

League of Women Voters of Wyoming  
2020 Wyoming Legislature Reports  
#4 – Week 4, March 2, 2020  
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Next major deadline is Thursday for bills to be reported out of committee in second house. Subsequent deadlines – at least according to the original schedule by the Management Council – are:

Friday is last day for bills on General File

Monday (March 9) is the last day for bills on second reading.

Tuesday (March 10) is the last day for bills on 3<sup>rd</sup> reading.

Wednesday (March 11) is the last day for concurrence on amendments or conference committee reports.

Thursday (March 12) is scheduled to end the 2020 session.

The House has pushed back two proposed constitutional amendments HJ1 and HJ4, outside the regular schedule, and they are so far behind that they will hard pressed to meet those deadlines.

The House – in committee and on the floor – spent hours and hours on proposed gaming regulation in the form of HB171 – Wyoming gaming commission. Debate focused on what kind of gambling – mostly the machines found commonly in bars – we want to legalize and regulate. More emotional debate over a proposed 48-hour waiting period for women seeking an abortion (HB197) also took an emotional toll on House members before the final vote 39-17 (4 excused).

The other measure that has dominated debate is HB249 in the House and SF138 in the Senate, to authorize the State Loan and Investment Board to evaluate a one-time deal to buy 1 million acres of surface and 4 million acres of minerals, mostly in southern Wyoming. Supporters are looking for millions of dollars of revenue and for an opportunity to keep and develop the land according to our own values. The bill promises to compensate counties for loss of private property tax, and it proposes various ways to raise money to buy the land – bonds, permanent funds, rainy day accounts. The House version requires one public hearing by SLIB and requires legislative approval. The Senate version has a much more robust public comment requirement.

Meanwhile, House and Senate conferees have begun meeting in unpredictable snatches to write a compromise version of Wyoming's biennial budget to present to their chambers. They have to be done by Friday to leave time to override any gubernatorial vetoes.

The Wyoming Legislature continues to ponder what public education should look like and how the state can fund it. The Management Council already has the consultants of Picus and Odden at work costing out the current system. Meanwhile, HB40 contemplates creation of a legislative task force to both review the “basket of goods and services” that are guaranteed to Wyoming school AND figure out how that basket can be delivered AND cost it out – all before the next legislative session. The Legislature can extend that to 2022.

The Wyoming Department of Education and several other groups are calling for a “modern” basket, which probably means less. There also is talk about consolidation of some of the 48 districts to create efficiencies. The Wyoming teacher of the year, Dane Weaver of Ten Sleep, addressed the House and reminded lawmakers of the vital importance of schools in small communities.

The bill to restrict voters’ ability to change party affiliation before a Primary Election (HB209) continues to advance, winning approval in the House on Friday and being sent to the Senate, with a fervor and anger toward groups fighting any “blackout” period (including LWVWY). The current version limits the blackout to two weeks and exempts unaffiliated voters, and that has softened some opposition. LWVWY continues to oppose the bill, which likely will be heard in Senate Corporations this week.

**Please contact members of Senate Corporations to argue against this bill as an impermissible limitation of access to a publicly funded election/ballot box to protect the perceived interests of one political party. Find contact information on the LSO Website, Joint and Standing Committees, #7 Corporations, Elections and Political Subdivisions.**

Another bill that we have worked to defeat in the past but that seems to be impervious this session is SF104 – Management Council membership, to reduce to one the seats reserved for minority party legislators when members of the minority party are less than 30 percent of the chamber where the chairman is not a member. This further reduces the diversity of voices on this important policy- and rule-making council. Sen. Chris Rothfuss, D-Laramie, tried to suggest a ranked order selection process, without success.

You may have heard about Speaker Harshman’s apology to the House late Thursday for an offense joke told earlier in the day by a former legislator who had been invited to address the House (and everyone observing from the gallery). Such things would not be tolerated, the speaker said. And then representatives gave a standing ovation. It was necessary and well done. You can listen to the audio on the LSO Website. (You also can listen to the original comment during the morning session.)

As you follow the 2020 session, find daily action bill-by-bill or house-by-house on the LSO Website [wyoleg.org](http://wyoleg.org). You can find daily floor calendars and committee meetings on the Website, as well as contact information for legislators and action from past sessions. The LSO updates the status of bills on the daily debate schedule.

(end #4 report)