

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 2011 LEGISLATURE

Gavel-to-gavel coverage of House and Senate floor sessions will be broadcast online and on cable television stations statewide beginning Jan. 3, the first day of the 62nd session. Floor sessions generally begin at 1 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and 8 a.m. most Saturdays. The broadcasts are also archived for later viewing.

Audio broadcasts of floor sessions and committee meetings also will be available online. To access the video and audio broadcasts, visit:

www.leg.mt.gov/broadcast. You'll need RealPlayer software to view or listen to them.

In addition to Internet broadcasts, the Legislature will broadcast its proceedings over cable television through TVMT, a state government public-access network launched by the legislative branch in 2001. To find out if TVMT programming is available in your area:

- Visit www.leg.mt.gov/tvmt;
- Contact your cable or other video service provider; or
- Call the Legislative Information Office at 444-2957.

This session, the Legislative Services Division will debut a new feature on the legislative Web site. Users will be able to search for audio and video related to specific bills using one search function at:

www.leg.mt.gov/broadcast-archives. Click on "Bill Specific Audio/Video Form."

Results will include committee hearings and minutes.

Montana legislators are eager to hear from constituents about their positions on pending legislation. There are several ways you can contact lawmakers during session to express your views. Beginning Jan. 3, you can leave messages for me using an online form available at:

www.leg.mt.gov/message. You can always use their regular e-mail, if available. You can also call the Session Information Desk at 406-444-4800. Messages will be delivered to any lawmaker. When leaving a message, be prepared to provide:

- your name and address
- the name of the legislator(s) or committee for whom your message is intended
- the number of the bill you wish to support or oppose
- a brief explanation for your position on the bill

You may leave messages for as many as five legislators or one legislative committee at a time. The service is available Mondays through Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to adjournment, while the Legislature is in session. The Session Information Center does not accept anonymous messages or blanket messages to all legislators.

The legislative process relies on the participation of informed citizens. The Legislative Automated Workflow System, or LAWS, is a free online service that provides legislative information before, during, and after sessions. With it, you can find:

- Complete text of legislative bills
- Up-to-date status of bills
- Committee hearing schedules
- Agendas for committee hearings and floor sessions
- House and Senate votes on bills

The LAWS website for the 2011 session is at:

www.leg.mt.gov/laws.htm.

One of the most important opportunities to become involved in the debate over a bill is when it's the subject of a hearing before a legislative committee. You can communicate personally with legislators at any time about any bill, but the committee hearing is the occasion when anyone may publicly approve, oppose, or suggest changes to a bill. You can testify on any bill that concerns you. All committee hearings are scheduled at least three days in advance. Each committee of the House and Senate is assigned to a specific meeting room in the Capitol. Occasionally, if a hearing is expected to attract a large crowd, it may be moved to a larger room. Such changes are noted on hearing schedules, and notices are placed outside the regular meeting rooms. The time and place of every committee hearing is posted several days in advance on the legislative Web site. You can also check with the Session Information Desk in the first floor hall of the Capitol, (406) 444-4800 (during session only). For more information about getting involved in the legislative process, contact the Legislative Information Office at 406-444-2957 or:

leginfo@mt.gov. Or visit the legislative Web site at: www.leg.mt.gov. Of course, we at the Motor Carriers of Montana are always happy to help, too.

In addition to this the Motor Carriers of Montana Board of Directors invites you to join them every Monday morning at 11 AM for a legislative conference call. At this time we discuss the issues that may come up during the week to make sure we did not miss anything. Please feel free to call in and give us your thoughts on these or other issues involving MCM.

Conference Call Information:

11 AM Monday Mornings During Legislative Session

Dial-In number: 888-272-7337

Conference ID: 5197705

PASS CODE; 120550