

2019 Wyoming League of Women Voters Legislative Report #5

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The Wyoming House and Senate spent the better part of three days last week to get an explanation of the \$235 million supplemental appropriations bill prepared by the Joint Appropriations Committee and then to amend their separate versions. A House-Senate conference committee will work this week and next to create a compromise version of the budget and try to win their chambers' approval. Reminder that meetings in the appropriations committee room are streamed online and archived, so you can listen to the deliberations. If you want to look at all the amendments and their outcome, select the "amendments" tab for SF1 and HB1.

I testified against SJ4's call for a so-called "Article V" convention of the states, which supporters believe is the way to solve all their issues with federal overreach. LWV – nationally and in many states – have warned about the dangers of throwing open the U.S. Constitution to whatever such a convention might do. (See www.lwv.org/sites/default/files/Constitutional-Convention.grouppetter. 4-14-17.) Sen. Cale Case termed our fears "wacky," and then the Senate Corporations Committee approved the measure and sent it to the Senate floor. ***Committee members mentioned not getting opposing emails from Wyoming people, so please let people in the Senate know this is not a solution but a potential disaster for our Constitution.***

Meanwhile, it seems the Legislature is sympathetic to the state GOP leadership's concern that Wyoming voters were "meddling" in their Primary when they changed parties to vote for a person. One measure to limit ability to change party affiliation for the Primary is moving through the system. I suggested that if they wanted to close their nomination process, the Republican Party could undertake a privately-funded and operated caucus. I didn't hear an enthusiastic endorsement for that idea. Primary Elections are publicly funded. The LWV testimony was opposed to attempts to restrict access to the ballot box by qualified electors. There are versions of this in the House and Senate. There also is a voter ID bill in the House, but that looks doomed to die on General File.

Monday is the deadline for bills to clear General File in their house of origin on Monday, and then second reading Tuesday and third reading Wednesday. There are five-dozen bills waiting for initial debate in the House and 28 in the Senate. The bills may move up or down on the lists, to assure their survival or death, so this is a key time to let your legislators and Majority Floor Leaders Dockstader (Senate) and Barlow (House) know what's important to you.

The tobacco bill that would have had an impact on youth initiation, HB218, died in House Revenue when advocates for tobacco-sellers won the sympathy of five members. It would have raised the tax on a page of cigarettes by \$1 to \$1.60. The House Appropriations Committee wrote its own bill at the last minute, but the raise of 75 cents is too little to make a difference. LWV and others in the tobacco tax group are opposing this measure.

A victory to celebrate: HB 145 to repeal the death penalty passed the House 36-21-3 and advanced to the Senate. LWV joined with the Catholic Diocese of Cheyenne and the Wyoming ACLU to lobby to take the death penalty off the books, which costs Wyoming millions of dollars and is ineffective in any hope

to deter crime. The testimony has been very moving, including committee testimony from Department of Corrections Director Bob Lampert and Wyoming Public Defender Diane Lozano.

A Medicaid Expansion bill has made it out of committee for the first time: HB244. It must be heard on Monday in Committee of the Whole, or it is dead, once again. The sponsor is Jackson Rep. Andy Schwartz.

Meanwhile, House Labor is moving along Rep. Cathy Connolly's bill to raise the minimum wage (HB273) to \$8.50. The current minimum wage in Wyoming is \$5.15 an hour. The federal rate is \$7.25 (set 10 years ago). A committee amendment would delete the automatic increases. Tipped employees are not included.

Go to the Legislative Service Office Website www.wyoleg.gov to read all the bills and their status, about the legislators and leadership and the calendars for committees and floor action. All floor debate is streamed and archived. Appropriations meetings are streamed and recorded, as well. Audio links are on wyoleg.gov. The Legislature will return to the State Capitol for the 2020 session.

The Management Council has scheduled 35 days for the 2019 session. Monday is day number 4. The first big deadline is Feb. 1 for bills to be out of the house of origin. The next day it must clear General File (initial debate). Majority floor leaders set the debate schedules. Adjournment is Feb. 27.

Find info on how to contact legislators by clicking on the "Citizen Engagement" tab at the top of the home page of wyoleg.gov. Then click on "Contacting a Legislator." Lots of information on that tab about attending a session. Of course, a personal visit is the most effective, if you can make it.

Please contact me if you have questions about bills, meetings or issues navigating wyoleg.gov.