



Legislative Newsletter



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*An up-to-date review of Colorado government and politics especially for the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.
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We are officially half-way through the Legislative Session!

State Rep. Salazar to run for attorney general, aims to be 'the people's lawyer'

Colorado Statesman

Colorado House firebrand Joe Salazar, a Democratic representative from Thornton, announced Friday he is running for state attorney general motivated by the desire to act as "the people's lawyer" in a national political climate he views as threatening to democratic values and processes and to civil rights.

"People get upset that I challenge Democratic leaders and Republicans the way I do, but they know who I am and what I stand for," he told The Colorado Statesman. "Being attorney general is about protecting Coloradans. It's also about supporting business where it needs to be supported and helping boost prosperity in the state. But the job is about helping the people first, and always." Salazar said he looks forward to running against the record of current Attorney General Cynthia Coffman, a Republican, who hasn't announced yet whether she intends to run for re-election

Colorado Democrats elect Morgan Carroll as state party chair

Colorado Statesman

Colorado Democrats elected former Senate President Morgan Carroll as state party chair Saturday at a central committee meeting in Denver.

"I believe what we need right now is a movement, not just a club, and I believe the Democratic Party should be on the front lines of the resistance - we must adapt or face extinction," Carroll told

Democrats gathered at the Marriott Denver City Center for the party's biennial reorganization. Carroll, an Aurora Democrat, won election to a two-year term by a wide margin, receiving 401 votes to 38 votes for Clear Creek County Commissioner Tim Mauck, who stressed the importance of reaching out to rural and suburban Democrats.

Latecomer to state GOP chair contest drops out early

The Gazette

Having just launched his late-in-the-game bid to lead the state Republican Party, longtime Douglas County party activist Mark Baisley already has withdrawn. Baisley briefly announced his exit in the same forum he had used to announce his entry into the race two days earlier, Facebook:

"Folks, I am withdrawing from the Chairman's race. Or to put it more accurately, I have decided that I will not accept the nomination at the Colorado Republican organization meeting three weeks from today.

"A reality that I did not have three days ago that I know in full today is how much the 400+ members of the Colorado Republican Committee were already struggling with their decision and that adding my name to the mix was not helping. Bottom line is that I believe my stepping in to the race at this point is not good for the party.

#Coleg Week 9: Concerning gay conversion, early voting, rolling coal, pot for PTSD, and more *Colorado Statesman*

Happy halfway mark. On Wednesday, lawmakers will arrive at this year's legislative session midpoint. Many of the House and Senate minority party bills doomed to die in committee have lived their brief and sometimes newsmaking lives. Now many of the bills doomed to die at the hands of the opposite chamber majority party will meet their own swift ends. Then soon will appear this year's "long bill" budget proposal. And then, on the long bill's tale, will come the big compromise proposal on transportation funding... and anything else lawmakers feel pressure or overdue obligation or last gasp whimsy to move on at last.

Charter school funding bill gaining bipartisan support; Dems get support on amendment *Complete Colorado*

Second reading of a bill that would equalize local mill levy funding for charter schools was postponed for the second time this week after senators spent nearly two hours debating several amendments to the bill.

SB17-061, which would require school districts with current mill levy overrides (MLOs) to share the funding with their charter schools will be continued by the full senate on Monday.

It is expected to pass the Senate mostly along party lines, however, it appears to be gaining support from Democrats, including co-sponsor Angela Williams, (D-Denver).

Colorado charter schools are tuition-free public schools. They are non-profit, cannot test students for admission, and they are held to the same accountability standards as traditional district schools.

The much-touted transportation money deal at the Colorado Capitol just became more complicated *Denver Post*

How troubled is the much-acclaimed deal at the Capitol to spend \$3.5 billion on Colorado roads to relieve traffic congestion? Here's the best indication to date: The No. 2 Republican in the state Senate said Monday he is proposing an alternative to the measure unveiled last week by the Senate's No. 1 Republican.

Colorado Lawmakers: Will Voters Increase Taxes for Transportation?

KUNC Radio

A top Republican joined with Democratic leaders at the Colorado legislature Wednesday evening in an effort to find solutions to ongoing transportation woes.

To do that lawmakers are proposing House Bill 1142. It would send the question to voters, asking for a 0.62 cent sales tax increase. That money would go towards priority infrastructure projects as well as to provide funding to local governments for transit, roads, trails, and potholes.

"Do I want to pay a little bit more so the government is doing what it should actually be doing?" said Senate President Kevin Grantham of Canon City, a Republican, who will be one of the main sponsors of the proposal.

Colorado lawmakers reach agreement for tax hike, \$3.5 billion bond in transportation deal

Denver Post

Colorado's top lawmakers want to ask voters to increase the state sales tax by less than a penny on a dollar to support spending as much as \$3.5 billion to improve roads and traffic congestion.

The much-anticipated legislation, introduced late Wednesday, represents a breakthrough after months of difficult negotiations between Democratic and Republican leaders to address what both parties agree is the General Assembly's top priority.

House Bill 1242 - sponsored by Democratic House Speaker Crisanta Duran and Republican Senate President Kevin Grantham - would increase the statewide sales tax to 3.52 percent from 2.9 percent. If approved by the voters in November, the tax hike would start in January 2018 and remain in place for 20 year.

Conservative group files for ballot measure to "Fix Our Damn Roads" - without new taxes

Denver Post

Voters miffed at a bipartisan proposal to raise sales taxes to pay for the state's transportation needs may end up with another option on their November ballot.

The right-leaning Independence Institute on Friday took a first step to getting a competing measure on the ballot - a colorfully titled initiative to "Fix Our Damn Roads" without raising taxes.

"Let's be clear, this is not a tax increase or a budget cut, it's a re-allocation of existing state spending to roads," said Jon Caldara, the group's president. "If lawmakers aren't willing to do their jobs, then we'll ask the voters to do it for them."

Rival groups of liquor retailers kick up dust in legislative fight over spirit licenses

Colorado Statesman

The battle over Colorado's liquor store landscape intensified last Monday in the wake of a Senate vote that killed a bill to let Wal-Mart sell full-strength liquor in as many as 20 locations over the next two decades, among other tweaks to 2016 legislation that overhauled the state's liquor licensing laws.

And amid renewed threats of a potentially expensive ballot fight over liquor sales at grocery stores, two organizations representing different groups of independent liquor retailers squared off and hurled charges, each claiming to be standing up for the little guy.

"How dare they put small liquor stores at the risk of another ballot issue?" asked Jeanne McEvoy of the Colorado Licensed Beverage Association, after the Senate voted 18-17 to sink Senate Bill 143.

Senate kills Williams bill to allow Wal-Mart to sell full-strength liquor

Colorado Statesman

The Colorado Senate, last Monday, narrowly voted down a bill that would have allowed Wal-Mart to sell full-strength beer, wine and liquor by clearing up a statute passed last year. This as the state begins expanding the number of liquor licenses grocery and big box stores can acquire over the next 20 years.

Described by backers as a simple technical clean-up to last year's landmark legislative revamping of the state's liquor code, Senate Bill 143, sponsored by state Sen. Angela Williams, D-Denver, met fierce, bipartisan opposition from senators who argued that the bill would devastate small liquor stores throughout the state and wreak havoc on Colorado's breweries and distilleries.

The bill went down 18-17 with Senate President Kevin Grantham, R-Cañon City, casting the deciding vote at the end of a tense roll call.

Bipartisan vote kills bill to fix 'glitch' in grocery liquor-sales

Grand Junction Sentinel

Some called it a simple cleanup bill, but others said a measure dealing with last year's law opening full-strength liquor sales to grocery stores did a lot more than that.

Because of that dispute, a measure that was intended to fix a glitch in last year's law died on a surprising bipartisan 18-17 vote last Monday.

"A lot of the people that are involved in this internally and externally (of the statehouse) are really unclear and uncertain about how all this comes together and how it's being determined," said Sen. Randy Baumgardner, R-Hot Sulphur Springs. "This is a tough decision because several of my mom-and-pop (liquor stores) are saying, 'It doesn't sound like a bad deal.' But then I have several that said, 'I hate this. This is going to destroy us.' So it's going to be a hard decision for a lot of us on how to vote on this."

Colorado lawmakers defeat bill to allow liquor sales in Walmart and Target

Denver Post

Colorado lawmakers defeated a measure to allow liquor sales in Walmart and Target in an extraordinary vote last Monday that suggested alcohol remains a potent political question.

The bill to allow big-box stores to expand beyond beer and wine sales emerged as one of the most contentious of the legislative session and split lawmakers on the question of whether it would hurt local liquor stores.

State Senate President Kevin Grantham, R-Cañon City, cast the final - and decisive - vote against the measure, 17-18 - an unusual tally that drew gasps from onlookers.

Did a misinformation campaign kill this year's liquor licensing cleanup compromise?

Colorado Statesman

A legislative effort to clean up last year's hard-fought and widely bipartisan liquor licensing reform compromise died a surprise and dramatic death in the state Senate last Monday. According to proponents, Senate Bill 143's demise by a narrow 18-17 vote was almost entirely due to misleading information, flat-out lies and a convoluted process by a "mystery" group of clients and their lobbyist, Jason Hopfer - claims he says are patently false.

This year's bill was not designed to be contentious, according to its sponsors and advocates. It was aimed only to clean up a few oversights in last year's last-minute Senate Bill 16-197, which was passed to allow grocery stores like Kroger, Safeway, Walmart and Target to sell full strength alcohol by obtaining liquor licenses over a phased-in 20-year period. The move headed off as many as five initiatives that were headed to the November 2016 ballot, where many believe the well-funded big box stores would have taken it all and left little for the smaller liquor businesses to survive.

Colorado Senate passes GOP bill aimed at curbing construction-defects litigation

Colorado Statesman

The Colorado Senate gave bipartisan approval last Tuesday to a Republican-sponsored bill to require owners and builders of condominiums to submit disputes over construction problems to arbitration or mediation before filing class-action lawsuits.

Five Democrats joined every Republican senator voting in favor of Senate Bill 156 on third reading, sending the bill on a 23-12 vote to the Democratic-controlled House, where its future is less certain.

The legislation, sponsored by state Sen. Owen Hill, R-Colorado Springs, and Assistant House Minority Leader Cole Wist, R-Centennial, and state Reps Lori Saine, R-Firestone, is one of several bills meant to encourage condominium construction statewide that are making their way through the chambers this session.

The bill also requires condo owners to get approval of a majority of the homeowners in the association before proceeding with a complaint, as well as tell the homeowners the project cost, duration and financial impact of filing a claim. It wouldn't bar a single homeowner from pursuing legal action against builders for alleged defective construction.

Colorado could owe feds up to \$43 million for Medicaid "systems error"

Denver Post

A "system error" at the state Medicaid department could leave Colorado taxpayers on the hook to repay the federal government as much as \$43 million, an unexpected expense that state officials are scrambling to reconcile.

The department's computer system "erroneously categorized" some services as eligible for more federal funds than they were, according to a memo sent Wednesday to lawmakers on the Joint Budget Committee from a committee staffer.

The state Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, which oversees Medicaid government health insurance for the needy and disabled, estimated the federal payback would total anywhere from \$21.8 million to \$43.4 million. The department is fixing the system error for Medicaid claims beginning this month, but the problem dates back to July 2015.

Congressional report: 24 million more will be uninsured, deficit will drop by \$337 billion by 2026 under GOP bill

Denver Post

Nonpartisan analysts project that 14 million people would lose coverage next year under the House bill dismantling former President Barack Obama's health care law. The estimate is a blow to Republicans. Monday's estimate by the Congressional Budget Office says there would be 24 million more people uninsured by 2026 than under current law.

TABOR bill sponsor responds to constituents and bows out; says he will vote against changes

Complete Colorado

One of three Republican sponsors on a bill that would change the way revenue is capped under the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) has had a change of heart.

Despite the fact supporting TABOR is one of the many issues that normally binds conservatives, Representatives Phil Covarrubias, (R-Adams/Arapahoe), Dan Thurlow (R-Mesa) and Lois Landgraf, (R-EI Paso) all originally advocated for a change to the 25-year-old constitutional amendment that restricts tax increases without a vote of the people and caps state revenue.

Covarrubias, however, said he took enough backlash for his role in it that he announced via social media that he was pulling his name from the sponsorship of HB17-1187.

House Republicans float possibility of revamping legislative budget process

Colorado Statesman

House Republican leaders on Wednesday said the GOP caucus wants to "fundamentally change" the way the Legislature puts together the state's annual budget, potentially by vastly diminishing the role of the powerful Joint Budget Committee and giving all the other committees more say.

Cautioning that the caucus he leads isn't planning to introduce a proposal this session, House Minority Leader Patrick Neville, R-Castle Rock, told reporters that Republicans have been considering different ways to assemble a state budget and plan to "come up with a good solution" in the near future.

"I think we need to fundamentally change how we do the budget," Neville said during a mid-session briefing in House chambers. "We've been discussing how we can actually change it. I think we have a problem when the JBC gets together and does a budget without having much input from the committees of reference and much otherwise input. It's business as usual, the way we've been doing it."

Home-grown marijuana crackdown passes first test in legislature

ColoradoPolitics.com

State lawmakers last Monday advanced a measure that aims at cracking down on the illegal diversion of marijuana.

House Bill 1220 would limit marijuana home grows to 12 plants statewide. Local jurisdictions, including Colorado Springs and Denver, have already limited home grows to 12 plants. But law enforcement felt there should be a statewide standard.

The bill passed the House Finance Committee 11-2, though it was heavily amended and other changes to the measure are expected.

Expanding Tech Skills for Colorado Students

Colorado House Democrats Communication

(March 7) - This morning, the House approved by voice vote a bill by Speaker Crisanta Duran and Senate President Kevin Grantham that responds to demands for technology and computer science skills by adding technology skills into current content standards and creating a publicly available resource bank for schools and districts that want to start or expand computer science programs.

"This bill is good for the people of Colorado-good for parents who want to make sure their kids have access to computer science and digital literacy classes, good for kids who want to reach their full potential and good for our economy by making sure we have a skilled workforce ready to enter our fastest growing industries," said Speaker Duran, D-Denver. "This is also good for equity-because it ensures that anywhere in Colorado, students can truly have an opportunity to succeed."

Information technology is one of Colorado's fastest growing career clusters, but many students lack exposure to technology and computer science training. Colorado has over 13,517 open computing jobs, but there were only 668 computer science graduates in the entire state in 2014.

Only 53 schools in Colorado (14 percent of Colorado schools with Advanced Placement programs) offered an AP Computer Science course in 2015-2016. This access gap ultimately results in ethnic and gender underrepresentation in STEM training and careers. Out of 780 Colorado high school students who took AP Computer Science in 2016, only 19 percent were female, only 92 of the students were Hispanic or Latino, and only 14 students were Black.

Under HB17-1184, industry experts would also be allowed to co-teach computer science in the classroom.

Organizations in support of the bill include Apple, AT&T, Colorado Code.org, Colorado Business Roundtable, Colorado Children's Campaign, Colorado League of Charter Schools, Colorado Succeeds, Colorado Technology Association, Couragion, Democrats for Education Reform, Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, Education Reform Now, Galvanize, IBM, Jaybird Group, Mile High United Way, Stand for Children Colorado, and The Women's Foundation of Colorado.

The bill remains on the House floor for third reading.

Sen. Cory Gardner defends Medicaid expansion as GOP reveals Obamacare replacement

Washington Post

House Republicans last Monday released long-anticipated legislation to supplant the Affordable Care Act with a more conservative vision for the nation's health care system, replacing federal insurance subsidies with a new form of individual tax credits and grants to help states shape their own policies.

Under bills drafted by two House committees, the GOP would no longer penalize Americans for failing to have health insurance and would begin winding down the ACA's expansion of Medicaid three years from now.

The legislation would preserve two of the most popular features of the 2010 health-care law, letting young adults stay on their parents' health plans until age 26 and forbidding insurers to deny coverage or charge more to people with pre-existing medical problems. It would, however, allow insurers to impose a surcharge on such people if they have had a gap in coverage.

Gov. Hickenlooper Announces Boards and Commission Appointments

Office of the Governor

The Board of Governors for the Colorado State University System is the governing board for Colorado State University and Colorado State University, Pueblo. The Board selects the presidents of these institutions and generally oversees the schools, including determination of salaries and tuition, conferring degrees and carrying out other legal functions.

For a term expiring December 31, 2020:

- Kimberley Beth Jordan of Fort Collins, a Larimer County resident and a Democrat, appointed.

The Colorado Energy Research Authority directs the allocation of State matching funds required to support activities or proposals of the Colorado Energy Research Collaboratory, which includes Colorado School of Mines, Colorado State University, University of Colorado at Boulder and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, for federal energy and energy-related research funding from federal agencies and other public and private entities.

The Authority may promote rapid transfer of new technologies developed by the Collaboratory to the private sector to attract and promote clean energy businesses in Colorado.

For a term expiring July 1, 2019:

- Kathleen Booth Staks of Lakewood, and occasioned by the resignation of Jeffrey Paul Ackermann of Denver, appointed.

The Colorado Medical Board reviews applications for medical licenses. In cases involving any professional or ethical violations of the Medical Practices Act, the board holds hearings and assists the state's district attorneys in the prosecution of all persons, firms, associations, or corporations charged with improper conduct.

For a term expiring May 3, 2020:

- Greg A. Bowman, MD of Pueblo, to serve as a doctor of medicine, and occasioned by the resignation of Brock Matthew Bordelon, MD of Colorado Springs, appointed.

Calculator

Days Left to Sine Die: 58

House Bills Introduced: 254

Senate Bills Introduced: 230

Dead Bills: 89

Governor Signed: 27