

Abortion Restrictions, Stronger Beer and Smoking Bills Pass

Utah legislators will wrap up their 45-day annual session Thursday after passing two measures restricting abortion, reaching a deal to raise alcohol levels in beer and moving to restrict underage marriage.

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Link: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/utah/articles/2019-03-14/utah-lawmakers-weighing-contentious-bills-as-session-ends>

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SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah legislators wrapped up their 45-day annual session Thursday after passing abortion restrictions, reaching a deal to raise alcohol levels in beer and moving to restrict underage marriage.

Here's a look at some of the record 573 bills passed this year:

BEER ALCOHOL LEVELS

A compromise will raise the amount of alcohol available in beer sold at grocery and convenience stores to 4 percent starting in November, up from 3.2 percent. Supporters said a failure to raise the limit would lead to a lack of beers on the shelves because big brewers aren't producing as many low-alcohol beers as the market shrinks. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which counts most lawmakers as members, had opposed an earlier proposal to raise the alcohol percentage to 4.8 percent.

ABORTION

Lawmakers have passed a measure sponsored by Republican Rep. Cheryl Acton that would ban abortion after a fetus reaches 18 weeks gestational age, which could be among the strictest in the country. Exceptions include if the pregnancy was a result of rape or is a serious detriment to the mother's health. The American Civil Liberties Union of Utah has already said it will sue if the measure is signed into law.

Another measure to ban abortions sought only because a fetus has been diagnosed with Down syndrome has also been sent to Gov. Gary Herbert's desk. It would only go into effect if a similar law is upheld elsewhere. Utah law currently prohibits abortion past the 22nd week.

GUN LAWS

Lawmakers strengthened the "stand-your-ground" law by stating there's no duty to retreat, but did not pass a measure that would have declared the state didn't need any new gun laws. They also passed a voluntary suicide-prevention measure focused on education and gun-lock distribution that was supported by the gun lobby.

A proposed "red-flag law" allowing police to temporarily confiscate guns of those deemed to be a threat died without a hearing. A measure allowing family members to voluntarily give up firearms passed.

A proposal inspired by the death of University of Utah student Lauren McCluskey to hold gun owners civilly liable if they loan firearms used in a crime died in committee.

SMOKING AGE

Lawmakers have passed a plan to raise the tobacco-buying age from 19 to 21, with exceptions for military members. The measure sponsored by Republican Rep. Steve Eliason would phase in the change, putting it fully into place by January 2021. It comes as some cities raise the ages themselves.

SLAVERY

Voters will be asked next year whether to remove a provision in the state constitution that allows slavery as punishment for crime. Lawmakers signed off on the measure championed by the sole black member of the Legislature, Democratic Rep. Sandra Hollins.

AID FOR PEOPLE LEAVING POLYGAMOUS GROUPS

Lawmakers passed a proposal to allow people escaping polygamy to receive money from a crime-victims fund. Anyone leaving a polygamous community is qualified to apply, but to receive the compensation they must make a report to law enforcement and cooperate with an investigation. Analysts are estimating the fund would pay out about \$3,500 a year per victim starting in 2020.

UNDERAGE MARRIAGE

Legislation is sitting on Herbert's desk that bans marriage completely for those 15 and younger, and requires judicial and parental approval for 16 and 17-year-olds. It also outlaws marriages with age gaps larger than seven years. The proposal initially aimed to ban all underage marriage but was later amended by Democratic sponsor Rep. Angela Romero. Current state law says 15-year-olds can marry with judicial approval and 16 and 17-year-olds only need consent from a parent.

U.S. CONSTITUTION

A call for a new Constitutional convention passed, adding Utah to several states that have approved similar measures. Republican sponsor Sen. Evan Vickers believes a convention to revisit the Constitution is necessary to combat what he sees as federal overreach resulting in national debt and manipulation of federal mandates. It requires two-thirds of all states to approve similar resolutions.

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