

Summary of bills of interest filed for the 2021 Wyoming Legislature as of Jan. 17, 2021

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.

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.)

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.

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.”

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 payment 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. This bill is Senate Corporations Committee on Tuesday 1-20-21.

SF17 Governmental Publications Requirements – Joint Corporations

Would let government agencies post notices on an official Website, in lieu of a newspaper. Scheduled for Senate Corporations on Tuesday, 1-20-21.

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.

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.

TAXATION AND REVENUE

HB11 – 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 online House Minerals Committee on Wednesday, 1-20-21.*

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 – 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.

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.

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.

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.

SF27 Essential health product dignity act – Joint Revenue

Would provide a sales and use tax exemption for feminine hygiene products and diapers.

Expected lost annual revenue: \$939,000 to the General Fund and \$902,000 to local governments.

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.).

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.

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.

ELECTIONS

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

Would require bond elections be held during General Elections and not Primaries.

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.

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 then 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.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

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

Would amend the Wyoming Constitution to require voter approval for taxes.