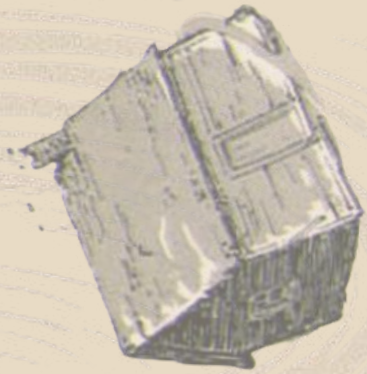




CFI PRESENTS:
THE WONDERFUL
2025
LEGISLATIVE
WRAP UP

WE'RE NOT IN COLORADO ANYMORE, TOTO...



A fiscal tornado swirled on the horizon of 2025, made up of a broken budget system and looming federal threats. The howling winds whisked our fair state away to a topsy-turvy legislative session where our legislators found themselves in a land cursed by a constitutional hex: the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, or TABOR.

In this suffocating world, lawmakers are powerless. They want to fund the schools, clinics, and services Munchkin families need—but TABOR hoards the green pennies, locking them behind red tape and rigid rules. Even small fixes require a statewide vote. So, with hands tied, legislators are left scrambling, trying to patch holes in the yellow brick road with whatever's left.

Our legislators want desperately to get home, to a Colorado where everyone thrives and order prevails. They must take a yellow brick road to the Emerald City, where a wizard can grant their wish. But the road is long, and the challenges are many.

FISCAL AND BUDGET POLICY: HAVEN'T GOT A BRAIN, ONLY STRAW

So the legislators set off down the path. Before long, they came upon the Scarecrow, who longed for a brain. In him, they saw a reflection of Colorado's budget and fiscal policy—well-meaning, but shackled by the stiff and stale constraints of TABOR. With the right changes, those budget and tax policies could be guided by real wisdom, making choices that truly serve the people. But this year, that wisdom was nowhere to be found.

Just as the Good Witch gifted Dorothy her ruby slippers, the legislators were handed a tool of their own: **HJR25-1023**. It lacked the red sparkle, but held real power. This resolution would have asked the state courts to weigh in on whether parts of TABOR conflict with the state constitution. More importantly, it could've opened the door to a deeper question: whether TABOR strips lawmakers of their core responsibility over public finance, undermining the function of a true republican form of government. But unlike Dorothy, the lawmakers never got the chance to use their slippers. After a spirited debate in committee, HJR25-1023 was left to wither on the House calendar, its promise unfulfilled.

Colorado started off the year with a \$1.2 billion budget deficit. Much like the Scarecrow, the fiscal policies aimed at solving this crisis under TABOR's grip had good intentions, but got lost in confusion, trapped by arbitrary caps and outdated rules. Then, from the Good Witch came a new hope: **HB25-1296**. This bill was meant to bring flexibility to our budget, cleaning up tax expenditures the state auditor found to be ineffective, rarely used, or out of step with today's economy. But like the Scarecrow's slapdash ideas, the bill's most meaningful reforms were stripped away. In the end, the changes, though promising, were scattered to the wind.

Other attempts to add brains to our budget included two bills that would have reclassified certain revenue streams out of the TABOR cap calculator, freeing up some room under our revenue limit. **SB25-173** was the Scarecrow's most promising attempt yet, seeking to reclassify certain property sales and damage awards to count as TABOR-exempt revenue. The bill passed and is now making its way to the Governor's desk—an achievement worth celebrating, though still a small step forward. On the other hand, a bill to reclassify a portion of the Highway Users Tax Fund sent directly to local governments—arguing that it should be TABOR-exempt by virtue of being “collections for another government”—never made it to introduction.

CFI also found itself on the front lines, playing defense against several ill-advised fiscal bills, including **SB25-280**. This bill promised massive tax incentives to data center companies in exchange for setting up shop in Colorado. But with little accountability, and no guarantees that these investments would benefit the rural areas desperately in need of property tax revenue, the bill was defeated thanks in part to CFI's help.

In the end, this year's fiscal and budget policies fell under the spell of TABOR, twisting rational ideas like a tornado into something unrecognizable. Smart policies were reduced to straw stuffing, lost in a haze of legal uncertainties, fear of lawsuits, and political resistance.



IMMIGRATION, HOUSING, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM: HAVE A HEART

Next, the legislators came upon a Tin Man, who longed for a heart. In him, they saw the embodiment of compassionate policies—immigration reform, criminal justice changes, and housing initiatives designed to help those in need, especially in the face of cruel attacks and the heartless nature of federal policies.

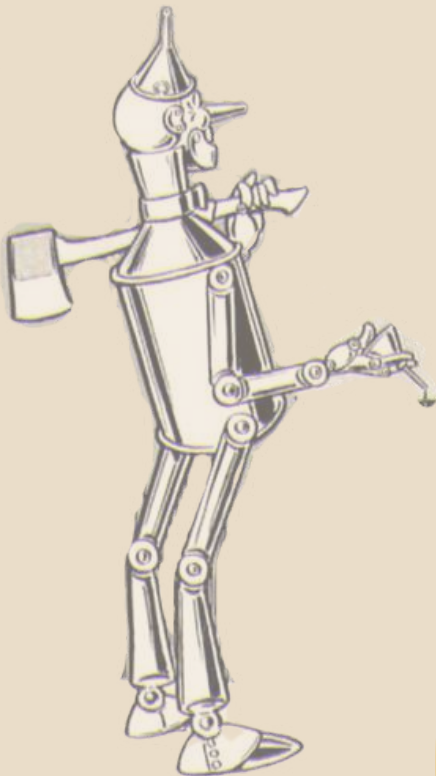
The legislators took a huge leap toward protecting safety, data privacy, and equal treatment for all their people through the passage of **SB25-276**. Much like the Tin Man who longed for a heart, this bill offered compassion and care for those often overlooked. Expanding upon the protections secured in **SB21-131**, it ensured that state and local governments could no longer share personal identifying information without consent. It also shielded private spaces in public schools, childcare centers, and healthcare facilities from federal immigration enforcement, and guaranteed fair treatment under the law for anyone detained by local law enforcement. SB25-276 is one more step toward making Colorado a more compassionate place—where all people, regardless of immigration status, can live, work, and contribute without fear, just like Dorothy and her friends finding their way home.

This session, the legislature also passed **HB25-1013**, which will expand the rights of Coloradans to visit their loved ones who are imprisoned. This bill recognizes that those who go to prison are parents, former and future members of our communities, public servants, and essential workers.

Prison visitation is vital for maintaining relationships that serve as crucial lifelines to people in prison and promotes successful returns to community post-release, as well as increasing public safety through reducing recidivism return rates. HB25-1013 is on its way to the Governor's desk, ready to be signed into law.

As the path wound on, the legislators continued their work to give the Tin Man a heart—this time in the realm of housing. They passed **HB25-1004**, a bill that protects Colorado renters from algorithm-driven price collusion. For too long, rent-setting technologies like RealPage and YieldStar have quietly coordinated prices behind the scenes, allowing large property management companies to artificially inflate rental costs across Colorado. While a federal lawsuit against RealPage is moving forward through the Justice Department, Colorado didn't wait. With HB25-1004, the state took a bold step to ensure fairness in the housing market, shielding renters from this modern form of price fixing powered by algorithms and AI.

This year, legislators took bold steps in centering kindness, compassion, and humane policies in the realms of immigration, housing, and criminal justice reform.





WORKER JUSTICE: SUMMONING THE COURAGE

Finally, the group then encountered a Cowardly Lion who longed for courage. He represents labor policies that require boldness and bravery to fight back against corporate greed and economic inequality.

As the Cowardly Lion once learned, courage isn't the absence of fear—it's the will to act in spite of it. In the realm of worker justice, Colorado faced a test of bravery this session. Unfortunately, in the case of the Worker Protection Act, that courage faltered. **SB25-005** was a bold piece of legislation that promised to modernize outdated labor laws and boost wages was stalled by the business community and the Governor, despite the clear economic benefits and the power of unionization to close persistent racial and gender wage gaps. Facing a Governor veto, Colorado is upholding a broken, two-election process that gives employers more chances to intimidate and silence workers.

But not all courage was lost on the yellow brick road. After a disappointing veto last year, Colorado finally took a firm step to end wage theft across all industries. **HB25-1001** empowers the state to hold bad actors accountable, protect whistleblowers, and close loopholes that allow some employers to exploit their workers with impunity.



However, it is notable that fiscal constraints did create a roadblock. In order to get Senate Appropriations members to approve the bill's fiscal note, an amendment was added to include a legislative report on the use of Colorado Department of Labor and Employment resources to restrict the resources dedicated to this.

Care workers, too, found renewed strength in the legislature's footsteps.

HB25-1328 implemented the first policy recommendations from the Direct Care Workforce Stabilization Board, born of previous years' sectoral bargaining win and the 2023 tax credit for care workers. This bill sets a \$17-an-hour wage floor with a path to \$25 by 2028, offering not just fairer pay but overdue recognition for a workforce largely made up of women, immigrants, and people of color. It was a reminder that the lion heart of our caring economy beats strongest when those who support others are supported themselves.

The Cowardly Lion reminded the legislators that true courage isn't a gift from the Good Witch—it's earned through bold action. This session, Colorado's labor movement showed signs of that growing bravery, taking important steps forward in the fight for worker justice. But in the face of corporate greed and persistent threats to working families, their roar must grow louder still. The path to justice demands not just courage, but the determination to keep pushing for stronger protections and more equitable workplaces.

THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

In this surreal land of Oz—Colorado under TABOR—the legislature finds itself trapped in a world of make-believe crises, irrational fiscal rules, and half-measures that offer no lasting solutions. But like the so-called great and powerful Oz, TABOR is not what it seems. Behind the curtain of promises and projections lies no real magic, only scare tactics to delay real change and scare Dorothy and her team from dismantling the status quo.

Still, our legislators press on, doing what they can within this illogical and inequitable system, advancing reforms in fiscal, budget, housing, immigration, criminal justice, and labor policy. And sometimes, against all odds, they win. But until they take on TABOR, every step forward will be met with resistance, every solution constrained, every vision of justice delayed.

Then comes the Good Witch, CFI, telling the legislature all along they've had what they need to get back: the ruby slippers, in the form of **HJR25-1023**.



This resolution held the power to begin rewriting the rules of Oz—to question TABOR’s constitutionality, to remove its grip on the legislature’s core powers, and to chart a path toward a Colorado that is fair, fully funded, and built for all.

Dorothy stared down at the ruby slippers on her feet. But just as she is about to tap them together, she hesitated. The fear of change, of challenging the status quo, proved too strong. The resolution never made it to the floor, and the HJR died on the calendar. And so Dorothy is stuck in the TABOR land of Oz for another year, another legislative session—while, on the horizon, a tornado begins to swirl.

Federal threats to our budget loom large, and could send us into an even more upside-down place that is even harder to escape. The good news? Legislators still have the wisdom, heart, and courage to take on true fiscal reform inside them all, they just have to believe in their own power—and act.

