

League of Women Voters of Wyoming
2020 Wyoming Legislature Reports
#5 – Week 5, March 9, 2020
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Talk of deadlines is outdated at this point, with the suspension of several of them over the past couple of weeks. We go into the final week with a General File in the House and Senate and some hope still alive for some (any?) of those measures. (The original deadline for Committee of the Whole was last Friday.)

The 60-day constitutional limit on legislative days for a two-year Legislature cannot be changed by a simple rules change. However, it seems the Legislature needs an extra day this week, to allow time for the governor to consider a legislative budget bill, issue his vetoes and have the Legislature consider override attempts. That extra time may come in the form of taking a day off at some point and then reassembling on Friday to consider all vetoes to the budget bill and other measures.

The ad hoc nature of that accommodation has marked the session in general. One example: in the past, it was extremely unusual for a House or Senate to call a bill out of committee and override the sacrosanct “committee system.” Yet it happened twice in one week in the House. And here we are, a day after cutoff for General File, with bills listed for General File in the Senate. Deadlines have been unusually flexible in 2020, as useful for leadership to get things done that were considered important but out of time, without curtailing motions and debate.

One need for the extra day was the inability of conferees to come to a compromise on the states \$3.6 billion two-year budget bill until late Friday. The issues were about money, of course, but also about some stubborn postures taken by the House and Senate on education and capital construction at the University of Wyoming and community colleges. The compromise go to both chambers for acceptance on Monday morning and could be to the governor by mid-day, providing three days to exercise his line-item veto powers and then the override consideration.

The emotionally weighted HB171 – Wyoming gaming commission continues, up for 2nd reading in the Senate. Meanwhile, the other emotional bill, HB197 – Abortion-48-hour waiting period, has died in the desk of Senate Labor.

The land bonanza purchase proposal that will be worked is the Senate version, SF18, which is less detailed about which funds might be tapped for the purchase and more allowing the State Loan and Investment Board to use its expertise and diligence to evaluate the deal. The current proposal includes ample public input and a requirement for explicit legislative approval.

The House and Senate are heading to a faceoff on what the process looks like to recalibrate our public education funding formula and also to review the basket of goods and services that are guaranteed to all students in the state. Should the legislative select committee go around the state to get input from stake holders or rely on an “advisory committee” of appointed spokesmen for various stakeholder groups to gather information and sort it for the legislators? The House is dubious, while the Senate likes the idea, proposed by Superintendent of Public Schools Jillian Balow. In the world of semantics, some people are

calling for “modernizing” the basket, which some fear is code for putting more education online and trimming the guarantee to cut the formula.

The Senate Corporations Committee killed, by lack of action, a bill to restrict voters’ ability to change party affiliation before a Primary Election (HB209). Whether or not so-called “crossover voting” is large enough to affect Primary outcomes, the effect is voter suppression. In fact, the term “crossover” implies changing party affiliation is somehow an aberration or cheating. It is simply voting – no adjective needed.

Another bill that we have worked to defeat in the past but that seems anointed 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. It ended up in House Appropriations, so it’s unclear if it has voted on the bill and – if so – it will be heard in Committee of the Whole (of which there should be none left) in the House. We’ll see what leadership wants to do.

None of the proposed constitutional amendments survived, but the idea of HJ4 is one to think about – making the odd- and even-year legislative sessions more alike or trying to restore the practice to the original design of one session devoted to budget and the other open to all issues.

As you follow the 2020 session, find daily action bill-by-bill or house-by-house on the LSO Website 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 #5 report)