Capitol News

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# This Week’s Highlights

This week marked the halfway point of the legislative session, which is scheduled to end on April 25th. Lawmakers continued their fulltime floor action in order to meet next Tuesday’s House of Origin cutoff. Committee meetings will begin in earnest on Wednesday, with the opposite house policy committee cutoff coming quickly on March 26th.

**Universal Health Care Commission.** On Tuesday, the Senate passed SB 5399, the bill establishing the Universal Health Care Commission. It was amended on the Senate floor to require the Commission to make recommendations for cost containment and savings strategies for a universal system. It was also amended to add local health jurisdiction representation to the Commission. It has been referred to the House Health Care & Wellness Committee.

**Capital gains legislation.** SB 5096, the Senate’s capital gains legislation, advanced from the Rules Committee this week and can now be voted on by the Senate. In her striking amendment to the bill, Senator June Robinson added an intent section to the bill, laying out how this new revenue would be allocated. The first $350 million would be deposited in the existing Education Legacy Trust Account to fund education, including early learning and childcare. The next $100 million would go to the state’s general fund, with the remaining revenue deposited into the Taxpayer Fairness Account created in the bill.

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**COVID-19**. The COVID-19 vaccine was in the news this week, with several important announcements from President Biden and Governor Inslee. At the top of the list was the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) approval of the Johnson & Johnson single-dose COVID-19 vaccine. **President Biden announced on Tuesday that states must prioritize vaccinations of educators and childcare workers. Governor Inslee announced soon after that these two groups have been added to Washington’s Phase 1B-1 and are immediately eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination.**

Governor Inslee also announced this week that beginning around March 22, the state will add groups to Phase 1B’s second tier. Those groups include law enforcement, firefighters and corrections staffers, as well as workers in public transit, grocery stores, food processing and agricultural sectors. People over 16 years old who have a disability that puts them in a high-risk category, and people who are pregnant are also included in that phase.

By April 12, the state intends to make eligible people who are 50 years old and older if they have two or more underlying health conditions. Two weeks after that, around April 26, the state intends to make eligible people who are 16 and older who have two or more underlying health conditions.

**Economic news.** The state received some positive economic news this week from the state’s chief economist. Revenue collections are $593 million, or 9%, above the projections from last November. Housing construction continues to exceed November estimates and overall employment rates are expected to grow. All eyes will be on the March 17th economic forecast, which will provide key information to House and Senate budget writers as they complete work on their budget proposals.

# Priority Bill Updates

* **HB 1196**, the bill that creates reimbursement parity for **audio-only consultations**, passed the House and is scheduled for a hearing in the Senate Health & Long Term Care Committee on Friday.  **Last week, WSLHA signed onto a letter to legislators, with other health care provider associations, in support of this bill.**
* **SB 5169,** the bill providing **reimbursement** to health care providers for the cost of **PPE** when treating patients in person, has passed the Senate unanimously. It has been referred to the House Health Care & Wellness Committee.
* **SB 5229,** the legislation that creates a **health equity continuing education** requirement for health care providers, has passed the Senate. It has been referred to the House Health Care & Wellness Committee.
* **SB 5284** is scheduled for a hearing in the House Labor & Workplace Standards Committee on Friday. This bill **eliminates subminimum wage** certificates for people with disabilities after July 31, 2023.

# Next Week’s Events

Committees return to hearing bills beginning on Wednesday. They will have about two weeks to work on bills from the opposite chamber before the next cutoff deadline on March 26th. Bills must be voted out of their policy committees by then to remain alive. The cutoff deadlines keep coming quickly after that. Bills with an impact on the state budget must pass their fiscal committees by April 2nd and must pass the opposite chamber by April 11th. The Legislature is scheduled to adjourn on April 25th.