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Good legislation doesn't happen after midnight

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By CODY DAVIS and SUE HANSEN

As your local elected officials, we both took an oath to look out for the best interests of our communities. A big part of that is encouraging the state legislature to consider the Western Slope perspective when considering upcoming and current bills. Our communities may be different, but as local, elected officials, we generally find ourselves spending time on similar issues. Affordable housing. Land use. Water. Public safety. Roads. All of these challenges have kept both of us up at night since we've been elected. Right now, our sleepless nights are being caused by a bill that is being introduced in the waning hours of the legislative session to unionize county employees. This bill will negatively impact both of our communities and we wanted to make constituents aware of these potential impacts.

Plenty of ink has been used discussing Colorado's complicated fiscal knots. While we may have different ideas about how to untie these knots, we both agree that late-night legislating to unionize county employees is going to create even more financial struggles. This one-size-fits-all approach will unnecessarily complicate the nearly nine-month long budget processes in our counties and will require additional staff to manage the process.

In Mesa County, this legislation will have a significant fiscal impact. If past is prologue, the likelihood of the State of Colorado actually attaching funding to a new mandate is pretty slim — reference “unfunded mandates” that ultimately cost the taxpayers even more. It's getting expensive to do business, and without an added source of revenue, this may force both boards to make choices between reducing services and/or increasing taxes. Voters are quite discerning when it comes to approving new mandates. I know my Mesa County constituents will not agree to pay for a new

will cost upwards of \$7 million annually. At what cost should we burden our community members? Fewer deputies? Less road maintenance? Longer waits for the DMV? Fewer case workers with the Department of Human Services?

This year, the legislature has passed bill after bill effectively eroding the financial bottom line for counties across the state. In Montrose County, the board of county commissioners continues to be fiscally conservative — no bells, no whistles and we're quite proud of that. We focus on the essentials: public safety, roads and bridges, public health and human services; and we are concerned when something like this proposed bill comes along that will threaten funding for those core services.

Forcing counties to comply with a collective bargaining approach takes away any local control we have with regard to managing our employees. In Montrose County, staff completes salary surveys each year and we are consistently at or above market. We have a generous benefit package, which is key in employee attraction and retention. We take care of our employees. To be forced to participate in collective bargaining suggests the opposite — that they would need a union to negotiate for them. Nothing could be further from the truth. We've done the math and this bill will force counties to make some really tough choices with regard to funding services. This bill is being pushed by the ACLU, *not* the people.

It is one thing if a county wishes to manage their employees with a collective bargaining approach, but let individual counties make that decision. What works in one county may not work for another — and we already know that Western Slope counties are different from the Front Range. Let each county make their own decision; don't force our hand (and pocket books) with unfunded mandates.

Growing up, both of us always heard from our parents that nothing good ever happens after midnight. When it comes to the Colorado General Assembly, we tend to think that very few good things tend to happen in the final weeks of the legislative session. From where we sit, the collective bargaining legislation does not take in to account the impact it will have on communities like ours. While someone decided behind closed doors that municipal employees, K-12 employees and higher education employees should be exempted from this bill, county governments are still in the crosshairs and we have not been meaningfully engaged at all during this process. This is not good government and, if this measure passes, taxpayers across Colorado should brace themselves for reduced services and increased taxes.

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