

Ways to keep track of the Utah Legislature

If you have an interest in following — and having an impact on— Utah’s legislative process, there are a number of ways you can get involved.

Utah’s government website is top-notch for ease of use and ability to find information.

You can find live audio streaming of all committee hearings and live audiovisual streaming of all floor debates. If you want to listen later, committee and floor hearings are saved and accessible, going back years. You can find your legislators and their contact information, who is on what committee and much, much more. The Utah Legislature ranks among the best in the nation for state legislative transparency and ease of following the goings-on on Capitol Hill.

Here are some ways you can follow along with the legislative session, which also gives you info for some awesome small talk at dinner parties.

Go to the award-winning legislative site le.utah.gov. You can search for bills by topic, number or legislator.

Track bills electronically. Each time there is a change to the wording and each time it is scheduled to be discussed in committee or on the floor, the bill file will be updated. If you want email notifications of bill changes, enter your email on the bill page, on the righthand side under le.utah.gov/asp/billtrack/track.asp.

Listen to committee meetings live or later. All of them are le.utah.gov/asp/billtrack/track.asp.

discuss bills): le.utah.gov/calendar/list.html.

Twitter is especially valuable during the session. Several legislators tweet actively, as well as @UtahReps and @UtahSenate. Use the hashtag #utpol to follow along.

Finally, if you are trying to read a bill, it might be a bit confusing. I know it was forme.

When I read my first bill, I wondered what in the strange heck was going on with all the numbers down the left side of the page. I’ve since learned that the line numbers make it very easy to go straight to a specific section of text. Instead of saying, “Go to page 4, paragraph 5, about a third of the way through,” you simply direct people to “Line 812.” Once you know what you are looking at, it makes a lot more sense.

When reading a bill, start by looking at the “short title” (the one in all caps at the top of the page), then take a look at the “long title,” just under the sponsor information. There you will find a general description, monies appropriated, the section or sections of code the new bill language will affect and, sometimes, a description of legislative intent. Intent can be helpful to the passage of a bill and to maintaining its integrity later on, but unless it’s actually encoded into the law, it’s not legally binding.

You sometimes will see very long bills that actually change very little. The bill might affect large sections of existing code, requiring those sections to be renumbered and nothing more. You may wonder why there is a 400page bill for a

show language to be deleted.

As bills move through the process of becoming law, there are often changes made to them. Some are substantive, while others are small. Some are hostile takeovers and some are considered friendly. Some changes are made in committee and others on the floor. I’ve seen bills hijacked and gutted so thoroughly by a series of amendments that the bill’s own sponsor will kill it. Some good bills die for lack of time and sometimes a lack of understanding.

The process of publicly vetting bills is designed to maximize the chances of passing a “good bill” and decrease the chances of letting bad bills become law. I hope you’ll weigh in this year on bills you care about. **Holly Richardson**, a regular contributor to *The Salt Lake Tribune*, is a former member of the *Utah House of Representatives*.



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Watch every floor time, House or Senate, live or later.

Follow the reading calendars here (the schedule for the House and Senate to

“small” issue— that’s why. Utah’s bill are also typically one-topic bills, and they are short enough that they can be read thoroughly. Find the proposed new code by looking for underlined words. Strike-throughs

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