

Summary of bills of interest filed for the 2021 Wyoming Legislature as of Jan. Feb. 7, 2021

The status of bills is provided in blue italic text.

THE BUDGET

HB1 and SF1 – The bill that rewrites the biennial budget bill that passed just last year, reflecting a precipitous drop in state revenues. Contains net appropriations cuts of \$445.9 million from the General Fund. Read the bill and complete fiscal note, posted as PDFs, on the LSO Website. These mirror bills hit the House and Senate floor on Wednesday. They will be introduced and assigned back to their Appropriations committees when the Legislature reconvenes (in person?) March 1. Expect the typically extensive list of amendments in floor debate.

GOVERNMENT

HB32 Ethics and Disclosure Act amendments – Joint Judiciary

Would expand the scope of the Act to include local governmental agencies, the judicial branch and additional executive branch employees. Would prohibit supervision of a family member. It would add “private benefit” to the type of matter for abstaining from a vote. The biggest thing this bill does is to bring judicial employees into the Act. *Still waiting for committee assignment.*

HB36 Management Council Membership – Rep. Dan Laursen (R-Powell)

Would tie political diversity requirements to the percentage of a minority party in the Legislature (30 percent), and the at-large Senate members would be selected by a vote of all senators. The two at-large House members would still be selected by caucuses of the two major political parties. (Note that the current minority representation is 9 of 90.) *Still waiting for committee assignment.*

HB56 Public Health Orders – Rep. Dan Laursen, R-Powell

Public health officials may issue orders that limits gatherings or close public facilities, but only for 15 days, unless the Legislature or other governing body votes to extend the orders by another 15 days. Also, quarantines are permitted only for people who actually are infected, which excludes suspected infection because of contact tracing. *Still waiting for committee assignment.*

HB98 Public Health Orders-reforms – Rep Chuck Gray, R-Casper

Another proposed restriction on public health authority, requiring approval by the Legislature and governor to extend state or local health orders beyond 10 days. *Not introduced yet.*

HB113 Public health orders-limitations – Rep. Steve Harshman, R-Casper

Creates a new section of law to set requirements for a “public health order,” including a declared health emergency, limit of 30 days and ratification of local elected officials. Quarantines may be ordered for persons “reasonably believed to be or known to be infected with a contagious disease.” *Awaiting committee assignment.*

SF80 Public health orders-local and legislative oversight – Sen. Troy McKeown, R-Gillette

Would require a 48-hour notice on state public health orders, allowing a county to opt out. Would limit orders to 30 days. District, county or municipal orders would be limited to 15 days and require a public comment period. *In Senate Labor.*

HB59 Public Health Emergencies – Joint Travel

Would grant immunity from civil liability for anyone who – by a legal activity -- causes anyone else to be exposed to or to contract a disease defined as a “public health emergency.” A proposed committee amendment would exclude act of gross negligence or wanton misconduct from immunity. *Approved by House Travel 8-1, on General File*

HB110 Wyoming business council-promotion of low taxes – Rep. Chuck Gray, R-Casper Assigns the Business Council the additional duty of promoting the attractiveness of Wyoming as a place with low taxes. Does not provide direction to include information about concurrent limited services. *Awaiting committee assignment.*

HB114 Property tax assessment – Rep. Steve Harshman, R-Casper

Would make the office of county assessor appointed, instead of elected, with a requirement of being a certified real estate appraiser. ALSO would limit the annual increase in taxable value of the category “all other property” to a maximum 50 percent, absent property improvements. *In House Revenue.*

SF16 Net Metering – Joint Corporations

Would overhaul Wyoming’s laws for rooftop solar and backyard wind by repealing the current statues for net-metering, which involves payback for customer-generated energy. SF16 would eliminate the guarantee that customers could hook up their solar system to the grid and receive “credit” for the power they generate. It also tells the Public Service Commission to establish an “appropriate system” to regulate rates, terms and conditions of customer-generators by electric utilities. *Passed Senate, sent to House.*

SF17 Governmental Publications Requirements – Joint Corporations

Would let government agencies post notices on an official Website, in lieu of a newspaper. Debate centers on whether loss of print distribution (and possible failure of certain newspapers) is worth the money saved by local governments on legal notices. *Senate Corporations approved, on General File.*

SF19 Public health emergencies-immunity amendments – Joint Judiciary

Would extend civil liability immunity to persons or entities who were complying with health orders, during a declared public health emergency. This immunity is much more narrowly drawn than the “free pass” proposed in the House bill by Rep. Laursen. *Senate Judiciary approved 5-0, on General File.* Proposed amendments would further narrow and add lots of definiitons.

SF46 Air ambulance membership-regulation and disclosures – Sen. Cale Case

Would impose consumer information requirements for air ambulance membership plans, clarifying to people buying the plans exactly what they’re getting, that it is NOT insurance and there is no regulation of the companies offering the plans. *In Senate Corporations.*

SF65 Government waste, fraud and abuse – Sen. Tom James, R-Rock Springs

Would set up what the sponsors say would be a reporting system within the Department of Audit for governmental waste, fraud and abuse. Provides for penalties to government employees. Fiscal impact: indeterminate extra duty with administrative costs. *In Senate Appropriations.*

SF67 Repeal gun free zones and preemption amendments – Sen. Ogden Driskill

Would repeal gun free zones, provide for carrying concealed weapons and “clarify” that only the state Legislature may regulate firearms. *In Senate Judiciary.*

SF86 Attorney General elected – Sen. Anthony Bouchard, R-Laramie

Would create the elected office of attorney general, with a four-year term, starting next year. Would not change the boards and commissions populated by the “top five elected officials.” *In Senate Corporations.*

SF95 Election of state health officer – Sen. Anthony Bouchard, R-Laramie

Would provide for election and recall of the state health officer, who now is an employee of the Wyoming Department of Health, starting in 2022. *Awaiting introduction.*

SF81 Second Amendment Preservation Act – Sen. Anthony Bouchard, R-Laramie

Would invalidate federal restrictions on gun ownership, citing the 10th Amendment. This reprises a House bill from last year that was so unworkable that it died under its own weight. It was amended extensively, and supporters withdrew. *In Senate Judiciary.*

TAXATION AND REVENUE

HB11 Oil and Gas production tax exemption – Joint Minerals

Would cut in half (from 6 percent to 3 percent) the severance tax rate on crude oil and gas by Wyoming statute when the average price of West Texas Intermediate oil gets as low as \$45/barrel. The exemption applies to wells drilled after Jan 1, 2021, and to renewed production from wells that were shut in before July 1, 2020. The fiscal note predicts a \$13.5 million loss to the state in fiscal 2021. *In House Minerals.*

Details:

The exemption would apply to the following production categories:

- sweet crude oil production when the immediately preceding 30-day average of the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) spot price is \$45.00/barrel or higher,
- sour crude oil production when the immediately preceding 30-day average of the Western Canadian Select (WCS) spot price is \$38.00/barrel or higher, and
- natural gas production when the immediately preceding 30-day average of the Henry Hub spot price is \$3.00/mcf or higher.

HB26 Fuel Tax – Joint Revenue

Would increase the gasoline tax from 24 cents a gallon to 33 cents per gallon.

The Department of Revenue predicts this would raise about \$60.3 million a year: \$40.2 million for the Highway Fund, \$14.1 million for county road funds, \$5.9 million for cities and towns and \$1.1 million for state parks. *In House Transportation.*

HB55 Tobacco Tax – Joint Revenue

Would increase the tax on a pack of cigarettes from 60 cents to 84 cents. It would increase the tax on an ounce of moist snuff from 60 cents to 72 cents. Expected annual revenue in fiscal 2023 and following years would be \$6.1 million to the General Fund and \$920,000 to local governments. *House Revenue approved and on General File.*

Please note that the American Cancer Society – Cancer Action Network say a tax to decrease smoking rates would have to increase by at least \$1 a pack.

SF73 Tolling authority for I-80 – Sen. Cale Case, R-Lander

Would create a highway tolling program “to finance, construct, operate and maintain Interstate 80 and accommodate the needs of the traveling public through safe, efficient, convenient and modern vehicular traffic.” The bill would authorize the Wyoming Transportation Commission to create and supervise a tolling program in the Department of Transportation (include setting rates). Development of a master plan would cost an estimated \$1 million to \$1.25 million, according to the fiscal note. *In Senate Transportation.*

HB28 Wind tax exemption-repeal – Joint Corporations

Would repeal a 3-year exemption of a tax on energy production, generating an estimated \$800,000 a year. *Not assigned yet.*

SF30 Pandemic response review task force – Joint Corporations.

Would establish a task force of legislators, educators and reps from the Health Department and the business community to evaluate Wyoming’s ability to handle pandemics – focusing on health orders (who can issue, do they work, etc.). *In Senate Corporations.*

HB88 Data center tax exemption-Repeal – Rep. Clark Stith, R-Rock Springs

Would repeal sales and use tax exemptions for purchases by data processing servicecenters, with estimated revenue collections of \$8 million in FY22 and \$16 million in FY23, split roughly in half between the General Fund and local sources funds. *In House Revenue.*

HB94 Solar electricity generation-taxation – Rep. Albert Sommers, R-Pinedale

Would impose a \$1/megawatt hour tax on electricity generated from solar resources. Revenue would be distributed 60 percent (\$114,000 a year) to counties where the resources are sited and 40 percent \$76,000 a year) to the General Fund. *Awaiting committee assignment.*

HB99 Property tax increase limit-2 – Rep. Chuck Gray, R-Casper

Would impose an artificial limit on the change in property “market value” computed for tax purposes to a maximum 3 percent increase per year. Fiscal note says local government and the School Foundation Account would take a hit, but it’s impossible to predict. *In House Revenue.*

HB108 Wind energy production tax – Rep. Hallinan, R-Gillette

Would restore a \$1/megawatt hour tax to replace the one that is set to expire, with expected revenue of \$11.5 million annually for the General Fund and \$3.1 million for counties. *Awaiting committee assignment.*

HEALTH

SF52 Insurance-mental health and substance use parity – Joint Labor

Would ensure equal treatment by health insurance plans for mental health and substance abuse claims as for other health coverage. *Approved by Senate Labor, on General File..*

SF54 Statewide health information exchange-codification – Joint Labor

Would codify the health information exchange set up in session laws in 2016. The Department of Health would be authorized to administer and maintain the (voluntary) sharing of information about health care costs in Wyoming. Estimated annual cost is \$200,000. *Passed Senate & House. Signed as SE1.*

HB83 Health care cost control – Rep. Clark Stith, R-Rock Springs

Would prohibit health care providers from charging different amounts to insured and uninsured (doesn't mention under-insured) people in Wyoming. The bill implies providers are charging insured patients more, although sometimes big insurers can negotiate rates down.

In House Labor.

HB87 Provider recruitment rant program-repeal – Joint Appropriations

Would defund a program in the Office of Rural Health, in the Wyoming Department of Health, to recruit physicians and other health care professionals, saving \$122,000 a year. *Awaiting introduction.*

ELECTIONS

HB12 Bond elections - Rep. Clarence Styvar, R-Cheyenne

Would require bond elections be held during General Elections and not Primaries. Not assigned yet. *Awaiting introduction.*

HB74 Elected Officials-Removal – Rep. Bear

Would establish a mechanism to remove municipal elected officials. Sets signature gathering requirements and procedures for a recall election. Would repeal an existing recall provision. No fiscal note. *Awaiting introduction.*

HB75 Voter fraud-protection – Rep. Chuck Gray (plus 40 other reps and 15 senators)

Once again attacking a problem that doesn't exist, this bill would require presentation of a state-issued or tribal ID at the polls. Apparently great fear grips the House and Senate to attract this number of co-sponsors, including many who know better. LWV has opposed this measure every time it is proposed as unjustified voter suppression. *Awaiting introduction.*

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COURTS

HB46 Crime of Bestiality – Clark Stith, R-Rock Springs

Would create the misdemeanor of bestiality, defined as a sexual act with an animal, which also would include promoting or recording such an act. It exempts normal, ordinary and accepted practices of animal husbandry, artificial insemination or veterinary medicine. *Not assigned yet.*

HB103 Journalists-privileged communication – Rep. Dan Zwonitzer, R-Cheyenne

Would make Wyoming the 40th state with a so-called “shield law” to provide privilege for journalists who refuse to disclose sources of information in a news-gathering capacity, protecting them from being held in contempt by a court or grand jury. *In House Judiciary.*

EDUCATION

HB61 School Finance Recalibration – Select Recalibration Committee

Frustrated by the inability to find disproportional or inappropriate budgeting by school districts – and facing a revenue shortfall -- the select committee decided to compute the funding model guarantee for each district and Would reduce it by \$100 million (proportionally, of course.) In a compromise with education advocates who argued that unbridled cutting was not the answer, the committee included a provision for a possible sales tax, if the Legislature determines that the tax revenue is necessary to meet its constitutional duty to finance a “complete and uniform” public education. Several committee members who voted for the measure indicated they expected much more debate about revenue during the 2021 session. So, stay tuned. *In House Education.*

HB62 Suicide Prevention – Education

Would require school districts to incorporate suicide prevention programs for students into their health curriculum. Districts currently provide suicide awareness and prevention programs for staff. *Died on first floor debate 25-34-1.*

H63 Early Childhood Education – Education

Would transfer all program and staff for early childhood programs (developmental pre-schools) from the Departments of Health and Workforce Services to the Departments of Education and Family Services. This was opposed strongly by some individual early childhood programs, but the move is intended to increase accountability and efficiency. Joint Education killed the bill in the fall and then brought it back in the winter, with strong backing by the Department of Education. *In House Education.*

HB77 School District Reorganization – Rep. Dan Zwonitzer

Would set up a planning committee (to include representatives from all 48 school boards) to recommend a plan to create 24 total consolidated districts. This group will report to the Joint Corporations (or another standing committee) an the State Board of Education by Sept. 1, 2022. The bill clarifies the new districts may cross county lines, and some counties may have to share a district, board and superintendent. *In House Education.*

HB81 School finance litigation – Rep. Mark Baker, R-Green River

Would prohibit school districts from using state funding to support litigation to challenge school funding actions by the Legislature. *In House Education.*

HB89 School finance amendments – Rep. Tim Hallinan, R-Gillette

Six new legislators join four veterans – none of them on the House or Senate Education committees -- to cut education expenses by about \$45 million a year by editing down several parts of the formula used to compute district guarantees. Even though they name categories of cuts, the funding still comes as a block grant, so it just cuts the bottom line.

Among the cuts: eliminates instructional facilitators and cuts activities, administrative salaries and professional development. Also eliminates the (constitutionally mandated) external cost adjustment. Completely counter to consultants' research. *In House Education.*

HB106 Wyoming education options act – Rep. Sue Wilson, R-Cheyenne

As the Legislature figures how to afford its constitutional duty to fund public education, here comes a bill to pay children to attend private school – i.e., a voucher bill – with the idea that they are “saving” districts money by attending classes somewhere else. This would add approximately 5,100 children to the state enrollment, for a cost of about \$65 million. *In House Education.*

SF83 Gillette college community college district – Sen. Jeff Wasserburger, R-Gillette

The Wyoming Community College Commission has approved an application by the Campbell County Commission to create a college district. With this bill, the Legislature would approve the formation and put it on the ballot for approval of the district and at least 4 mills property tax. The new college would keep the same staff and facilities as the Gillette college campus of the Northern Wyoming Community College. *In Senate Education.*

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS & RESOLUTIONS

SJR1 Taxes to voters – Sen. Tom James, R-Rock Springs

Would amend the Wyoming Constitution to require voter approval for taxes. *Not assigned to committee yet.*

HJ3 State lands mineral royalties – Rep. Tim Hallinan, R-Gillette

Would amend the Wyoming Constitution to let the Legislature take 2/3 of the mineral income from school trust lands and put it in a spending account for six years. Currently, the state must put 2/3 into a permanent fund, which then generates revenue for spending. This would reduce that saving requirement to 1/3. *In House Revenue.*

HJ4 Recall of state elected officials – Rep. John Bear, R-Gillette

Would amend the Wyoming Constitution to authorize recall of elected public officials. *Awaiting introduction.*

HJ1 Traumatic brain injury and post traumatic stress treatments – Joint Transportation

Resolution asking Congress and the Veterans' Administration to act to improve treatment of TBI and PTSD. *In House Transportation.*

HJ2 Board of Medicine-Improper enforcement actions – Rep. Bear

This resolution disapproves of the Board of Medicine's statement on COVID-19 prescribing and conservation of health resources and requesting its withdrawal and rescission. Contends the statement violates the right of people to make their own health care decisions, contained in the Wyoming Constitution. If the board fails to reverse the statement, the Legislature will take action to preserve the rights of the people. *Not assigned yet.*