



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 must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

House Minority Leader Neville

Here's what to expect in the 2018 legislative session in Colorado

Denver Post

Colorado lawmakers returned to the Capitol last week for a 2018 legislative session that's threatening to derail before it even starts.

A cloud of political controversies and steep policy challenges is making this year's term one of the most unpredictable and uneasy in recent memory.

The Republicans who control the Senate and the Democrats who lead the House are entering the session with divergent policy agendas. On two of the most consequential and difficult issues - overhauling of the state pension fund and improving the state's roads - neither side sees eye to eye on solutions, let alone whether it's a priority.

In final State of the State, Hickenlooper outlines ambitious agenda that targets unfinished business

Denver Post

In his final State of the State address, Gov. John Hickenlooper outlined an ambitious agenda for a state that transformed under his watch into one of the nation's most vibrant economies - and yet still struggles to meet the demands of a growing population.

The term-limited Democrat painted a disparate picture of two Colorados last Thursday as he called for solutions to the some of the state's most pressing problems, perhaps none more urgent than those stemming from the growing urban-rural divide.

Even as he outlined ambitious goals, Hickenlooper struck a reflective tone in his 49-minute address, recalling that the "economy was in disarray" when he took office seven years ago and recounting the steps his administration took to help the state reach the lowest unemployment rate in the nation in 2017.

But the governor lingered on his achievements for only so long before he outlined eight priorities for the legislative session - an agenda that focuses on addressing immediate needs as well as resolving age-old conflicts that he feels are being overlooked.

Colorado Legislature 2018: 1st-day bills tackle road funding, paid leave, oil and gas regulations

Denver Business Journal

Bills introduced by Colorado legislators on the opening day of the 2018 session last Wednesday ranged from expected measures on subjects such as transportation funding and oil and gas regulation to new proposals, including one that would ask voters to impose a tax on grocery-store plastic bags that would fund affordable-housing development.

Members of the Legislature introduced 125 bills straight out of the chute - 72 in the House and 53 in the Senate - in hopes of getting many of the topics considered quickly rather than mired down in late-session debate where ideas are given less time and killed at a higher clip. Many of the first-day measures, in fact, were reintroductions of bills that have died in previous sessions.

Traffic, housing costs, retirement funds take spotlight

Lakewood Sentinel

Democrats recently remarked that Colorado has "no shortage of unmet needs" - a comment that elicited a sardonic tone from Colorado House Minority Leader Patrick Neville, R-Castle Rock - and the 2018 legislative session, with its kickoff Jan. 10, is shaping up to bear out that claim.

Which needs it will meet is a different story.

Lawmakers will be pressed to find solutions for a state with a ballooning population clogging roads, an underfunded retirement-fund program and housing costs through the roof. With roughly \$300 million projected in previously unforeseen revenues - a prediction that may double - the state has a small bit of breathing room to signal where its priorities lie.

Among other issues lawmakers have discussed in the weeks leading up to the regular session - the four-month part of the year when legislators pass bills - health-care costs have already risen as a key debate to watch for in 2018.

Amid elections, this year will offer no easy waters for bipartisanship - all 65 seats in the state House are up for election, as are 17 of the 35 state Senate seats, plus statewide races including the governor's post. Here's what both parties had to say about the flash-point issues this session.

Colorado Legislature checklist: 2018 session begins

The Daily Sentinel

Rural lawmakers say they mean business this time.

While the 2018 session of the Colorado Legislature that began last week is expected to tackle a slew of issues - from agricultural interns to zebra mussels - the one thing that lawmakers continue to disagree on has been rural broadband.

Not this time, promises Sen. Don Coram and several other state lawmakers who are working on the issue.

The Montrose Republican plans to introduce a bill into the 120-day session that starts Wednesday to ensure the state's Broadband Deployment Fund has the money it needs to actually deploy broadband to areas of Colorado that don't have it.

The issue was a subject of hot debate at the end of last year's session that ended up going nowhere. As a result Coram is getting some legislative big-hitters to help at the start of the session, including Senate Pro Tem Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling, House Majority Leader KC Becker, D-Boulder, and perhaps even House Speaker Crisanta Duran, D-Denver.

Colorado chambers, business groups tell legislature to put the pedal down

Colorado Politics

Dear Colorado legislature, get on the bus, but don't step on the gas.

That's the takeaway from a letter more than 20 chambers and other business organizations sent to lawmakers last Friday urging them to support an ongoing source of revenue for transportation, meaning revenue from growth that's locked into the state budget.

Transportation funding is expected to be a major issue at the statehouse again this year.

"The congestion and road safety situation in the state is at a watershed moment, so it is encouraging that the governor and many legislators have engaged in a very hopeful dialogue around the right questions: How much taxpayer money can we invest and for how long?" former state Sen. Mike Kopp, who is president and CEO of Colorado Concern, said in a statement.

"The public will applaud them if they reach the \$300 million level for an extended period of time."

Colorado leaders have looked at the dicey proposition of asking voters to raise gas or sales taxes, but proposals have bogged down at the state level, where Republicans eschew higher taxes (especially in prosperous times). Locally, municipalities contend they need to reserve voters' willingness to raise sales taxes for local needs.

Battles over full-strength beer sales gear up in Colorado Legislature

Denver Business Journal

Colorado Senate Majority Leader Chris Holbert, R-Parker, will sponsor an omnibus bill regulating full-strength beer sales in grocery and convenience stores.

While transportation funding and affordable housing will take up significant time during the legislative session that starts Wednesday, no issue is likely to lead to bigger fights and more employment for lobbyists than that of full-strength beer.

Two years after the Colorado Legislature passed Senate Bill 197 - which allows grocers to sell full-strength, wine and beer at multiple locations if they buy out the licenses of two nearby locally owned liquor stores - lawmakers this year expected to consider letting those same grocers and convenience stores sell full-strength beer at all their locations.

Because SB 197 mandates that low-strength beer - known often as 3.2 beer for its alcohol content by weight - will be phased out by Jan. 1, 2019, it's now just a matter of what limitations, if any, legislators want to put on the retail outlets that will move from low-alcohol products to regular strength beer.

Colorado Senate president calls for bipartisanship in opening day of legislature, moves quickly on transportation with funding bill

Denver Post

Colorado Senate President Kevin Grantham struck an optimistic, bipartisan chord as he kicked off the 2018 legislative session last Wednesday, announcing that his Republican caucus would immediately introduce a significant bill to fund transportation.

"Our willingness to engage one another has diminished," said Grantham, a Cañon City Republican who is term-limited, despite anxiety in the Capitol's halls over how much can get done in an election year with a split legislature. "Today is a moment of deciding for our state: Shall we fall to (the) partisanship and constant suspension that is Washington D.C. politics? ... Let us work together to solve the issues that matter most to Coloradans."

The transportation funding bill would commit roughly \$300 million from the state's forecasted revenue growth (some of which is a consequence of the recently passed GOP federal-tax overhaul) to roads and put a measure before voters in November asking them to issue bonds of up to \$3.5 billion.

On opening day of 2018 session, House Speaker Duran says "the intolerable will be tolerated no more."

Denver Post

Saying "the time for cultural change is now," Democratic House Speaker Crisanta Duran opened the 2018 legislative session with a call for Colorado lawmakers to confront the issue of sexual harassment head on and reform a workplace culture that gave rise to a tumultuous off-season, rocked by scandal and allegations of misconduct.

"Let our actions show that the intolerable will be tolerated no more," said Duran, a Denver Democrat who is entering her second year as speaker.

Duran's speech touted last year's bipartisan accomplishments on issues ranging from construction defects, to road and hospital funding, to charter schools. But, she said, the new year presented "new obstacles."

Willett won't run again; Soper to seek Grand Junction seat

Colorado Politics

Colorado State Rep. Yeulin Willett of Grand Junction became the first Republican member of the General Assembly to announce he won't seek another term.

According to the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel, Willett said he's stepping down to spend more time with his family. Matt Soper of Delta has announced he plans to run for the seat, and immediately won an endorsement from Willett.

According to his Facebook page, Soper is a fourth-generation Coloradan. He earned an undergraduate degree from Colorado Mesa University and graduate degrees from the University of Edinburgh and University of New Hampshire. He previously served as a trustee of Orchard City.

"I look forward to continuing the good work of Rep. Willett, as well as focusing on the basics of protecting our water, getting our roads fixed, and keeping a lid on spending," Soper said.

Willett was up for this third term in 2018. He was first elected to the General Assembly in 2014.

Federal tax overhaul could lead to changes in some states

Colorado Politics

In New Jersey and California, top Democratic officials want to let people make charitable contributions to the state instead of paying certain taxes. In Connecticut and New York, officials are exploring a switch from income taxes to new ones on payroll. A few governors have even called for tax cuts.

The ideas are bubbling up as state lawmakers begin their 2018 sessions and assess the effects of the Republican tax overhaul that President Donald Trump signed into law last month. Lawmakers and governors in some states are grappling with how to protect their constituents.

The federal policy implements a maze of changes. It cuts tax rates and nearly doubles the standard income deduction. Yet it also caps or eliminates some popular itemized deductions, and sets the personal exemptions to zero.

For many Americans, the result is expected to be lower federal tax obligations, at least initially. Those facing higher bills are expected to be concentrated in some high-tax states.

With legislators starting their sessions and governors writing state budgets, the response is a political priority. The proposals are bold, though not yet fleshed out.

Jefferson County state senator ditches Democratic Party

Denver Post

A Democratic state legislator from Jefferson County has switched her party affiliation just days before the 2018 legislative session begins.

Sen. Cheri Jahn announced Friday on Facebook that she will be an independent because she is frustrated with the political system. State and national politics have become more polarized and partisan since she was first elected to the statehouse in 2000, she said.

"I have always brought an independent voice," Jahn wrote on Facebook. "I didn't change, the system changed. This system is terribly broken. I have watched through the years and witnessed that there is more care about politics and those in power than serving people in the state."

However, Democratic party leaders don't believe the change will have much impact during the upcoming session. Jahn has requested to caucus with the Democrats during the 2018 session, which begins Jan. 10, said Sen. Lucia Guzman, Senate minority leader.

Sexual harassment cast a big cloud over Colorado lawmakers ambitions on the legislature's opening day

Denver Post

The sexual-harassment scandal that rattled the state Capitol late last year became the focal point on the opening day of the 2018 legislative session last Wednesday, overshadowing dueling election-year agendas that include a \$3.5 billion transportation bond and ambitious programs for the middle class.

Gov. Hickenlooper Announces Boards and Commission Appointments

Office of the Governor

Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2017 - Gov. John Hickenlooper today announced Boards and Commissions appointments to the State Medical Assistance and Services Advisory Council.

The State Medical Assistance and Services Advisory Council assists the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing in the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive medical plan for low-income families.

For terms expiring Nov. 12, 2021:

- Theresa G. Buxton, RN, PhD of Centennial, to serve as a professional nurse, reappointed;
- Sean Raymond Whalen, DDS, of Denver, a dentist licensed in this state, appointed.