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Transportation among Progressive 15's main interests, Chamber told

With 128 proposed initiatives filed by the secretary of state, Coloradans will have many decisions to make at the polls this fall.

During Wednesday's Brush Area Chamber of Commerce monthly luncheon at Bunker Hill Country Club, Progressive 15 Executive Director Cathy Shull said she expects about 18 to 20 of the proposed initiatives to appear on Colorado ballots.

"That's a lot of decision making, and they're all very ambiguous," she said. "...Please study them very carefully. Don't just look at the title."

Progressive 15 is a public advocacy group that lobbies for issues that affect 15 northeastern Colorado counties, including Morgan County, Shull said.

Transportation is one of the group's main concerns, she said, as about 25 percent of northeast Colorado's 5,200 highway miles are in poor condition. Of the 1,123 state-owned bridges in the area, Shull said, 11 have a sufficiency rating below 50.

"Since the legislature did nothing to fund transportation and take care of the shortfall, our job now is evidently to put a plan in their hands that they can carry forward," she said.

The proposed northeast Colorado railroad relocation is also of great interest to Progressive 15, Shull said.

The group hopes that a new rail line in eastern Colorado will allow freight rail traffic along the I-25 corridor to take the eastern route, she said. The line would free up the western rails for high-speed traffic to travel between Casper, Wyo. and Albuquerque, N.M.

Shull said not to expect the new rail line any time soon, and it may never happen because of rising labor and materials prices.

Additionally, Shull said, oil and gas regulations that may take away private property rights are one of the group's major concerns.

She said the regulations, geared toward problems on Western Slope federal lands, are meant to protect the environment and animals. Northeast Colorado has more animals now than it did in the past, she said.

"We have a real concern that the new oil and gas regulations have become answers to a problem that didn't exist," she said.

Shull said Progressive 15 has teamed up with John Stulp, commissioner for the Colorado Department of Agriculture, to look at different options for agriculture.

She said ethanol will probably not be a viable source of energy in the future, and wind and solar energy look more promising.

Shull said Progressive 15 supports three ballot issues: Referendum O, Amendment 46 and Amendment 47.

Referendum O, she said, would make it more difficult to change the state constitution. To make a change if the issue passed, she said, the number of signatures needed would increase from 5 to 6 percent of those who voted for the governor in the last election, among other new requirements.

Amendment 46 would prohibit discrimination and preferential treatment by the Colorado government, Shull said.

This would mean that the government may not discriminate against anyone, she said, and it may not give preference to specific gender or ethnic groups to achieve balance in certain situations.

Amendment 47 would prohibit certain conditions of employment, Shull said. The amendment would prevent employers from forcing workers to join unions, among other prohibitions, she said.

During the presentation, Brush Chamber Executive Director Ron Prascher said the chamber has worked with Progressive 15 for more than three years.

"It is really a good organization," he said.