

UNDER THE DOME

WITH THE NCLA

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WITH HALF OF THE SESSION OVER, CONTENTIOUS ISSUES STILL ON TAP

The 2015 legislative session has reached the halfway point and various contentious issues are still looming in a session that has, thus far, been relatively calm for business.

The 2015 Colorado Legislature is a split body with Republicans holding a one-vote majority in the Senate and Democrats holding a slim 2-vote majority in the House. The tenor at the outset of the session was one of collaboration but the first 60-days have had an underpinning of partisan and messaging issues.

With a newly found majority, Senate Republicans have taken aim at issues that rocked the 2013 legislative session including proposals to reverse various gun control and labor issues. Despite the unlikelihood that such divisive issues would meet with any success in the Democrat House, Republicans have taken the opportunity to share their agenda with the public. Democrats have also taken advantage of their majority in the House and introduced similarly divisive issues to highlight their philosophical agenda. Such issues have met similar defeat at the hands of Republicans.

The quiet but underlying partisanship is a different dynamic than seen in split legislatures of the past. The smoldering partisanship sets the stage for some fireworks to emerge as the last 60 days of the session will see the introduction of the state budget, TABOR surplus and oil and gas legislation.

The state's 1st quarter economic forecast will be issued in the third week of March and it will provide the final numbers from which the state budget will be built. It will also be clear at that time how much money will be considered TABOR surplus and, under law, be returned to the taxpayers. A debate is expected about retaining some or all of the surpluses as a portion of the revenues were generated marijuana revenue that wasn't excluded from the TABOR calculation when passed by voters in 2013. Republicans are generally opposed to the idea of retaining the surplus dollars but have indicated some willingness to consider the marijuana funds uniquely.

The surplus will also prompt discussion about transportation funding and whether a funding formula will be triggered to provide \$100 to \$200 Million in funding for transportation projects.

On the heels of the recommendations by the Governor's Oil and Gas Task Force, there is speculation and expectation of the introduction of legislative measures to implement the consensus recommendations. It is also anticipated that the House may introduce proposals that reflect the Minority Report recommendations. The Minority Report

encompasses proposals which seek to restrict the locating of well-heads and other more restrictive approaches to oil and gas fracking