



Published on *TheCabin.net* (<http://thecabin.net>)

[Home](#) > [News](#) > Lawmakers return for likely busiest week of session

Lawmakers return for likely busiest week of session

Created 3/13/11 7:18 pm

By ROB MORITZ

Arkansas News Bureau

LITTLE ROCK — Committees at both ends of the Capitol plan to take up proposed constitutional amendments today, the start of what is shaping up to be the busiest week of the 2011 General Assembly.

Proposals to cut taxes, raise taxes, reform the state prison system and raise interest rates on small loans will share the spotlight during the 10th week of the 2011 General Assembly.

Today, the House Committee on State Agencies and Governmental Affairs and its Senate counterpart are scheduled to begin reviewing 21 proposed constitutional changes ranging from abolishing the office of constable to curbing the autonomy of the state Highway Commission, Game and Fish Commission, Lottery Commission and public colleges and universities.

The Legislature can refer up to three proposed constitutional amendments to voters in the 2012 general election.

The Senate Transportation Committee also is scheduled to meet after the Senate adjourns this afternoon, and the panel's chairman, Sen. Linda Chesterfield, D-Little Rock, said she hopes to convene the committee every afternoon this week — in addition to its regular Tuesday and Thursday meetings — to consider bills.

Among the bills before the committee is HB 1902 by House Speaker Robert S. Moore Jr., D-Arkansas, which proposes a public vote on a 5-cent diesel tax increase to finance a bond issue for maintenance and improvements to the interstate highway system.

The bill passed the House last week.

A companion measure is among the proposed constitutional amendments. House Joint Resolution 1001 by Rep. Jonathan Barnett, R-Siloam Springs, would refer to voters a 10-year, half-percent sales tax hike to fund bonds to finance construction of a statewide four-lane highway system.

On Tuesday, The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to take up Gov. Mike Beebe's program to ease chronic overcrowding in the state prison system.

Senate Bill 750 by Sen. Jim Luker, D-Wynne, approved last week by the Senate, would change sentencing laws to keep violent offenders behind bars while diverting some nonviolent offenders to treatment, probation and parole.

The bill includes \$9 million in spending to expand drug courts and hire additional parole and probation officers, and one-third of the cost would come from an increase in parole and probation fees.

Also Tuesday, the Senate Insurance and Commerce Committee is to consider SB 568 by Sen. Michael Lamoureux, R-Russellville, which would allow a small-loan interest rate higher than the state usury limit of 17 percent.

The bill would change Amendment 89, passed in November to set the interest-rate at 17 percent, to allow the General Assembly to establish the rate that could be charged on loans of \$5,000 or less.

Critics have warned Lamoureux bill could open the door for the return of payday lenders and exorbitant interest rates on short-term loans to the state.

Elsewhere Tuesday, the House Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee is to discuss HB 1447 by Rep. Donna Hutchinson, R-Bella Vista, which would require each school district to have employees trained in giving glucagon shots to students with diabetes.

The bill requires a licensed nurse in each district to conduct the training.

On Wednesday, the Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee is to consider HB 1002 by Rep. Ed Garner, R-Maumelle, which would eliminate the capital gains tax on profits from the sale of property and companies acquired in Arkansas after July 1 and possessed for at least one year.

Gov. Mike Beebe opposes the bill, which the state Department of Finance and Administration estimates would cost the state \$44.5 million over the next two years and \$68 million annually when fully implemented.

Also, the House Insurance and Commerce Committee is to resume consideration of HB 1992 by Rep. Tommy Baker, D-Osceola, which would raise the severance tax on natural gas, with most of the revenue going to highway improvements.

More than 100 workers from natural gas drilling companies packed the committee's hearing room and the adjacent hallway Friday, when the hearing began, in a show of opposition to the bill.

Elsewhere this week, the House Rules Committee will take up HB 2201 by Rep. David Sanders, R-Little Rock, which prohibit a former official of a state regulatory agency from going to work for an entity regulated by the agency within one year of leaving office.

0