

# The Gazette

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## **3 tax increases could be coming to ballot near you**

**By Ed Sealover**

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DENVER - Colorado voters may be asked to consider as many as three tax and fee hikes on the November ballot.

A title-setting board of state officials gave approval Wednesday to three groups to begin collecting petition signatures for their initiatives. Two of the three proposals have multiple ballot titles so that backers can decide later which to submit to voters.

A brief look at the proposals:

### **FURTHER ETHICS LAW**

Backers of last year's successful Amendment 41 are pushing another constitutional change that would clarify the intent of that law and charge an annual tax on lobbyists.

Amendment 41's language bans all gifts from lobbyists to lawmakers and restricts any gift of more than \$50 to any public official or their family members. That has been interpreted to mean children of government employees can't accept college scholarships, and firefighters injured on the job can't benefit from fundraisers, among other things.

The new measure would clarify that the only gifts that violate the law are ones solicited or accepted for personal or private gain as a breach of the public trust. It would also charge lobbyists \$25 a year to supplement costs of the ethics commission that enforces the law.

And it would re-enact any section of the law dealing with the gift ban, \$50 cap or ethics commission that is thrown out by a judge who is considering a lawsuit against the amendment.

Opponents are likely to ask the title-setting board to rehear the case.

### **CONSTRUCTION MONEY FOR SCHOOLS**

Arvada resident Daniel Hayes has submitted a plan to charge one-time fees on new construction to bolster what he considers an under-funded state higher education system.

One of his proposals would charge a .5 percent fee on the cost of new buildings, raising an expected \$79 million a year. The other would enact a fee of 1 percent of construction costs plus a property tax of 1 percent of the current actual value of the improved land, bringing in about \$200 million annually.

The constitutional amendment requires at least 25 percent of revenues be used to reduce tuition for Colorado residents at in-state public colleges and universities. Five percent of the new money over the first five years would go to improving campus security, and none of the money could be put toward athletics.

## **SEVERANCE TAX**

Two constitutional amendments from the Donnell-Kay Foundation educational group seek to increase revenues from the oil and gas severance tax and reallocate them. Both would raise about \$244 million a year by replacing the existing tax structure with a tax of 5 percent of the gross income from the sale of oil and gas extracted in the state.

One of the plans would send 25 percent of the new revenues to counties and cities affected by the development, processing, transportation or energy conversion of oil and gas. The General Assembly would determine how to spend the rest and could raise the tax at its discretion.

The other plan would distribute 23 percent of the new revenues to school district capital construction, 23 percent to impacted counties and cities, 15 percent to public elementary and secondary education, 15 percent to state capital construction and 24 percent to the general fund. The Legislature could not raise this tax without a vote of the people.

CONTACT THE WRITER: (303)837-0613 or [ed.sealover@gazette.com](mailto:ed.sealover@gazette.com)

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