



## **2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT**

### ***CoSEA***

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The Second Regular Session of Colorado's 75th General Assembly adjourned on May 13th.

This was a difficult session overshadowed by a nearly \$1.5B structural budget shortfall. Important programs were trimmed or cut altogether, one-time maneuvers were employed, and inflationary increases in many programs were not covered. The budget problems impacted all aspects of policy considered this year and created tension between members whose policy priorities could not move forward due to their fiscal impact.

The following report provides: insights into the 2026 Legislative Session; an overview of the final Fiscal Year 2026-27 State Budget; 2026 potential ballot initiatives; and, a preview of 2026 primary and elections.

It has been an honor to represent you. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,  
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# Session Overview

## 2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION YIELDS MIXED RESULTS

What did the 2026 legislative session – “*The Second Regular Session of the Seventy-fifth General Assembly*” – accomplish? As always, especially in politics, it depends on whom you ask.

Outgoing Democratic House Speaker Julie McCluskie, who is always optimistic, put it this way in her farewell speech: “With extraordinary and generational drought, inflation, unlawful federal overreach, and a significant budget crisis all weighing on our minds, lawmakers came together and we accomplished some amazing work.”

Republican Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer, the always-direct senior member of the Joint Budget Committee (JBC), had a different view. She was quoted as saying Democrats should have “cut spending, cut programs, cut taxes, and cut regulations. ... We still have businesses leaving this state. More than 100 businesses signed a letter saying Colorado is unfriendly to them. We are not open for business in the State of Colorado.”

There were 626 bills introduced during the 2026 session, more than 178 of them were killed. In comparison, 657 bills were introduced and 171 failed in 2025

So, what did the 2026 session accomplish, and where did it falter?

- **Criminal Justice:** Corrections reforms, prison funding and competency measures were top of mind this year for JBC members and the General Assembly. Mild reform policies passed after negotiations with the Governor's office.
- **Education:** Education policy was not a big issue during the 2026 legislative session, but education funding certainly was. Despite initial worries that lawmakers would not be able to fully fund the K-12 finance formula for FY 2026-27, the legislature was able to shield education spending in the annual school finance act, [SB 26-023](#). Other education programs were not so lucky. Several programs in the Department of Education were trimmed or eliminated, and funding for state colleges and universities was held at FY 2025-26 levels.
- **Environment and Energy:** This session was a mixed bag for bills in this topic area. Lawmakers approved measures to renew the Public Utilities Commission after its sunset review ([HB 26-1326](#)), give municipal utilities more time to meet greenhouse gas emissions goals ([SB 26-182](#)), provide funding for species conservation ([SB 26-165](#)), provide revegetation of formerly irrigated farmland ([HB 26-1320](#)) and create a special path for local governments to develop geothermal energy ([SB 26-142](#)).
- **Healthcare:** The healthcare debate this session was shaped by a resource shortfall. Higher than expected Medicaid costs, combined with reductions in healthcare funding forced the General Assembly to restructure Colorado’s healthcare programs for lower-income residents. These issues were top of mind for JBC members through the budget process.

# Session Overview (con't)

- **Housing:** Housing affordability remained a priority for the General Assembly with more than two-dozen bills introduced on the issue this session.
- **State Government:** From ballot language to bureaucratic measures, a lot happened in this policy area this legislative session.
- **Technology and Artificial Intelligence:** It is not surprising, given today's tech-addled society, but a number of the highest profile bills this session involved technology, from the AI redo and data centers to protecting kids online.
- **Transportation:** Lawmakers passed two bills regulating rideshare providers, [HB 26-1043](#) and [HB 26-1424](#). The House bill sought to crack down on criminal behavior by drivers, an idea that has been vetoed by Polis in the past. Another transportation issue this session included reducing the size of and changing the membership of the RTD board ([SB 26-150](#)).
- **Tax:** Facing more than a billion dollars in annual cuts, legislators have struggled to realign expenditures with revenues. They pursued relief through both spending reductions and tax policy changes — including [HB26 1289](#), Modification of Certain Tax Expenditures and [HB26 1223](#), Modifying Certain Tax Expenditures. Other efforts to raise revenue to fund a new family affordability tax credit by decoupling state tax policy from federal tax policy through limiting net operating loss carry-forwards and reducing other state-level deductions failed.
- **Ballot Initiatives:** [SB 26-135](#) proposes a ballot measure to increase education funding in a complicated diversion of TABOR refunds. [SB 26-172](#) will ask voters to change the boundaries of the Front Range Passenger Rail District. [HB 26-1430](#) is a proposed shift in transportation funding, intended to prevent submission of a ballot measure that would embed some transportation funding in the state constitution; it is unknown if supporters of that will be persuaded.

For more information on key bills, see this [Colorado Sun report on the 101 key bills of the 2026 session](#) and here is a summary of the [Key Legislative Policy Decisions from 2026](#).

## STONE OF THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Partisan differences and tensions between Democratic moderates and progressives seemed a bit quieter this session. That did not mean they were not there.

Republicans still used some delaying tactics in the House, although the biggest delay was a solo act. Highlands Ranch Republican Representative Brandi Bradley had the long appropriations bill read at length, forcing a Saturday House session to finish work on the budget package.

The intra-Democratic feud over who paid for a Vail gathering of moderate members last summer resurfaced in a measure requiring disclosure of funding by all of the various interest group caucuses. [SB 26-168](#) was quietly killed.

# Session Overview (*con't*)

## **STATE HOUSE TRANSITIONS**

Every election year brings change to the General Assembly as members leave because of term limits or because they are seeking other offices.

While there looks to be less turnover this year than in the past, it still could be significant, particularly at the leadership level. Both House Speaker Julie McCluskie and Majority Leader Monica Duran are term-limited, setting up big leadership changes when the House Democratic caucus meets after the November elections.

In the Senate, Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez is term limited. Assistant Majority Leader Lisa Cutter is leaving to run for Jefferson County commissioner and former Assistant Majority Leader Julie Gonzales is term limited. She is also running to unseat incumbent U.S. Sen. John Hickenlooper. Senate President James Coleman of Denver is in the middle of his final term.

Budget Committee Chair, Representative Emily Sirota is term-limited but is running for a state Senate seat. JBC vice-chair Senator Jeff Bridges is in the middle of his term but is running for State Treasurer, a race he is predicted to win.

## **What About The Governor?**

Democratic legislators generally do not criticize Governor Jared Polis publicly, but privately a lot of them will be happy to see him go when his second term ends in January. His quirky libertarian views have conflicted too often with more orthodox Democratic priorities.

Governor Polis vetoed 11 bills last year. This year the threat of veto torpedoed some bills even before the session ended. Some Democrats say they have saved bill ideas for the 2027 session when a more standard issue governor will be in office.

And the question of exercise of administrative branch authority? One Democratic legislator was quoted as predicting Polis may veto more than 20 bills, which would be a Polis record.

Incidentally, Governor Polis probably destroyed any remaining credibility he had with Democratic legislators on May 15 when he reduced the sentence of former-election clerk Tina Peters. After months of speculation about what Polis would do, the decision interestingly came two days after the legislative session ended.

Polis' Friday afternoon announcement did not prevent pushback. The Democratic news releases condemning Polis started hitting inboxes within minutes of Polis' announcement. The Republican District Attorney who prosecuted Peters was not happy either.

# Budget Overview

## **BUDGET OVERVIEW**

For the second session in a row, lawmakers faced a big potential budget shortfall. For the second session in a row, there was a lot of public handwringing about the looming cuts to state programs. And, for the second session in a row, the Joint Budget Committee finally came up with a balanced budget. While there were some critical cuts to accomplish this, there were also a lot of transfers of money and other budgetary maneuvers that made balancing possible.

A key tactic used in balancing was reduction of TABOR refunds, including [HB 26-1419](#) and [SB 26-042](#). Minority Republicans hammered those bills during debate, but to no avail. In the end, the FY 2026-27 budget will be slightly larger than the current year's budget. The Long Bill ([HB 26-1410](#)) includes total appropriations for FY 2026-27 of \$49.51 billion in all-funds spending, including \$17.06 billion General Fund, \$13.96 billion cash funds, \$15.34 billion federal funds and the remainder re-appropriated. Total General Fund obligations, including legislation outside the long bill, totaled \$18.68 billion.

There is no doubt the budget challenge cast a pall over the session, if only because it meant there was virtually no money available for new programs or expansion of existing ones. That sparked a lot of creative thinking by lawmakers regarding new ways to raise funds. Several of those involved creating enterprises or special purpose authorities, organizations that are connected to the state government but not subject to Taxpayer's Bill of Rights limits.

Some of those worked, such as a plan to impose fees on insurance companies to fund homeowner grants for hail-resistant roofs. Others did not, including an early childhood funding scheme.

Governor Jared Polis' plan to help balance the budget with proceeds from the sale of Pinnacle Assurance went nowhere. The JBC would not touch the idea. And, two bill similar bills circulated by legislative leaders were not introduced.

More details on the FY 2026-27 budget can be found in this May 1st [Summary of the Final Package](#).

# Interim Committees

There will be very few interim committees allowed to meet in 2026. [HB26-1331](#) was passed as a result of the FY2026-27 budget deficit and (1) prohibits Legislative Council from approving interim committee requests; (2) eliminates per diem and travel expenses for members serving on a statutorily created interim committee; and, (3) suspends meetings, field trips, and reporting requirements for numerous existing committees.

Those permitted to meet are limited to five bill requests and three recommendations for bill introductions in 2026. Below is a list of the committees approved to meet in 2026 and those that are suspended.

## **Committees Authorized to Meet in 2026**

- Black Colorado Racial Equity Study
- Colorado Commission on Uniform State Laws
- Colorado Youth Advisory Council Committee
- Task Force to Expand Effective Public Schools (created by [SB26-170](#))
- Commission on Medicaid (created by [SB26-187](#))

## **Committees Suspended in 2026**

- American Indian Affairs Interim Committee
- Colorado Health Insurance Exchange Oversight Committee
- Legislation Inside Advisory Council Review Committee
- Legislative Oversight Committee Concerning Tax Policy
- Legislative Oversight Committee Concerning the Treatment of Persons with Behavioral Health Disorders in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems
- Legislative Oversight Committee for Colorado Jail Standards
- Pension Review Commission and Subcommittee
- Sales and Use Tax Simplification Task Force
- Transportation Legislation Review Committee
- Water Resources and Agriculture Review Committee

# November 2026

## *Potential Ballot Initiatives*

The process for finalizing citizen-driven initiatives will not be finalized until early September. The information below includes those items currently on the ballot and key ones approved for circulation, along with measures referred to the ballot by the Legislature. A more comprehensive list will be forthcoming in a future election report after the initiatives have been finalized.

### **On the Ballot**

- [#85 Penalties for Fentanyl Crimes](#)
- [#95 Law Enforcement Reporting Requirements to Federal Authorities](#)
- [#108 Penalties for Human Trafficking of a Minor](#)
- [#109 Male and Female Participation in School Sports](#)
- [#110 Prohibit Certain Surgeries on Minors](#)

### **Approved for Circulation ([entire list](#))**

- [#175 State Revenue Supporting Road Transportation](#)
- [#177 Right to Natural Gas](#)
- [#195 Graduated Income Tax](#)
- [#232 Income Tax Rate Cap](#)
- [#234 Plain Language Ballot Questions](#)
- [#240 Congressional Redistricting](#)
- [#249 Separation of Pinnacle Assurance from the State to Fund Workforce Development](#)

### **Pending Supreme Court Action**

- [#245 State and Local Initiatives And Referenda](#)
- [#310 Liability for Oil and Gas Operations](#)
- [#312 Cost of Natural Gas Pipeline Extensions](#)
- [#416 Limited Gaming Expansion and Local Control](#)

### **Measures Referred by the General Assembly**

- [SB 26-135](#) - State Public K-12 Education Funding
- [SB 26-172](#) - Front Range Passenger Rail District
- [HB 26-1430](#) - Transportation Funding Adjustments

# 2026 Election - Who's Running?

## STATEWIDE SEATS

All of Colorado's statewide offices will be on the ballot in 2026 and every incumbent in those seats is term-limited. Given the Democratic Party's strong support among Colorado voters, the most consequential decisions will likely be made during the June primary.

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY

All 65 seats in Colorado's State House are up for election every cycle, along with about half of the State Senate seats. It is generally safe to assume that incumbents, who are not term-limited, will seek re-election and likely win. However, open seats and the few truly competitive districts may tell a different story. We will learn more about the candidates in these races over the next several months.

### Governor

- U.S. Senator Michael Bennett (D)
- Attorney General Phil Weiser (D)
- Victor Marx (R)
- State Representative Scott Bottoms (R)
- State Senator Barbara Kirkmeyer (R)

### Secretary of State

- Jefferson County Clerk & Recorder Amanda Gonzales (D)
- State Senator Jessie Danielson (D)
- James Wiley (R)

### Attorney General

- Secretary of State Jena Griswold (D)
- Michael Dougherty (D)
- Hetal Doshi (D)
- David Seligman (D)
- Michael Allen (R)
- David Wilson (R)

### Treasurer

- State Senator Jeff Bridges (D)
- Former State Senator Kevin Grantham (R)

### United States Senate

- Senator John Hickenlooper (D)
- State Senator Julie Gonzales (D)
- State Senator Mark Baisley (R)

### Congressional District 1

- Diana Degette (D) - incumbent
- Melat Kiros (D)
- Wanda James (D)

### Congressional District 2

- Joe Neguse (D) - incumbent
- Christina Blunt (R)
- Kelley Dennison (R)

### Congressional District 3

- Jeff Hurd (R) - *incumbent*
- Ron Hanks (R)
- Alex Kelloff (D)
- Dwayne Romero (D)

### Congressional District 4

- Lauren Boebert (R) - *incumbent*
- Eileen Laubacher (D)

### Congressional District 5

- Jeff Crank (R) - *incumbent*
- Joe Reagan (D)
- Jessica Killin (D)

### Congressional District 6

- Jason Crow (D) - *incumbent*
- Khaleb Dammen (R)

### Congressional District 7

- Brittany Petterson (D) - *incumbent*
- Amanda Capabianco (R)

### Congressional District 8

- Gabe Evans (R) - *incumbent*
- Former State Representative Shannon Bird (D)
- State Representative Manny Rutinel (D)