

## CAPITOL UPDATE - Week Ending March 13, 2026

YOUR BILL TRACKER: [CoSEA](#)

### THIS WEEK'S HIGHLIGHTS FROM UNDER THE DOME

The 2026 legislative session has been running fairly smoothly up to now. Events this week highlighted some stresses that are likely to overshadow the rest of the session. This week's biggest shocks revolved around the state budget.

Everybody knew the legislature had big shortfalls to close in order to balance the FY2026-27 state budget. At Thursday's quarterly revenue forecasts, legislative economists informed the Joint Budget Committee that the gap could be as much as \$1.5 billion.

On Friday, the JBC chose to calculate next year's budget based on the more optimistic forecast from Executive Branch economists, but that will only narrow the shortfall by about \$300 million. Budget Director Mark Ferrandino also shocked the JBC this week when he told members the Executive Branch needs up to \$250 million to open a new prison.

The other big news of the week was the House returned to partisan tensions as members debated over various gun measures Thursday and Friday. Other statehouse activity of note since last Friday included action on these bills:

- [SB 26-135](#): Proposes to ask voters to divert TABOR refunds, passed its first committee review.
- [SB 26-068](#): Would create yet another task force to study elementary student testing, moved out of committee.
- [SB 26-032](#): Intends to protect and maintain immunizations policies and access, passed in both chambers.
- [HB 26-1271](#): Proposes to impose fees on alcohol sales to pay for health treatment programs, died in committee.

Friday was the 66th day of the 120-day session.

### TALLYING THE BILLS

The flow of new bills slowed to a trickle this week, but there were still a few proposals to take note of.

- **Abortion:** [HB 26-1335](#) would require health centers at colleges and universities to provide abortion medication. Democratic.
- **Energy:** [HB 26-1337](#) encourages the development of nuclear energy in the state. [SB 26-142](#) promotes geothermal energy development. Both bipartisan.

- **Wildlife:** [SB 26-141](#) proposes optional vehicle registration fees to support wildlife-protection projects, like highway crossings. Bipartisan Western Slope sponsors.

As of Friday morning, [481 bills had been introduced](#).

## **THIS WEEK AT THE JBC**

Before the revenue forecasts and OSPB's budget comeback hit the committee, the JBC had its last figure-setting session on Monday (for IT capital) and then plugged along all week considering staff comebacks on various previously-undecided budget items and draft bills to be introduced with the long bill. Late Tuesday afternoon the committee went into executive session to discuss the proposed sale of Pinnacol Assurance with JBC staff and a legislative staff lawyer. No word on the tone of the discussion. It's probably a good guess that the JBC

remains skeptical of the idea. OSPB Director Mark Ferrandino pitched the Pinnacol plan during Thursday's revenue forecasts, drawing a skeptical retort from JBC Chair Representative Emily Sirota. On Friday, the Committee heard analysis of the revenue forecasts from Staff Director Craig Harper and decided to base FY2026-27 budget balancing on the slightly more optimistic forecast from the Office of State Planning and Budgeting. A report providing an overview of these details was just recently sent to you.

The committee does not have much time to make tough decisions. Introduction of the budget package in the House is scheduled for March 30.

## **Key decisions facing the JBC include:**

- The size of pay increases for state employees
- The Department of Corrections proposed increase
- The amount of across-the-board rate cuts for Medicaid providers
- Exact funding amounts for K-12 and higher education - will the negative factor return?
- The Governor's proposals to (1) "sell" Pinnacol Assurance and raise \$400 million; (2) transfer money from Prop 123 housing funds to the General Fund; and (3) recapture 2005 TABOR refunds that were supposedly refunded unnecessarily – along with other creative Mark Ferrandino ideas.
- Whether to reduce the size of the 15% GF reserve

Based on Friday's committee discussions, shrinking the reserve to 13% or even less seems to be a foregone conclusion.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

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## KEY NEWS LINKS FROM THE WEEK

### Notable Stories of The Week

Links to revenue forecast reports are below this section.

- Ferrandino: State needs another prison – or two (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/19/colorado-needs-new-prison-legislature/>
- Family caregivers brace for Medicaid cuts (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/18/colorado-medicaid-family-caregiver-hour-cuts/>
- Possible compromise advancing on AI regulation (CO Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/17/artificial-intelligence-working-group-agrees-on-framework-to-replace-colorado-law/>
- Vaccine access bill passes (CO Newsline): <https://coloradonewsline.com/briefs/colorado-legislature-vaccine-children/>
- How the cost of immigrant health care got out of control (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/16/colorado-medicaid-immigrants-cost-overruns/>

### All of This Week's News Links

Friday, March 20, 2026

#### Revenue forecasts:

- CO Pols: <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/19/colorado-revenue-forecast-worsens-pushing-budget-shortfall-to-nearly-1-5b/>
- Sun: <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/19/colorado-budget-shortfall-grows-2026/>
- Post: <https://www.denverpost.com/2026/03/20/colorado-budget-forecast-deficit/>
- CO Newsline: <https://coloradonewsline.com/briefs/colorado-state-budget-shortfall-expands-to-1-5-billion/>
- Axios: <https://www.axios.com/local/denver/2026/03/19/colorados-budget-deficit-grows-march-economic-outlook>

#### Other news:

- Lawsuit targets yet another state human services failure (CPR): <https://www.cpr.org/2026/03/19/colorado-lawsuit-children-held-juvenile-detention-past-judges-release/>
- Bill would fast-track licenses for out-of-state teachers (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/20/colorado-license-out-of-state-teachers-compact/>
- Panel approves bill to protect workers in high heat (Sum & Substance): <https://tssc Colorado.com/bill-to-help-workers-in-extreme-temperatures-passes-its-first-committee/>

#### Thursday, March 19, 2026:

- Ferrandino: State needs another prison – or two (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/19/colorado-needs-new-prison-legislature/>
- Bill that would have require police to intervene with ICE dies (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/18/colorado-lawmakers-reject-ice-excessive-force-bill/>
- Youth data privacy bill also could raise money for schools (Chalkbeat): <https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2026/03/19/bill-would-raise-money-for-schools-through-online-gaming-fe e/>

Bill would allow conversion therapy survivors to sue therapists (Westword) -

<https://www.westword.com/news/colorado-bill-conversation-therapy-sue-practitioners-40855635/>

### **Wednesday, March 18, 2026**

- Alcohol fees bill dies in committee (CP Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/17/proposal-to-levy-new-fees-on-alcohol-products-in-colorado-dies>
- Family caregivers brace for Medicaid cuts (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/18/colorado-medicaid-family-caregiver-hour-cuts/>
- Lawmakers take aim at sports betting (Axios): <https://www.axios.com/local/denver/2026/03/18/colorado-sports-betting-advertising-prop-bets-limits>
- Panel tells Weinberg to attend sexual harassment training (CO Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/17/colorado-ethics-panel-tells-legislator-to-attend-sexual-harassment-training/>

### **Tuesday, March 17, 2026**

- Possible compromise advancing on AI regulation (CO Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/17/artificial-intelligence-working-group-agrees-on-framework-to-replace-colorado-law/>
- Vaccine access bill passes (CO Newslines): <https://coloradonewslines.com/briefs/colorado-legislature-vaccine-children/>
- Advocates push for less testing (Chalkbeat): <https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2026/03/17/colorado-assessment-time-bill-passes-first-hearing/>

### **Saturday, March 14 – Monday, March 16, 2026**

- How the cost of immigrant health care got out of control (Sun): <https://coloradosun.com/2026/03/16/colorado-medicaid-immigrants-cost-overruns/>
- Leadership bill would shrink interim committee work (CP Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/13/colorado-plans-to-slash-interim-committee-work-amid-budget-woes/>
- Weinberg ethics hearing set for Tuesday (CO Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/13/house-ethics-committee-to-begin-hearing-on-weinberg-complaint/>
- Dems' education funding referendum advances in committee (CO Pols): <https://www.coloradopolitics.com/2026/03/12/senate-committee-moves-forward-with-colorado-ballot-measure-to-redirect-tabor-refunds-to-schools/>

Lawmaker who resigned rated most effective (Axios):

<https://www.axios.com/local/denver/2026/03/16/colorado-effective-lawmaker-shannon-bird>