



John W. Hickenlooper
Mayor

CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER

AGENCY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Lucía Guzmán

DENVER WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Chaer Robert, Director

WELLINGTON E. WEBB
MUNICIPAL OFFICE BUILDING
201 WEST COLFAX AVENUE
DEPARTMENT 1102
DENVER, CO 80202
TELEPHONE: 720-913-8465
TTY: 720-913-8475
FAX: 720-913-8470
www.denvergov.org/women
Email: chaer.robert@ci.denver.co.us

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Possible 2006 Legislation

Compiled by
Chaer Robert

Most legislators breathed a huge sigh of relief with the passage of **Referendum C**. Without it, they would have spent agonizing months cutting over \$400 million out of the State Budget. Expect sparks over allocation of the additional revenue. Expenditure of the money is guided by last years HB 1350 and HB 1194. As advertised by the Vote Yes on C-D campaign the extra estimated \$3.1 billion would be divided this way:

- 30% K-12 Schools
- 30% Health Care – Increasing caseload and costs are expected to consume most of this
- 30% Community Colleges and State Colleges
- 10% Repayment of Referendum D Bonds on roads and bridges, K-12 school repairs, Higher Education Building Repairs, and Fire and Police Pension funding. Since Referendum D failed, one could expect this 10% to be used for these items on a pay as you go basis.

EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT – With the passage of Referendum C, 200,000 low-income Colorado families lost their Earned Income Tax Credit because it was a TABOR refund mechanism. Expect legislation making this credit permanent instead.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE -- The asset test for Medicaid is being dropped to streamline application, as was the food stamp asset test in 2001. The Asset Test for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and many other public assistance programs remains at \$2000. Most of the very poor have no assets, but with the growth of 401Ks, Health Savings Accounts, refund splitting and other saving vehicles, some must choose between receiving benefits and depleting all savings and assets, or trying to hang onto small assets and not getting help. Look for legislation to eliminate the TANF Asset test.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE – Only 27% of unemployed Colorado women get unemployment insurance. One barrier is the formula for calculating minimum work requirements. Changing the Alternative Base period would prevent some unemployed workers from having to wait an additional 3 months before receiving benefits by changing allow consideration of work worked in the previous 4 quarters, rather than the four quarters before the previous quarter. Particularly helpful for more recent entrants into the workforce. Another bill would add loss of and inability to get child care or transportation to the "good cause" which might allow an employee to get UI when she or he loses their job.

PARENTAL INVOLVMENT IN SCHOOLS – Expect legislation again to allow parents a few hours per year of unpaid leave from their jobs to attend certain important school activities.

HOUSING -- Possibly a pared-down version of last year's tenant/landlord bill, including the most basic provisions, such as requiring the tenants receive a copy of their lease, that security deposits be returned within a month, that tenants be informed of their rights under eviction.

HOMELESS—Lack of identification is a major problem for many of the homeless. I.D.s are difficult to replace, but essential for receiving many services. Look for legislation which addresses this barrier by add to the list of official documents which can be used to replace an I.D.

LOW INCOME FAMILIES & INDIVIDUALS -- Many of the working poor are trapped in a cycle of getting loans against their upcoming paycheck, paying exorbitant fees in the process. Legislation may look at limits on rolling over these loans, or on fees and interest rates.

Another bill will attempt to raise the State minimum wage. It currently is the same as the federal -- \$5.15 per hour. The Self Sufficiency Standard creates a truer county and family size- specific measure of what it takes to meet basic

needs without government supports. The State will be encouraged to adopt this more accurate alternative to the Federal Poverty Level. Excess severance taxes may again be redirected to help pay utility bills for low income folks.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION -- To increase racial diversity in Colorado public 4 year colleges, and in particular in Colorado's most selective public colleges, expect to see a proposal to guarantee admission to Colorado's public colleges for the top 25% of each high school graduates. The top 10% of each high school's graduates would be eligible for automatic admission to Colorado's selective colleges. Need based financial aid would be a part of the package.

HEALTH—Expect legislation restoring some of the health care cuts made, particularly \$8. million in cuts for mental health services. Interim Committee legislation includes increasing primary care grants for community clinics serving those with chronic illnesses. Local governments could set up health assurance districts to provide local funding for health care for county residents (contingent on a vote by their residents). The Child Health Plan and Children's Medicaid could be blended under a proposed Colorado Family Care. Recruitment for the free and reduced school lunch program could be wedded to recruitment for the Child Health Plan, since both program have similar eligibility standards. Mandatory Med-Pay could add emergency health care coverage for auto accidents back into people's auto insurance. Hospitals could be required to report basic data, like how much uncompensated care they provide, how much bad debt they are owed, and nurse patient ratios under proposed legislation. Requiring hospitals to report hospital based infections could reduce Medicaid and health care costs significantly. Another attempt will be made to restrict smoking in all enclosed workplaces, including bars and restaurants. Public Health Departments will fight to store Per capita funding lost in recent years. Large employers (of 3500 or more) would be required to either pay at least 11% of payroll to cover employees with health insurance, or contribute to the State to subsidize the Child Health Plan and Medicaid if their employees are uninsured under proposed legislation. Referendum C money could be used to help subsidize health care premiums for uninsured employees, or to subsidize premiums of employees of certain small businesses.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – Those on State Aid to the Needy Disabled are destitute and disabled. Their monthly stipend of approximately \$200. per month is not enough to cover health insurance. Referendum C promised money to address health care for the disabled. Expect to see a proposal to add a medical care program for those on Aid to the Needy Disabled. The department of Human Services will be requesting additional money for sign language interpreters.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH – Expect legislation improving access for emergency contraception, when a woman has about 3 days to prevent pregnancy after sex. In the fall, expect a ballot measure with new restrictions on abortion.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE – A resolution clarifying the law enforcement shall arrest those violating a restraining order will be introduced in response to the U.S. Supreme Court case *Gonzales v. Castle Rock*. Another measure may standardize enforcement of interstate protection orders.

IMMIGRANT ISSUES – Expect a fall ballot measure requiring verification of citizenship status prior to receiving government services. Expect legislation adding regulations to the hiring procedures of businesses contracting with the State, licensed by the State and possibly the State itself.

GLBT ISSUES – Expect a fall ballot initiative banning same sex marriage. During legislative session, expect legislation to legalize civil unions and same sex adoption.

SENIOR ISSUES – Creating a line item for funding for the Older Americans' Act, using evidence based medicine in the development of a preferred drug list, requiring reporting of elder abuse, and limiting the liability of those who help seniors choose a Medicare prescription plan are likely legislation affecting seniors in 2006. Also expect to see a push to restore the Homestead tax credit for those seniors who own their own homes.

This list is still very preliminary and subject to change and refinement! For additions, corrections, and more information contact Chaer Robert at 720-913-8465, or chaer.robert@ci.denver.co.us