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Committee GOPers flunk answer to state's teacher shortage

ARVADA, Colo. (Feb. 13, 2018) – A creative proposal to solve Colorado's teacher shortage got voted down by Republicans in the State Senate Finance Committee today, despite strong support from nine witnesses who attended the hearing. No witnesses spoke in opposition.

Without clear explanation, the three Republicans on the five-person committee stood firm against Senate Bill 18-147, the Educator Loan Forgiveness Program, sponsored by Senators Rachel Zenzinger (DArvada) and Don Coram (R-Montrose).

"My colleague on the bill, Sen. Coram of Montrose, understands too well the urgency of this teacher shortage that plagues the rural parts of Colorado," Zenzinger said. "Unfortunately, certain members of the Senate Finance Committee apparently can't grasp the situation."

The shortage also particularly affects students in urban areas who can't get the educational foundation they need to prepare for certain jobs of today. The legislature had authorized a bipartisan study of the situation, and a nonpartisan panel recommended the loan-forgiveness solution that was largely incorporated into SB

18-147. The report estimated that the loan forgiveness would go far toward helping to fill the 100 teacher jobs that go unfilled every year, on average.

"I am disappointed that ideology talked louder than testimony in committee today, and the three Republican members on the panel prevented the bill from having a fair hearing of the full Senate," Zenzinger said.

The bill proposed a program that would have repaid up to $5,000 of qualified educational loans for up to five years for educators employed in qualified positions. It targeted educators employed in hard-to-fill positions due to geography or content area.

The bill was co-sponsored by Representatives Barbara McLachlan and Bob Rankin in the House.

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