

2019 Wyoming League of Women Voters Legislative Report #7

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Wyoming House and Senate members continued to work last week on a compromise supplemental budget bill in the background of the 2019 Wyoming Legislature's session work – most of it routine but some with controversy. They ended the week with a draft conference committee report, ready for presentation and a vote by the House and Senate. With their approval, it goes to the governor this week. (A competing four-bill substitute bill package was left to die in the Senate.)

Debates this week include HB106 – Party Affiliation Changes in the Senate Agriculture Committee on Tuesday and SF144 – Medicaid and SNAP eligibility requirements, which passed House Labor 5-4 and was re-referred to House Appropriations before being heard on the House floor. Critics, including ACS CAN, fear the barriers created by the bill would take Medicaid coverage away from the people who need it the most for primary and preventive care. The bill directs the state to seek a waiver from the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) so we can require work, school or volunteer work of Medicaid recipients (who earn 56 percent of poverty). Recipients can seek exemption from the requirement, but the process is complicated and challenging, especially for people who are sick.

House Rules also continues work on SF161 – Management Council membership-2, which removes the requirement that one of the extra non-leadership seats be filled by the minority party. I testified against the measure, arguing in favor of the benefits of diversity – regardless of how the proportion of partisan membership on the Management Council matched the proportions of the full Legislature.

Among last week's legislative news: death of the death penalty repeal bill, a veto by Gov. Mark Gordon, his first bill signing (Women's Suffrage Day), progress of a bill to create a new requirement for Medicaid recipients, and the death, resurrection of a capital construction bill and resurrection and transformation of a tobacco tax bill that now contains no taxes.

The Senate voted 12-18 on Feb. 13 to kill HB145 that would have repealed the death penalty. That news was almost eclipsed by floor debate that bordered on the absurd. LWVWY was a prime supporter. Committee of the Whole debate in the second house was further than the proposed repeal had advanced previously. A spokesman for county prosecutors said they were opposed, but it was unclear why. Supporters will organize in the interim for further work, including a sign-on by supporting individuals and organizations.

The governor's office organized a gala bill signing event for SJ3 Wyoming Women's Suffrage Day (sponsored by Sen. Affie Ellis, R-Cheyenne) to declare Dec. 10, 2019, as Wyoming Women's Suffrage Day. During the same week, Gov. Gordon vetoed HV38 to increase the per diem rates for legislators, objecting to the lower rate provided for lawmakers who live within 25 miles of the capital city of Cheyenne. His veto message urged further work on the issue before the 2020 session.

Senators voted down SF162 State funded capital construction 0-30, then rescinded that vote 22-7-1 and then gave it final approval 21-8-1. The bill is in the House awaiting action.

Competing bills to limit voters' ability to change political party affiliation during Primary Elections are awaiting action in committees this week – HB106 in Senate Agriculture and SF160 in House Corporations. Senate Ag will hear the House bill on adjournment Tuesday afternoon. The House bill has been amended to narrow the block-out period for changes. LWV opposes both as a restriction on a voters' right and obligation to exercise their franchise, and we are urging members to contact Senate Ag members and other senators to vote "no" on HB106.

The next big deadline of the 2019 session is Feb. 20 for bills to be reported out of committee in the second House, followed by the deadline for General File on Feb. 21. The Senate has a long list of House-passed bills on General File, several of which probably will die. Adjournment is scheduled for Feb. 27.

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.

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. Remember to read the "engrossed" version of bills as they move from one house to the other.

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