



Legislative Newsletter



14305 E. Alameda Ave., Ste. 300
Aurora CO 80012
Tel: 303-344-1500
Fax: 303-344-1564
www.aurorachamber.org

April 12, 2019

*An up-to-date review of Colorado government and politics especially for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.
Compiled and edited by Axiom Strategies, Inc.*

**“Every strike brings me closer to the next home run.”
Babe Ruth**

The First Regular Session of the Seventy-second General Assembly convened on Jan. 4, 2019. As of today, there have been 320 bills in the House and 238 bills in the Senate introduced. Expect weekly newsletters from Axiom during the legislative session, and your Capitol Watch bill tracker URL will be sent every Friday.

-Team Axiom-

The First Regular Session of the Seventy-second General Assembly convened on Jan. 4, 2019. As of today, there have been 320 bills in the House and 238 bills in the Senate introduced. Expect weekly newsletters from Axiom during the legislative session, and your Capitol Watch bill tracker URL will be sent every Friday.

-Team Axiom-

Colorado oil and gas overhaul tips power toward local government. How that power is used will vary widely.

Colorado Sun

Before the city of Thornton adopted a new oil and gas ordinance, it got a letter from the state warning that it was overstepping its bounds. After the ordinance passed, the city was sued by the oil and gas industry.

When Longmont adopted an ordinance that blocked oil and gas development in residential areas, it was sued by both the state and the industry.

And when Erie’s trustees considered a one-year drilling moratorium, a representative of the state’s main oil and gas trade group stood up at the meeting and threatened a lawsuit. (That was after the trustees had been bombarded with email and phone calls from a national oil and gas industry lobbying group.)

Gov. Jared Polis is expected to soon sign the “Protect Public Welfare Oil and Gas Operations” bill, also known as Senate Bill 181, and when he does stories of such strong-arm tactics are to be a thing of the past – at least that’s the aim as the law tips power to local officials.

“A lot of these oil and gas companies have been real jerks,” Longmont Mayor Brian Bagley said. “It is kind of flipping off the guy in traffic on the way to a job interview and realizing ‘Oh! That’s the guy I am meeting with.’”

Balance of power not yet understood, but cities get a bigger say

Still, questions remain about what the new law will mean on the ground and how much of an impact it will have on the oil and gas industry, which has drawn a picture of potentially dire consequences.

All sides agree that it gives local governments a bigger say in oil and gas development in their communities, a role that until now has been limited by state primacy in regulating oil and gas operations.

How that power is used may vary widely.

Boulder has already adopted what its commissioners call “the strongest set of regulations in the state,” while officials in Weld County, the focus of Front Range drilling, support the industry and opposed the legislation.

“Adams County isn’t going to treat oil and gas development like Boulder County or Weld County,” said Steve O’Dorisio, chairman of the Adams County commission. “Adams County has proven we are not intent on banning oil and gas development, we are intent on protecting health and safety first and allowing as many minerals as to be extracted as possible.”

The law also will give local governments some breathing room in determining how much oil and gas can be extracted by changing the goal from the maximum production of oil and gas to permitting “nonproduction” if it is necessary to protect public health, safety, welfare or the environment.

What the new law will do, O’Dorisio said, is allow the county to “influence the location of wells to protect public health, safety and welfare.”

It will, Broomfield councilman Kevin Kreeger said, allow local officials to “move operations to a safe place to drill.”

Some local governments already have oil and gas ordinances, including the city of Brighton and Arapahoe County, or have negotiated operating agreements with drillers that included noise and air-emission standards stricter than the state’s.

Erie and Broomfield have both gotten drillers to move sites and agree to 1,000-foot setbacks from homes — double the state standard.

A few municipalities and counties — including Broomfield and Adams County — already have inspectors monitoring drilling operations. In 2017, Broomfield’s inspectors made 71 site inspections at 36 facilities and found 14 operations with leaks.

Despite these initiatives, the oil and gas industry remained outside much of the land-use controls and nuisance ordinances local governments applied to other industrial or commercial activities as the drillers relied on state preemption on these issues.

Colorado regulators prepare to hit the ground running when oil and gas bill becomes law

Denver Post

State officials aren’t waiting for the governor to sign a bill revamping oil and gas regulations to get a start on writing rules, a process that is likely to take at least a year, several hearings and a major overhaul of the main regulatory body.

Jeff Robbins, director of the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, said Tuesday that he and his staff are working on criteria to determine whether a drilling permit application should get a closer look while new regulations are being developed.

Since January, the COGCC staff has taken a second look at applications for wells proposed near schools, in floodplains and in other cases, said Robbins, named the commission's permanent director in March after a short stint as acting director.

The oil and gas legislation, Senate Bill 19-181, passed by the Colorado General Assembly last week, gives the director 30 days after the bill takes effect to release a new set of criteria the agency can use to review applications that raise health and safety concerns or are challenged by local communities.

"We're working on that now," Robbins said. "There's no reason to wait for 30 days."

The COGCC will then take public comments on the proposed criteria. The director's ability to delay action on a permit based on certain circumstances disappears once new rules on protecting public health, safety and the environment are in place.

"My overall goal is to keep the business of the COGCC moving while implementing Senate Bill 181," Robbins said in an email Wednesday.

The bill allows the director to hire two deputies, and Robbins said he will fill at least one position to handle the agency's daily activities.

Another priority on the to-do list is reorganizing the oil and gas commission. The commission will remain a volunteer, part-time panel until its transition to a paid, full-time commission by July 1, 2020. In the meantime, the seats held by industry representatives will drop from three to one and separate spots will be added for members representing wildlife and environmental interests and health interests.

Throughout debate in the legislature, the bill's opponents said the section giving the COGCC director discretion to delay permits would amount to a drilling ban.

Senate Majority Leader Steve Fenberg, one of the bill's primary sponsors, countered that with more than 6,000 permits waiting for approval, the provision is needed to make sure public health and safety are considered when those permits are acted on.

"That could be 10 years worth of drilling," Fenberg said in a March hearing about the backlog of permits.

Drilling and well-location permits that have been approved won't be affected by the law, Robbins said.

The bill makes safeguarding public health, safety and the environment a priority when regulating oil and gas, eliminating the COGCC's charge to also foster development. It clarifies that cities and counties can use their planning and land-use authority to regulate the siting of wells, monitor emissions and oversee other activities on the surface.

Approval of SB 181 follows escalating clashes between residents and oil and gas companies in fast-growing communities north and east of Denver. The clashes have produced ballot proposals on stricter regulations and lawsuits over attempted drilling bans.

Dan Haley, president and CEO of the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, a trade group, said in a statement that he has spoken to Gov. Jared Polis and his staff and "we know his administration is diligently preparing for full implementation of SB 181."

"The formation of this interim permitting criteria is an important next step — a step that requires input from a number of stakeholders, including Colorado's oil and natural gas industry," Haley said.

Colorado's proposed first-in-the-nation health insurance program just got a big rewrite. Here's what changed.

Colorado Sun

A big change to how Colorado proposes to fund a massive new program to bring down health insurance prices will cost the state's hospitals as much as \$150 million per year — but that's nearly \$100 million less than they would have been on the hook for under the previous plan.

Lawmakers in the Colorado House on Friday passed an amendment to rewrite how the state plans to pay for a “reinsurance” program for the state's individual health insurance market — where people who don't get coverage through their employers buy it on their own.

The program seeks to gather up a bunch of money that can be used to help insurance companies pay for their highest-cost claims. Insurers' savings can then be passed on in the form of lower premiums for everybody — as much as 35% lower in some parts of the state.

Under the old plan, bill sponsors had proposed a novel way to pay for the program — through limiting what hospitals could charge in certain situations, making Colorado's program potentially the first in the country to pay for reinsurance through mandated hospital price cuts rather than fees on insurance carriers.

But the bill's sponsor, Dillon Democratic Rep. Julie McCluskie, said that approach ran into trouble because the Trump administration signaled it would be unlikely to sign off on it. Federal dollars are also needed to make the program work, so the federal government's approval is key.

That sent McCluskie back to the negotiating table, and, on Friday, she walked onto the House floor with an agreement for hospitals to pay fees of up to \$150 million a year — and no more than \$500 million over five years — to fund the program.

McCluskie said she had genuinely hoped to use the program to drive down hospital prices. But she said it was more important to move forward with a scheme more likely to be approved.

“It was hard for me to give up the cost-savings approach,” she said. “I really thought we had a chance to make a dramatic change to a broken, dysfunctional health care system. ... (But) we are in a health care crisis on the Western Slope, and we've got to take action as soon as possible to reduce health care premiums for working people.”

Hospitals, too, had mixed feelings about the deal. Officially, they only moved their stance on the bill, House Bill 1168, from “opposed” to “neutral.” But Joshua Ewing, the Colorado Hospital Association's associate vice president of legislative affairs, said the change will bring greater predictability to hospital budgets.

Throughout the debate, hospitals have been trying to get insurers to also kick in money to fund the program. That won't happen under the new proposal unless the federal government suspends an obscure tax on insurers.

But Ewing said hospitals have a good reason to want to see insurance prices drop. As premiums rise, people are more likely to go without insurance — often sticking hospitals with the bill for their care. But expensive insurance plans can cause a separate problem, too, because people with insurance are increasingly struggling to afford the out-of-pocket portions of their plans.

8 ways Colorado lawmakers want to make health care cheaper

Denver Post

It seems like every state senator and representative is trying to pass a health care bill this session.

Republicans, Democrats and the new governor all put lowering medical costs toward the top of their to-do lists in 2019, and the result of that has been dozens of bills — some of them overlapping — that seek to lower the cost of health care in different ways.

“It looks like total scattershot,” said Rep. Dylan Roberts, a Democrat from Eagle who is behind several major health care bills this session. “But hopefully by the time we get to the end of the day on May 3, we will have passed a comprehensive package of bills that address all aspects of the health care industry.”

Some of them, however, hinge on getting support not only at the Capitol but also from the Trump administration.

1. Public option

Status: House Bill 4 passed the House.

One of the biggest proposed changes is for Colorado to develop a plan to basically sell health insurance to any resident who wants to buy it.

“Nobody is forced onto the plan,” Roberts said. “It’s not single payer at all.”

The bill, which he is sponsoring with Republican Rep. Marc Catlin, R-Montrose, requires the state to develop a plan for a public option and present it lawmakers by mid-November.

Fourteen of Colorado’s counties — mostly on the Western Slope — have just one health insurance plan for their residents who buy through the individual marketplace, and they pay some of the highest insurance premiums in the country. Roberts said adding another plan would be “a huge change for the people that live in those counties.”

The challenge for Roberts and Catlin is likely going to be convincing the White House.

The Affordable Care Act allows states to ask permission to try different ideas for lowering health care costs through something called a 1332 waiver. No state has one for a public option plan, and President Donald Trump already is trying to have the ACA itself declared unconstitutional.

2. Reinsurance

Status: House Bill 1168 passed its second reading in the House.

The easiest way to explain reinsurance is to say it’s insurance for insurance companies. Colorado would pay some of the medical bills for the most expensive patients on the individual insurance market, and in return insurance companies would lower the premiums for everyone in that market by as much as 30 percent.

To pay those medical bills, Colorado would ask the federal government for money by applying for a 1332 waiver and by charging hospitals a fee.

That’s different from the way states such as Alaska and Minnesota run their reinsurance programs, in large part because Colorado wouldn’t be spending any of its own money on the program.

“I frankly don’t think the federal government will grant a waiver under the conditions we are asking for,” Rep. Collin Larson, R-Littleton, said during a debate on the bill.

Larson thinks putting all the state costs on providers is asking too much from them and is likely to cause cuts in services. The bill’s sponsors disagree.

Rep. Julie McCluskie, D-Dillion, said hospitals across the state sat down with her in good faith and “crafted a policy that works for them.” The Colorado Hospital Association is neutral on the bill.

She has been working with the Colorado Division of Insurance and the federal government for weeks and is optimistic the state will get that 1332 before the end of the year.

3. Insulin prices

Status: House Bill 1216 is working its way through House committees.

About one in four insulin users ration their medication because they can't afford the out-of-pocket costs, according to a 2018 study at the Yale Diabetes Center.

That's why two Democrats and a Republican have sponsored a bill to limit to \$100 the amount Coloradans with health insurance pay for insulin each month. Roberts is one of those Democrats, and he said it could save Coloradans up to \$800 per month.

Insurance carriers would absorb those costs, and Roberts said the estimates he has seen show the price of health care plan increasing by "a couple of cents, per person, per month."

4. Prescription drug prices

Status: House Bill 1296 is working its way through House committees.

When Rep. Dominique Jackson, D-Aurora, ran out of manufacturer coupons for a medicine she takes, the price per month went from \$25 to more than \$1,500. She was shocked.

"It is really difficult for me to figure out why my prescription went up so much," Jackson said. "This bill is hopefully going to get at the real reasons."

Her bill, if passed, would authorize the state Department of Insurance to collect all kinds of data from everyone in the prescription drug supply chain, analyze it and report annually to lawmakers on ways to reduce costs. It also would require drug companies to publish certain price increases on the DOI's website 30 days before they go into effect.

Jason Hopfer, a health care industry lobbyist, said the companies he represents are fine with all of that. What they're concerned about is mandating that drug rebates be given to customers at the point of sale. The reason, Hopfer said, is some employers prefer to put those rebates towards lower monthly premiums for everyone in their company.

"You could raise the cost for everyone while trying saving some consumers money," Hopfer said. "Give employers flexibility in deciding how they want to use it."

Polis signs law to create program simplifying Colorado's sales-tax system

Denver Business Journal

Paul Archer holds 43 different sales-tax licenses for his Centennial-based multi-format printer-software company, Automated Business Products — one for each of the Colorado home-rule cities to which he sells his company's products. At the end of each month, one of his employees takes two full days to calculate the tax owed to each of those municipalities and to send out checks.

But after years of fighting for the state to simplify its byzantine sales-and-use-tax system that is a thorn in the side particularly of small businesses without many results, Archer got a glimpse Friday of a future he believes can be very different. He stood behind Gov. Jared Polis as Polis signed into law Senate Bill 6 after a two-process that began with the formation of a task force to advise the state on what it can do to take some of the compliance burden off of local companies.

SB 6, sponsored by Sen. Angela Williams, D-Denver, requires the state to put in place a system with which business owners can easily determine the level of taxes owed based upon the address to where they ship, as well as the particular taxing districts to who they owe the money, and to which they can submit taxes for all local governments and have the state parse out those various revenues. Authors of the bill — including co-sponsoring Reps. Tracy Kraft-Tharp,

D-Arvada, and Kevin Van Winkle, R-Highlands Ranch — believe it will be 18 to 24 months before the system is up and running, but Polis' signature Friday officially starts the process of the state requesting proposals from contractors to build the system.

"We have maybe the most complicated sales-tax system in the country. This is a step in the right direction," said Archer, also a leader with the Simplify Colorado Sales Tax Coalition, before entering Polis' office for the signing ceremony. "Literally, my sales-tax compliance will go from 20 hours a month to one or two hours a month."

During a year in which major business groups find themselves battling Democratic legislative leaders on subjects ranging from increased oil/gas regulations to mandates on paid-leave and equal-pay programs, the idea of simplifying Colorado's sales-tax system has been a rare point of unanimity. SB 6 made it through both chambers of the Legislature without so much as a single "no" vote against it, despite the creation of the new system carrying an estimated \$18.75 million price tag over the next two years. And a related bill, House Bill 1240, has passed through its first two committees without opposition.

Under rules adopted in September by the Colorado Department of Revenue, in-state companies that ship their products to customers must begin using a destination-sourcing system of tax remittance by May 31, paying money to each city, county and special district in which customers reside. With the overlap of boundaries between those three types of jurisdictions, there are 576 different taxing-district rates in this state, Van Winkle noted.

HB 1240, sponsored by Kraft-Tharp and Van Winkle, would delay that requirement for companies to use destination sourcing until the system mandated by SB 6 is in place if those companies sell less than \$100,000 worth of goods each year. It also solidifies a rule that any out-of-state company selling \$100,000 or more in goods into the state must submit taxes on a district-by-district basis as well.

The system created through SB 6 will only be considered a true success if the state's 71 home-rule cities that now collect taxes individually from businesses selling within their borders agree to be a part of the system and allow the revenue department to collect their taxes and remit them to them. But Colorado Municipal League Executive Director Kevin Bommer, who attended the signing ceremony, said he believes that will not be a problem as well as the system functions as expected.

"If this is all set up right, I imagine home-rule municipalities will participate," Bommer said. "But there's a lot of work to be done. This is the easy part."

Kraft-Tharp, however, eschewed the idea that the process of getting SB 6 into law has been easy, despite its unanimous backing this session.

Over the past two years, the task force she created brought to the table the disparate interests of business owners, local governments and the revenue department and found a way they could all continue to get the revenues they have been receiving while setting up an entirely new way of doing so in a state where home-rule governments hold sway over state edicts. And then once they came up with a solution, they had to convince a new governor who just took office in January to get on board with them.

"He came in at the end and looked at it and said, 'Hmmm, is there something we can do better than this?'" Kraft-Tharp relayed about her conversation with Polis. "It was really convincing him that there is, but this is a necessary first step in the process."

Colorado literacy bill mandating more teacher training advances

Colorado Politics

A Colorado bill that would require many early elementary teachers to undergo new training in reading instruction passed unanimously out of the Senate Education Committee on Thursday, but not before lawmakers and parent activists

expressed concern that the proposal represents a meager effort against a massive problem: that roughly 60 percent of Colorado third-graders do not read at grade level.

“What we really want to do is help our kids,” said state Sen. Bob Rankin, a Carbondale Republican and co-sponsor of the bill. “This can literally keep kids out of jail. The average prisoner only reads at a fourth grade level.”

Senate Bill 199 makes changes to the READ Act, 2012 legislation that aims to get students reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Schools must test students in reading from kindergarten through third grade, identify students with “significant reading deficiencies,” and develop individualized plans to help those students.

Six years after the implementation of this law, the number of children with significant reading deficiencies has actually increased slightly, and the number of children not reading at grade level has barely budged. Those numbers have raised questions about how districts are using roughly \$42.5 million in dedicated state funds each year and whether districts’ reading curriculum reflects scientific understanding of how children learn to read.

The original version of the bill introduced last month went much further in dictating how schools approach reading, going so far as to say how many minutes a day students should receive literacy instruction. It also would have created a new literacy certification process within the Colorado Department of Education for reading coaches and teachers, as well as for the classroom aides who often provide one-on-one and small group reading instruction. There is currently no licensing process for paraprofessionals.

Significantly, it would have shifted most READ Act money away from per-pupil allocations and into schoolwide literacy grants, with major financial implications for districts. Those per-pupil dollars represented an extra \$835 per student this year, but critics have said there is little accountability for how that money is spent. Schoolwide literacy grants, meanwhile, have shown better results in improving literacy.

In response to concerns from school district administrators, the teachers union, and even advocacy groups like Stand for Children, the sponsors of the bill, Rankin and state Sen. Nancy Todd, an Aurora Democrat, made numerous changes.

The amended bill keeps most of the money as a per-student allocation, but it requires districts to describe how they’re spending the money and requires them to choose from reading intervention tools that the state education department has deemed effective.

Colorado may make it tougher to get vaccine exemptions, but abandons “really aggressive option”

Colorado Sun

An outcry from parents and opposition from Gov. Jared Polis are leading a Colorado lawmaker to abandon his effort to eliminate the state’s personal-belief exemption for required vaccinations.

The legislation from State Rep. Kyle Mullica introduced Thursday makes it more difficult for parents to receive a religious or personal-belief exemption from immunizations required to enroll their children in school, but it preserves both in law.

The new approach is designed to address Colorado’s lowest-in-the-nation immunization rate and comes after warnings from public health officials about measles and mumps outbreaks in the state and across the nation.

Under the measure, parents who claim a religious or personal-belief exemption would be required to complete a standardized form and get it certified by a state or local public health agency. Parents would then file the certification with the school. Right now, a standardized form and public health approval is not required.

For a medical exemption, parents would need to get a certified form from a physician, physician assistant or advanced registered nurse, but not a signature from a public health agency.

The new rules would take effect for the 2020 school year and the state would have to develop materials touting the benefits of immunizations and distribute them to health care providers by Jan. 1.

“The goal is to obviously improve our vaccination rates,” said Mullica, a Northglenn Democrat and emergency room nurse.

“I think we were looking at a really aggressive option in the beginning,” he added. “At the end of the day, the experts I visited with believe this option could potentially work without having to be so aggressive.”

In Colorado, less than 89 percent of the state’s kindergarten-aged children have received the vaccines needed to prevent illnesses such as measles and mumps, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The rate is below the national median and the 95 percent threshold needed to prevent an outbreak.

The state’s policy for vaccine exemptions currently is classified as the easiest in the country, said Dr. Sean O’Leary, an associate professor in pediatrics and infectious diseases at the University of Colorado School of Medicine who consulted on the legislation.

If the new rules are approved, he believes the state’s policy would become difficult, which he supports. “We know the more difficult the process, the lower the rate of exemptions, the higher the rates of vaccinations,” O’Leary said. “So I do think it could help.”

But he cautioned that Washington state tightened its exemption process in recent years only to see an outbreak that led to an emergency declaration.

To get a better handle on the state’s rate, the legislation would require better tracking of exemptions as well as an annual report to lawmakers.

Polis, the first-term Democratic governor, emerged as one of the most prominent critics of Mullica’s original proposal to abolish the personal-belief exemption, telling *The Colorado Sun* in February that the state shouldn’t mandate the practice on parents.

Paid family leave plan advances in Colorado Senate after rocky rollout

Denver Post

When Jasmine White gave birth to her youngest daughter four years ago, she was a single mother juggling two jobs. Taking the recommended 12 weeks off to nurse her newborn, Carmyn, wasn’t an option.

In order to keep her home and feed her family, she begged her doctor to release her so she could return to work just seven weeks after an emergency cesarean section.

“I was relieved to get an income again, but I was also upset because I had to cut off bonding and breastfeeding with my new baby,” she said Tuesday on the west steps of the state Capitol hours before lawmakers agreed to advance a bill that would create an insurance program for workers.

The bill, sponsored by state Sens. Faith Winter and Angela Williams, would allow women in similar situations to White’s — in fact, most Colorado workers facing a health crisis of their own or a loved one’s — to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave without fear of losing their job.

The proposed insurance program, five years in the making, cleared a key Senate committee on a party-line vote Tuesday afternoon after the sponsors amended the bill to allow businesses that already offer identical benefits and local governments to opt out, increase the share employees must contribute, and push back the rollout of the program to 2023.

The committee also reduced the amount of available time off to 12 weeks. The previous version allowed up to 16 weeks in some instances.

The bill still provides wage-replacement benefits and job protections for all employees who work at least 680 hours during a year and contribute to the state fund. Seasonal workers are not covered.

Premiums, which will start at 0.64 percent of an employee's wages, are expected to be split 60-40 between employees and most employers. Originally, the proposed split was 50-50. An employee making \$50,000 a year would contribute about \$3.69 a week. Benefits would be based on a person's income but capped at \$1,000 a week.

Before Tuesday's vote, it was unclear whether the bill would advance, though it has been a top priority of the Democratic caucus. State Sen. Nancy Todd, an Aurora Democrat, raised concerns in part because her local chamber of commerce opposed the bill.

And state Sen. Pete Lee, a Colorado Springs Democrat who voted for it, gave only cautious support.

"I'm convinced more work needs to be done," he said.

Winter and Williams spent the better part of three weeks working on amendments to the bill to win over support from business leaders as well as fellow Democrats.

While the changes were enough to earn the bill the votes it needed in the Finance Committee, they were not enough to garner favor with business leaders who wanted the bill to be more closely aligned with the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

"We've never had an objection to creating a program for family leave. We had agreed to a paid program that aligns with FMLA," said Loren Furman, the Colorado Chamber of Commerce's senior vice president for state and federal relations. "The majority of employers are already complying with FMLA now. When you align with FMLA it makes it so much easier for those employers who are already doing it right now."

Republicans on the committee attempted to better align the bill to federal standards and eliminate the portability of the program, making the benefits only available if workers are employed by the same employer for a full year. All of their efforts failed.

Push On To Overturn 40-Year-Old Colorado Law That Bans Rent Control (VIDEO)

CBS 4 Denver

DENVER (CBS4) – Local governments would have control over apartment rent increases if a bill before state lawmakers passes. Celeste Martinez among those supporting the bill.

She's been a renter for eight years and says she's been forced to pay as much as 65 percent of her income on rent.

"It was really challenging and required for me to get a second job just so I could cover all my basic needs," Martinez said.

She's not alone. A third of Coloradans are renters, paying on average more than \$1,400 a month. While the Metro Denver Apartment Association says rents have increased 3.4 percent a year on average since 2000, Martinez says some rents have skyrocketed, "Right now, landlords technically have the authority to increase rent as many times as they want."

Which is why state Sen.s Julie Gonzalez and Robert Rodriguez have introduced a bill to allow local governments to control rent increases.

"I'm sorry, but the free market has led us to this crisis," Gonzalez told supporters.

The bill repeals a law passed almost 40 years ago that bans rent control. Ted Nicolais with the Colorado Apartment Association says with good reason, "Basic economics tells you that whenever you place a cap on the price of any good, less of that is supplied and it's the same with housing."

He says the bill will lead to less affordable housing, pointing to a study out of San Francisco that found rent control led to a 15 percent decrease in rental units, "The City of Denver has 120,000 rental units in it right now according to the U.S. Census. If what happened in San Francisco happened in Denver, Denver would stand to lose 18,000 rental units. My question is, where would those people go?"

Bill supporters don't buy it. But even in a Democratically controlled legislature, this legislation will have an uphill battle.

Colorado districts are preparing quickly for full-day kindergarten, potentially increasing costs

Chalkbeat Colorado

Large Colorado school districts that collectively serve thousands of children in half-day kindergarten programs are preparing to switch to full-day programs this fall, potentially pushing up the cost of Gov. Jared Polis' signature education initiative.

Lawmakers have set aside \$185 million — about 80 percent of what Polis requested — to pay for full-day kindergarten next year. Their logic in not paying for all of it: That not all districts will immediately make the jump and that not all parents will enroll their children in full-day since there is no mandate.

But a number of districts — including Boulder Valley, Cherry Creek, and Douglas County in the Denver metro area, and Grand Junction-based District 51 — are pushing to make the jump next fall, concerned about the academic and financial ramifications if they don't.

"With free full-day kindergarten across the state, nobody wants to lose enrollment," said Ted Knight, assistant superintendent for the Douglas County School District, where 1,600 students, a little more than a third of all kindergartners, are in half-day programs this year.

Some lawmakers were already concerned about the long-term sustainability of Polis' plan, which depends on local property tax revenue remaining high. The eagerness of districts to move to full-day kindergarten speaks to the importance of ensuring a good start for young learners even as it raises questions about Colorado's ability to pay for it.

As lawmakers begin the hard work of shepherding the kindergarten funding bill through the approval process, advocates insist the state can afford it — and must. They cite a long list of benefits, including stronger reading skills, better identification of learning disabilities, the hundreds of dollars a month it will put back in the pockets of parents paying tuition, and the millions of dollars a year it will free up for school districts that cover what the state won't.

Colorado currently funds kindergarten students at a little more than half the rate of older students. Statewide, nearly 50,000 students attend full-day programs, while another 13,300 are in half-day. Some districts pay for kindergarten out of their own funds, and many families pay tuition for full-day programs. Bipartisan legislation would fund kindergarten students at the same rate and ban districts from charging tuition. The first hearing takes place this week in the House Education Committee, and there is significant political momentum behind it.

"The kindergarten train is coming," state Rep. Jim Wilson, a Salida Republican and longtime champion of funding kindergarten, recently told supporters. "You can get on board, you can jump out of the way, or you can get run over, cause it's coming."

Crystal Jennings, a mother of three from Colorado Springs, recently visited the Capitol to urge lawmakers to approve funding. Traveling around the country as part of a military family, she paid for private full-day kindergarten for one child, had another in a half-day program, and then was able to enroll the third in full-day public kindergarten.

She didn't feel like her son in half-day got the same experience.

"There's logistical and financial challenges," she said. "But what's most important to families is: Are children learning?"

Colorado full-day kindergarten bill receives nothing but gold stars in first hearing

Denver Post

If politics was just a popularity contest, full-day kindergarten wouldn't have to worry about gunning for Miss Congeniality.

More than 20 people, including teachers, school administrators, business leaders and a handful of parents, spoke in favor of Colorado's House Bill 1262 at the House Education Committee on Tuesday afternoon. No one spoke against the bill, which would require the state to fund full-day kindergarten.

The committee unanimously voted to advance the bill, with one technical amendment, on to the House Appropriations Committee following its first public airing. Gov. Jared Polis has made funding full-day kindergarten a pillar of his agenda, and the Joint Budget Committee has included the funding in next year's tentative budget.

Under the current system, Colorado funds kindergarten students at 58 percent of the rate the state pays for older students. Districts can offer half-day kindergarten or make up the difference by charging tuition or dipping into other funds.

If the bill passes and is signed by the governor, Colorado's school districts would be forbidden to charge tuition for full-day kindergarten.

Ruby Cardenas, a mother of three children in Denver, said eliminating tuition would make her budget easier to balance. She said she struggled to pay her daughter's \$500 monthly kindergarten tuition after a series of family emergencies last year, and considered pulling her from her class.

"Nobody should go through the emotions I went through," she said.

Most of the speakers focused on research showing better academic results when children go to kindergarten full-time.

Kevin Aten, superintendent of the Bayfield School District, spoke to the committee via video chat. He said research has shown that full-day kindergarten leads to better outcomes for children, especially for boys whose summer birthdays place them at the younger end of the class.

"If you want to increase graduation rates, all those foundational skills ... begin in kindergarten," he said.

Gina Preszler, a kindergarten teacher in Durango, said full-day classes offer an "unhurried" setting to catch up children who are behind their peers, such as those who are learning English and those whose parents can't afford intellectually stimulating child care arrangements

"I feel like funding full-day kindergarten is an intervention," she said.

Mike Ferrufino, president and CEO of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metro Denver, said funding full-day kindergarten would contribute toward closing Colorado's achievement gap between Hispanic and white students, and would make it easier for businesses to find educated workers in the future.

"Let's make the right decision and investment for the future of Colorado," he said.

Red Flag gun bill signed into law Friday

9News

DENVER — It's official: Weapons can be seized from persons the court deems pose a significant risk to themselves or others.

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis on Friday signed the Red Flag gun bill, making it law.

The Colorado House on April 1 gave final approval to the bill in a 38-25 passing vote, with two Democrats voting against it: Rep. Bri Buentello (D-Pueblo) and Rep. Donald Valdez (D-La Jara).

Colorado Republicans defeated a similar bill last year, insisting it infringed on citizens' Second Amendment rights. But Democrats won both statehouse chambers in November, and Polis called for a "red flag" law while campaigning last year.

It would allow family or law enforcement to seek a court order to have guns seized if they believe the owner is a threat. If approved, a subsequent court hearing would be held to determine whether to extend the seizure, up to 364 days.

According to House Majority Leader Rep. Alec Garnett (D-Denver), who co-sponsored the bill with Rep. Tom Sullivan (D-Centennial), more than 25 changes were made to the bill, based on feedback that was received from those opposed.

The nonpartisan Legislative Council Staff estimates that 170 Coloradans will have their guns temporarily seized each year if the bill becomes law. Staffers arrived at that calculation based on the frequency of Red Flag gun seizures in some of the 13 states that have enacted similar laws.

The legislature's projection for Colorado assumes a seizure rate of three gun owners per 100,000 residents.

The bill also would leave it up to the person whose guns were seized to prove at any point that he or she no longer poses a risk.

Measure seeks more offices for migrants' driver's licenses

Grand Junction Sentinel

The Division of Motor Vehicles would increase the number of sites where temporary and illegal residents can go to get a valid driver's license under a bill that won preliminary approval in the Colorado House on Wednesday.

Under current law, there already are three DMV offices in Colorado where such people can get licenses: Grand Junction, Lakewood and Colorado Springs. To do so, applicants must first provide proof of their names, identity, date of birth and residency in the state.

The measure, SB139, would add five more offices around the state. Though it hasn't yet been determined exactly where, additional offices could be located in Montrose and Glenwood Springs.

The bill builds off of a 2013 law that is modeled after other states, including Utah, which approved the law in 2005. Since its passage, Colorado has issued more than 138,000 such licenses, with about 46,000 more expected over the next two years.

"This actually is an already existing program, and we're not the only state that implements this program or provides these kinds of documentation to undocumented residents," said Rep. Rochelle Galindo, a Greeley Democrat who introduced the bill with Rep. Jonathan Singer, D-Longmont. "But we are one of the only states that have actually rolled

this program back, causing lots of mayhem with people who want to apply. We're just trying to ensure they have access."

According to the Denver-based National Conference of State Legislatures, 12 states and the District of Columbia offer similar driver's license programs for undocumented residents.

Singer said the program's purpose is to maintain safety on the road by encouraging temporary or illegal residents to learn the rules of the road, and get insurance in case they are in accidents.

"If you actually go back and look at the states that have put this in place, whether you look at Democratic California or Republican Utah, you see more insured drivers on the road, you see less hit-and-run accidents," Singer said. "That is safety. You couldn't get more onto the issue of safety than with this bill."

Several Republican lawmakers didn't care for the measure not so much because of its provisions, but with the underlying program.

"This extends an embrace to those who are unlawfully present in the United States," said Rep. Mark Baisley, R-Roxborough Park. "If that means anything, then we should not officially give them documentation that is in conflict with that status of unlawfully present. This gets us to chaos. Let's not acknowledge and accept that they're going to continue to reside in the United States unlawfully."

Other Republicans attacked the measure for its financial cost.

Colorado Senate OKs 'Ban the Box' bill, sending it to Gov. Polis' desk

Denver Business Journal

Gov. Jared Polis will get his chance to sign the "Ban the Box" bill after the Colorado Senate finally passed the measure Friday on its third trip through the chamber in the past five years.

House Bill 1025, sponsored by Democratic Reps. Jovan Melton of Aurora and Leslie Herod of Denver, bars companies from asking on initial application forms whether job seekers have a criminal history. Employers still can ask about the subject at a follow-up interview and can do a background investigation on all applicants after receiving their forms.

Backers of the bill have argued for years that the criminal-history question, often presented in the form of a box on applications that job-seekers are asked to check, has served as a de-facto veto of these applicants, even as employment is viewed as one of the most important factors in helping to reintegrate formerly incarcerated people into society. Jack Regenbogen, family economic security attorney and policy advocate for the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, said at a March 18 Senate Judiciary Committee meeting that surveys have shown that only 40 percent of employers would give the same consideration to applicants who self-identified as having criminal backgrounds.

Business groups opposed the bill during its first two iterations but went neutral on HB 1025 this year after the House sponsors delayed implementation of the bill by two years for companies with fewer than 10 employees and removed from the original draft of the bill the creation of a private right of action that would have allowed job applicants to sue employers who they felt had violated the law.

Still, few Republicans in the Legislature jumped on board to support what they viewed as another unnecessary regulation on private-sector job creators. Sen. Kevin Priola of Henderson was the only GOP member joining Democrats to pass HB 1025 on a 20-12 vote on Friday.

Democrats who took back control of the Senate in the November elections, however, celebrated their ability to get the bill to the governor after Republican-held Senates have killed it previously.

"People make mistakes, and they deserve the opportunity to move on with their lives after they have answered for their crimes," said Sen. Robert Rodriguez, D-Denver, who co-sponsored the measure in the Senate with Democratic Sen. Mike Foote of Louisville. "The best way to help these folks rehabilitate and re-enter society is by making it easier for them to find a job and work hard to rebuild their lives."

Polis will have 10 days to decide whether to sign or veto the bill once it officially gets to his desk. The Democratic governor declined to take a stance on banning the box during his campaign, but staffers said at the time that he was open to considering the idea.

The business sense of Jared Polis

Colorado Politics

Jared Polis was in his element, and rarely have I seen the new governor more at ease, than during a lunch March 28 with small business owners and operators.

Sure, Polis runs a state of 5.7 million shareholders and a \$30 billion budget. Sure, he hit the cyber-economy jackpot twice on his way to becoming one of the richest members of Congress.

But in his mind, as he spoke to members of the National Federation of Independent Business's Colorado affiliate over barbecued chicken and baked beans, was a kid of about 12 years old selling tomatoes in Boulder.

"It probably wasn't legal," he said of the regulatory requirements. "I hope the statute of limitations has run out on that."

Polis joined the NFIB again on April 1 to sign Senate Bill 103, the so-called lemonade stand bill.

The new law blocks any local government to require a kid younger than 18 to pony up for a license or permit. The law applies to a small, occasional business that operates for fewer than 84 days per year, as long as it's a reasonable distance from a competing business.

The former tomato boy made his fortune, first, with his family's greeting card business, taking it online and cashing out when the internet boom was ripe.

He sold that business for \$780 million and parlayed his new wealth and tech savvy into an online flower business that saved people money and time by hooking them up online with growers and shippers.

As governor, Polis says he will foster the state's blockchain economy as one of his priorities. Agriculture is one of the industries that could benefit early from the online market that uses cryptocurrencies untethered from banks and government.

Polis said he would next take a regulatory relief view to food trucks and the redundancy of requirements they face.

It's the kind of hurdle-clearing the small-business advocacy organization seemed to embrace.

"What we want to see is kind of like the Hippocratic Oath: Just do no harm." said Tony Gagliardi, the state director for NFIB Colorado.

The Economist, a magazine for high-brow thinkers, seems to think Polis prefers a light government touch for the Midas Touch.

The headline in the March 30 edition called him "an unusual breed: a libertarian Democrat."

The magazine noted his liberal leanings and yet his small-government paradox.

"Mr. Polis, the first openly gay man to be elected as governor of any state, championed a progressive agenda on the campaign trail, but he does not sound like your average Democrat," the profile states.

"He backs universal health care, an expansion of full-day kindergarten, paid parental leave and investments in renewable energy. But he also wants to lower the income-tax rate. He identifies as a libertarian. 'The less government intervention in our private lives, the better. I think that's a value many Coloradans have on the left and right,' he says."

The first comment Polis fielded from the floor of the NFIB lunch in Denver that Thursday was about the new state logo he unveiled a few days earlier.

Besides a more colorful and inviting emblem that markets the entire state, Polis said it didn't cost his administration a dime to create it in-house, which pleased his small-business sensibilities.

In final push, Democrats rush major changes to elections and campaign finance disclosure in Colorado *Colorado Sun*

Better disclosure for campaign donations, automatic voter registration, longer hours to vote and more poll locations are a handful of the last-minute changes Democratic lawmakers want to make to Colorado election laws.

The initiatives are designed to increase transparency surrounding money in politics and boost participating in elections and take effect in time for the 2020 election. But one provision allows a loophole in disclosure and critics complain that other parts of the bills unfairly help the Democratic Party.

The four bills making these changes emerged late in the legislative session and now are moving toward approval with three weeks left in the legislative session. But the road isn't without bumps. House Bill 1278 is drawing the most fire from county clerks around the state. They say more voting locations and longer poll hours would require more workers and more money than is included in the bill.

And Republicans are expected to balk at some of the requirements in another measure, House Bill 1318, which requires nonprofits involved in politics to disclose some of their donors.

Democratic Secretary of State Jena Griswold ran in 2018 on a pledge to overhaul campaign finance laws, improve enforcement and increase voter registration and turnout, and the legislation is designed to address those areas.

"Too often, Coloradans feel that their politicians are beholden to big money special interests, and that the rich and powerful are allowed to side-step the rules," Griswold said in a statement. "Right now in Colorado, a \$50 contribution to a candidate is more transparent than a \$50,000 contribution to Colorado's version of a SuperPAC."

Earlier this session, Gov. Jared Polis signed a measure requiring more disclosure on all campaign literature that mentions candidates and closes a window in which groups didn't have to disclose spending on advertising. That's a measure thwarted in the past by Republicans who held a majority in the state Senate.

Here's a look at the issues addressed in the election bills being considered in the final weeks of the legislative session.

More disclosure of dark money — with a possible loophole

Dark money played a key role in Colorado's 2018 elections with thousands in donations flowing to super PACs from nonprofits and other entities without disclosure of the money's original source.

House Bill 1318 would require labor unions or nonprofits groups that donate \$10,000 or more to an independent expenditure committee — better known as a super PAC — to disclose the names of individuals who donate for political purposes. For businesses that make the same size contribution, the legislation would require the super PAC to list their corporate ownership.

But an exception in the legislation would allow donors to labor unions or nonprofit groups to avoid public disclosure, a measure that could significantly weaken the new disclosure rules if widely used.

The donor must affirm “reasonable probability” that they will face harm or threat, and it’s subject to review by the secretary of state’s office. But if allowed, the donor’s name will remain confidential.
[continue]

Bill eliminating cash bail for minor crimes in Colorado awaits governor’s signature after unanimous support in legislature

Denver Post

The poorest of Coloradans would no longer sit in jail for sleeping on a park bench or drinking in public because they can’t afford to pay bail for minor offenses if the governor signs a bill that cleared its final legislative hurdle Monday.

The law would ban judges from setting monetary bail for traffic offenses and petty crimes unless a defendant chooses to pay instead of waiting for a bond hearing. The state Senate voted unanimously Monday to pass the bill, following a unanimous vote from the House last month.

Proponents said the law, if adopted, would reduce the number of people sitting in Colorado’s often-crowded jails and keep people from sitting in jail for days or weeks before they have been convicted of any crime.

“Not every low-level offender or traffic violator has the means to pay their way out of jail,” Sen. Pete Lee, a Colorado Springs Democrat who co-sponsored the bill, said in a statement. “This bill will help reduce incarceration among Coloradans who have not yet been found guilty of anything.”

Defendants pay bail to the court as collateral to ensure they will come back for their next hearing. They forfeit the money if they fail to appear. The bill’s supporters said the system criminalizes poverty because people who can’t afford to pay sit in jail while the more affluent can continue their lives, even if they face the same charges. For the poorest people, even a \$50 bail is unaffordable, advocates have said.

The bill’s success is a reflection of broad support in the state for bail reform and work by the sponsors and reform advocates to speak with people in jail or who have been incarcerated because they couldn’t pay, said Rebecca Wallace, a staff attorney with the ACLU of Colorado who worked on the legislation. Key ideas for the bill came from a group of women who were jailed, she said.

Beyond a few municipal judges who voiced questions about the changes, the bill faced no organized opposition, Wallace said.

“It’s hard to argue that we should be holding people in jail for \$100,” she said.

Not including the Denver court, Wallace estimated that more than 13,000 Coloradans faced charges last year that would fall under the new statute.

On a single day in November 2017, more than 5,600 people sat in Colorado jails before their trials, according to data compiled by the ACLU. That same day, 16 of the state’s jails were more than 90 percent full, including the facilities in Denver and Jefferson counties, the data showed.

If signed by Gov. Jared Polis, the law would add Colorado to a growing list of states making significant changes to how bail works. Growing awareness about the practice has been spurred in part by high-profile cases — like that of a man who sat in jail for three years for allegedly stealing a backpack because he couldn’t afford \$3,000 bail — as well as lawsuits challenging the bail system, said Kellen Funk, a professor at Columbia Law School who studies bail.

Communities and leaders from all political perspectives, like faith leaders and judges, are now working toward reform, he said.

"It's not at all a radical-leftist argument that the government shouldn't be able to detain people on an accusation," Funk said. "It's kind of trans-political right now."

More than 200 bills are pending nationwide that would reform the bail system, said Shima Baradaran Baughman, a professor at the University of Utah who studies bail and pretrial systems.

New York lawmakers last week passed a bill that would eliminate cash bail for most misdemeanors and some low-level felonies, Funk said. New Mexico, New Jersey and Washington, D.C., have created systems where judges almost never use cash bail, though it technically remains on the books.

Colorado Ski Country presents lifetime achievement award

Colorado Politics

After 50 years on the slope, Dave Crisler's career reached its peak last week when he received a lifetime achievement award from Colorado Ski Country USA.

Crisler spent the last 24 years as director of slope maintenance after joining Steamboat Resort on lift operations in 1969.

He was elected by a 25-member committee during the 39th annual Colorado Ski Country USA Snow Conference in Grand Junction last week.

The commendation is called the Snow Conference Lifetime Achievement Award. It's given for contributions, dedication and service to the profession and the ski industry.

"Congratulations to Dave on a storied and successful career," Melanie Mills, president and CEO of Colorado Ski Country USA, said in a statement.

"This lifetime achievement award reflects his commitment to his profession, mentorship and management of his department and younger team members, and dedication to providing an excellent guest experience. We wish him well in retirement."

Colorado Ski Country USA is the trade group for 23 of the state's resorts.

CoPo celebrates with readers, officials at Denver reception (GALLERY)

Colorado Politics readers and supporters -- including state and local officials -- were on hand Thursday for a reception at the Ironworks events venue in Denver.

Some 120 attendees enjoyed food and refreshments as they mingled with the CoPo staff.

The party was a celebration of the General Assembly's ongoing 2019 session and also marked the launch of CoPo's coverage of Denver politics and civic affairs by veteran reporter John C. Ensslin and contributing columnist Neil Westergaard.

CoPo Managing Editor Mark Harden introduced the staff to the crowd -- including reporters Joey Bunch, Ernest Luning and Marianne Goodland; digital editor Erin Prater; opinion editor Dan Njegomir; and design director Stephanie Swearngin.

Harden also thanked Gazette Editor Vince Bzdek, CoPo General Manager Jared Wright, and Clarity Media Group President and CEO Ryan McKibben for their support of what Harden called "a 121-year-old startup."

Bill Cadman, former Colorado Senate president and now vice president of corporate and government affairs for Denver-based Whiting Petroleum, was master of ceremonies.

Among the many notable attendees were Senate Minority Leader Chris Holbert, former state senator and current U.S. Senate candidate Mike Johnston, District Attorney George Brauchler of the 18th Judicial District, former state Senate President Kevin Grantham, Senate Minority Whip Ray Scott, Denver City Councilmember Paul D. López, University of Colorado Regent Jack Kroll, former Colorado GOP chairman Dick Wadhams, and veteran journalist and Secretary of State's Office spokeswoman Lynn Bartels.

Sponsors of the event included lead sponsor CiviCO, whose founder, Ryan Heckman, addressed the crowd, as well as Arc Thrift Stores, Colorado Farm Bureau, Colorado Licensed Beverage Association, Enstrom Candies, Extraction Oil & Gas, MillerCoors and Sewald Hanfling Public Affairs.

Let us recall how to remove an official

Colorado Politics

State Rep. Rochelle Galindo is facing a recall attempt to remove her from office just five month after the Greeley Democrat won her first term.

Her opponents started gathering petition signatures on April 6, kicking off what's already shaping up to be a hard-fought and expensive campaign that could last through the summer and into the fall.

As charges fly left and right, we thought it would be a good idea to examine the recall process and describe how things might unfold in the attempt to put the question to voters in what could be the first of numerous recall campaigns this year.

Colorado is one of 19 states that allow voters to recall any elected official — except members of Congress and U.S. senators, who aren't subject to recall. Voters can remove Colorado officials for any reason, unlike some states that only allow recalls under certain grounds, including malfeasance, incompetence, felony conviction or drunkenness.

For state-level and county offices, supporters of a recall in Colorado have 60 days to gather petition signatures from district residents equal to 25 percent of the total votes cast in the last election for the office being recalled. If they meet that threshold — and survive legal challenges — an election is scheduled to decide whether to recall the official and, if that succeeds, pick a replacement. (It takes more signatures to recall school district directors and nonpartisan elected officials — usually, 40 percent of the total votes cast in the last election for the office.)

In Galindo's case, her detractors have until June 3 to gather 5,696 signatures from registered voters in Weld County's House District 50, which covers portions of Greeley, Evans and Garden City.

Galindo, the first openly gay Latina to serve on the Greeley City Council, won the House seat in November by a 6.7-point margin over Republican Michael Thuener in the Democratic-leaning district, which hasn't elected a Republican since 2002.

Once recall petitions have been deemed sufficient, potential replacement candidates can start gathering signatures to petition their way onto the same ballot under the same rules they'd use to get on the ballot in a regular election. For state House seats, that means getting 1,000 signatures from fellow Republicans or Democrats.

Those who qualify will appear on the same ballot as the recall question, but votes for successor candidates will only be counted if the recall is successful. (Write-in candidates can also file paperwork to have their votes tallied.)

If it goes to an election, the statement that appeared on the petitions — outlining grounds for the recall; it's limited to 200 words and can't include any "profane or false statements" — will be printed on the ballot. So will a statement

submitted by the official facing the recall, though it can be as long as 300 words. It can't contain profanity or anything false, either.

If recall proponents turn in enough valid signatures by the deadline, the Galindo recall election could be scheduled for as early as the end of August or as late as mid-October, depending on how long it takes to complete several required steps.

Here's what happens once the petitions are submitted, as outlined by the state constitution, applicable statutes and state election officials:

The Colorado Secretary of State's office has 15 business days to examine the petitions and determine whether they contain enough valid signatures.

If it turns out there aren't enough valid signatures, recall organizers get another 15 days to "cure" their submission, by gathering additional signatures and correcting technical problems, if any.

We asked our readers for questions about the Colorado legislature. Here are the answers.

Colorado Sun

As part of our Capitol Sunlight project, aiming to make the Colorado legislature more accessible and understandable to every Coloradan, we fielded questions from you — our readers — about what goes on under the state's Gold Dome.

You didn't disappoint, with prompts about everything from how to follow the death penalty repeal debate (which has been shelved until 2020) to Colorado's common law marriage statute and how to find out who your state senator and representative are.

One reader wanted to simply know: "What happens in the legislature?"

We hope our reporting during the 2019 legislative session has answered that question on most accords.

Here are your questions answered, at length:

How does a private citizen introduce an issue to be considered for legislation?

The state's residents cannot introduce bills on their own at the Colorado legislature, though they can lobby lawmakers to take up an issue on their behalf. And that's something that frequently happens.

Legislators will often introduce a bill by explaining that a constituent brought the issue to their attention, whether it be a problematic railroad crossing in Aurora or a lack of a law compelling people to call 911 when they see someone in need of help.

Sen. Kevin Priola, a Henderson Republican, has brought a pair of bills in the past two years stemming from conversations with constituents.

In 2018, he tried and failed to usher through a measure to increase the penalties for driving with a restricted license following an alcohol-related offense. Priola says the measure came after he had discussions with a woman whose husband was killed in a car crash.

This year, Priola added a provision onto a recycling bill increasing the penalties for littering. "That specific paragraph comes from talking to a gentleman in Brighton in 2016," he said.

Another example: Rep. Barbara McLachlan, a Durango Democrat, is working with other lawmakers to officially change the name of Western State Colorado University to Western Colorado University.

As we reported earlier in our Capitol Sunlight series, lawmakers like to bring bills that have a compelling story behind them and bipartisan support.

“The reality is that there are four main things to consider when working on a bill: The policy, process, politics and people involved,” said Sen. Jeff Bridges, a Greenwood Village Democrat. “Think through all four before approaching a legislator and you’ll have a much greater chance of success.”

If you try to bring a bill idea to a lawmaker while the legislative session is underway, it might be too late. Legislators typically have deadlines before the policymaking term begins each January by which they have to file titles for their measures.

What have Democrats learned from the last time they were in the majority?

Democrats last held the Colorado House, Senate and governor’s office from 2013 to 2014, during which the party passed and signed into law a number of progressive policies, including gun-control measures and one allowing people living in the country illegally to obtain driver’s licenses.

The successes for Democrats, however, came at a cost. Two state senators were recalled in 2013 over their support for the tougher gun regulations and a third resigned. Then, in the 2014 elections, they lost control of the state Senate.

A big question for Democrats in recent months has been whether or not they will be able to retain so much control after the 2020 election cycle, or if they will suffer the same defeats as the last time. It’s a frequent topic of conversation around the Capitol.

Gov. Polis signs executive order supporting employee ownership, establishing commission

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

DENVER - Gov. Polis today signed an executive order establishing the Commission on Employee Ownership. The Governor signed the executive order at the Save-A-Lot in Colorado Springs where he launched his campaign and promised to support employee ownership.

“Increasing employee ownership will help support a strong economy and promote job security in communities across the state,” said Governor Jared Polis. “Supporting employee ownership has been a top goal and now we are taking the necessary steps to make it a reality.”

In Colorado, 98 percent of all Colorado companies are small businesses. And these 560,000 small businesses employ over one million people, making small business one of the state’s top employers. Small businesses also diversify our economy with 85,800 minority-owned firms in Colorado.

As a record number of Colorado business owners reach retirement age, increasing employee-owned businesses across the State will ensure that local business will continue to offer necessary goods and services to communities beyond a business owner’s retirement.

The Commission will support the development and advancement of employee-owned businesses by:

- Establishing a robust and wide-reaching network of technical support for businesses wishing to convert to employee-ownership;
- Educating businesses and communities across the State on the economic and community benefits of employee-owned businesses; and
- Identifying barriers to the development and advancement of employee-owned businesses and recommending State actions and resources to remove such barriers.

The Commission will be housed in the Office of Economic Development and International Trade.

Read the executive order [here](#).

Updated: Gov. Polis, CDHS announce Colorado's Behavioral Health Task Force

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday, April 8, 2019

DENVER - Gov. Polis and the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) announced Colorado's Behavioral Health Task Force today. This task force will evaluate and set the roadmap to improve the current behavioral health system in the state. This includes developing Colorado's "Behavioral Health Blueprint" by June 2020 with anticipated implementation of recommendations starting in July 2020.

"Simply put, we need to do a better job serving those struggling with behavioral health," said Governor Jared Polis. "We can and must do better to transform our system for Coloradans living with a behavioral health condition so they can access affordable, high-quality, and patient-centric treatment. This new task force will be critical in developing a statewide strategy to make these reforms."

Colorado dedicates more than \$1 billion annually to its behavioral health system. Yet, many national rankings place Colorado in the bottom quarter of states when evaluating the quality of behavioral health care provided to residents. Colorado ranked 43rd out of 50 states on Mental Health of America's 2018 rankings for the prevalence of mental illness and access to care. Colorado also has among the highest suicide rates in the country.

"Colorado's behavioral health system is past due for a new blueprint," said CDHS Executive Director Michelle Barnes. "Coloradans who need access to mental health care should not have to struggle to obtain it. I am excited to chair the new Behavioral Health Task Force's effort in creating a plan that provides people with the help they need in a timely and impactful manner."

The task force will include members who represent diverse and balanced perspectives with respect to these issues such as consumers and families who are dealing with mental health issues, key executive agencies representing state and local government, criminal justice experts, advocacy groups, behavioral health experts, and consumers.

Gov. Polis signs bill into law

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, April 5, 2019

DENVER— Gov. Jared Polis signed the following bill into law.

HB19-1153

Colorado Mountain College and Direct Grants Annexation

Reps. McCluskie & Wilson/Sens. Rankin & Donovan

Concerning measures to enable local district colleges to serve more students