



**2026 Legislative Session
Week in Review
3/20/2026**

The wheels start to get a little wobbly

The 2026 legislative session has been running smoothly up to now, but events this week highlighted some of the stresses that may overshadow the rest of the session.

This week's biggest shocks were about the state budget.

Everybody knew the legislature had big shortfalls to close to balance the 2026-27 state budget.

At Thursday's quarterly revenue forecasts legislative economists told the Joint Budget Committee that the gap now could be as much at \$1.5 billion.

On Friday JBC decided 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.

The budget committee also was jolted this week when budget director Mark Ferrandino 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 returning to old partisan tensions over gun control. Preliminary debates consumed all day Thursday, and that chamber was deep into final debates Friday afternoon.

Other statehouse activity of note since last Friday included action on these bills:

- **SB 26-135**, which proposes to ask voters to divert TABOR refunds, passed its first committee review.
- **SB 26-068**, which would create yet another task force to student elementary student testing, moved out of committee.
- **SB 26-032**, the bill intended to protect and maintain immunizations policies and access, has passed in both chambers.
- **HB 26-1271**, the proposal to impose fees on alcohol sales to pay for health treatment programs, died in committee.

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 is the latest in a long roll call of bills intended to encourage development of nuclear energy in the state.. And SB 26-142 would encourage 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.

The Week for the JBC

Before it was hit with the twin shocks of the revenue forecasts and OSPB's budget comebacks, 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.

But it's probably a good guess that 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 Rep. Emily Sirota.

On Friday the committee heard analysis of the revenue forecasts from Staff Director Craig Harper and decided to base 2026-27 budget balancing on the slightly more optimistic forecast from the Office of State Planning and Budgeting.

The committee doesn't have a lot of time to make tough decisions. Introduction of the budget package in the House is currently scheduled for March 30.

Key decisions facing 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
- The governor's proposal to "sell" Pinnacol Assurance and raise \$400 million

- The governor’s proposal to transfer money from Prop 123 housing funds to the General Fund
- The governor’s proposal to recapture 2005 TABOR refunds that were supposedly refunded unnecessarily
- Whether to reduce the size of the 15 percent GF reserve

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

Notable stories of the week

(To save you time, here are links to key stories of the week that you should read if you haven’t already.)

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 Newslines) - <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

(Only a single link is provided for some events that were covered by multiple outlets. Multiple links are provided for some major stories.)

Friday, March 20

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 Newslines - <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://tsscolorado.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-fee/>
- 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

- 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

- 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 Newline) - <https://coloradonewline.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

- 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>