

Colorado Legislative Update January 23, 2023

Kick Off

The First Session of Colorado's 74th General Assembly convened Monday, January 9, 2023 with the typical pomp and circumstance: parliamentary business, leadership speeches, corridors and floors crowded with members' family and friends.

Members were sworn in, the elections of statewide officials were certified, rules were adopted, committee assignments were announced and late in the afternoon, the first batches of bills were introduced. There were 98 members present for the kickoff. Resigned GOP Sen. Bob Rankin was absent and his successor, Rep. Perry Will, has been chosen but not certified. Democratic Rep. Tracey Bennett of Boulder County resigned on the eve of the session; she's facing criminal charges for allegedly falsifying her residency. Senate President Steve Fenberg was re-elected unanimously. Representative Julie McCluskie was elected speaker – not unanimously. Two years ago a small band of House GOP hardliners broke House tradition and contested the motion to unanimously elect Democrat Alec Garnett as speaker. That symbolic effort, or course, was squashed by a roll call vote; however, that did not deter a new group of Republican members from trying the same tactics this year. The House finally voted, and McCluskie was elected Speaker 55-8.

Another opening day tradition is speeches by the speaker, president and the two minority leaders. Of most interest are the speeches by the first two, given that they represent the majority party. McCluskie's speech emphasized: affordable housing, affordable childcare, water resources, crime/public safety, gun control, reproductive rights, and "anti-racist" legislation. Fenberg emphasized somewhat different issues in his speech. He began with paying respect to the victims of the Club Q shooting and the passing of former House Minority Leader Hugh McKean. He spent a significant part of his speech encouraging bipartisanship and eliminating political polarization, while also highlighting issues of: gun control, reproductive rights, air and water quality, crime/public safety, education funding and affordable housing. The two minority leaders, Mike Lynch in the House and Paul Lundeen in the Senate, offered briefer remarks, made no policy proposals and basically said their shrunken caucuses will defend conservative principles and implored the Democrats engage with them in the policy process.

Governor Polis Delivers the State of the State

On Tuesday, January 17th, Governor Jared Polis delivered his annual [State of the State](#) address to a joint session of the Colorado General Assembly. His speech outlined a number of key issues he plans to focus on, including affordable housing, property tax reform, water sustainability, renewable energy & clean energy tax credits, saving people money on health care costs, the implementation of free full day preschool, expanding educational supports for in demand fields including early childhood education, public safety and gun control.