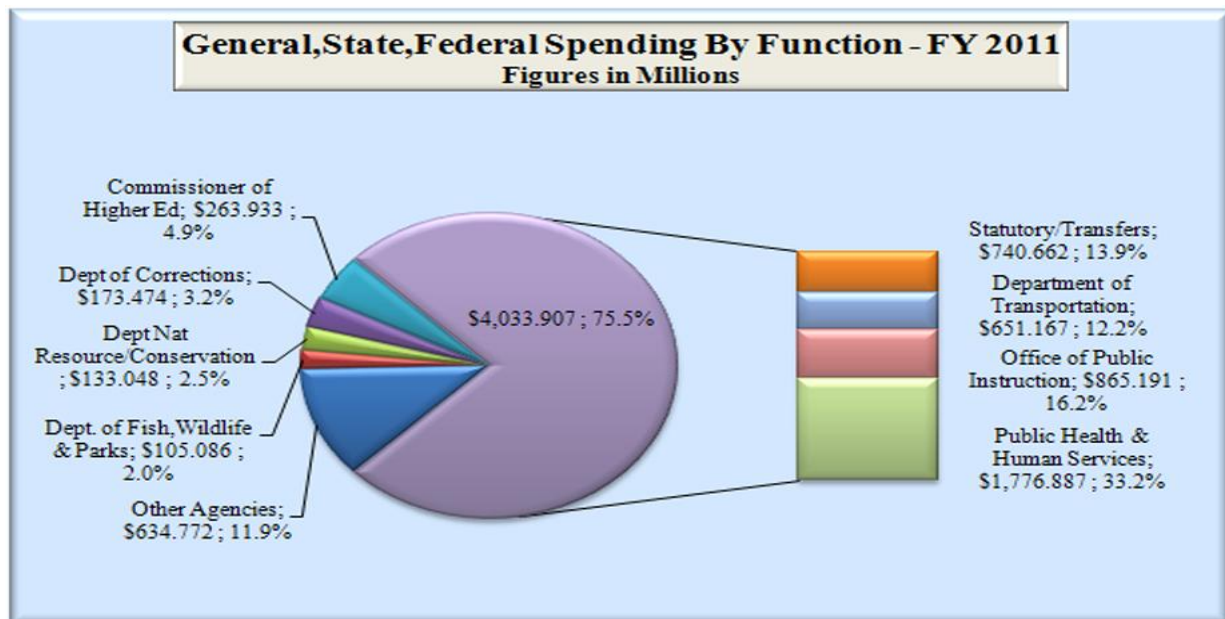
Children, Families, Health and Human Services meets Monday, Sept 19

Revenue and Transportation Committee meets Monday, Sept 26 and Tuesday, Sept 27 (Sen. Tutvedt)

State-Tribal Relations Committee meets on Tuesday, Sept 27 in Crow Agency and Wednesday September 28 in Lame Deer. (Sen. Mowbray-Polson and Rep. Read -Ronan)

Legislative Finance Committee meets Thursday, Sept 29 and Friday, Sept 30.

Interesting Chart on State Spending:



Last week's chart showed general fund spending only, which did not totally reflect all primary funds for all of state government services. The above chart shows state government spending from the three primary fund types – general, state special, and federal special. Total spending from these three funds for FY 2011 was \$5.344 billion. As the above chart shows, over 75% of total spending is for public health, public schools, transportation (highway maintenance and construction), and statutory/transfer functions. Statutory/transfers include spending for local governments, debt service, selected retirement payments, and other functions authorized by state statute.