

LWVWY Legislative Report #12, April 5, 2021

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LSO Website www.wyoleg.gov.

After a long Easter weekend, the Wyoming Legislature wraps up its 2021 session on Tuesday and Wednesday, with an expected light in-person presence of lawmakers who made the trek home and will finish up remotely from their kitchen tables (or wherever they have their laptops).

House and Senate conference committee members met without the usual rancor, agreed on a compromise budget bill and sent it to the governor early last week for his signature. He vetoed one bill (SF93) and made several line item vetoes in the budget bill, HB1, which you can read about in his letter to Speaker Barlow. The final version includes about \$430 million in cuts and eliminates 324 positions (mostly vacant), relying on the some \$1.3 billion expected in federal stimulus American Rescue Plan funds.

Tuesday will be a busy day with concurrence on the education funding bill (HB173) and not a lot of time to fix any differences between the House and Senate. SF130, written to put out a “Come on In” welcome sign for charter school companies, also faces a contentious conference committee challenge on Tuesday. Those two bills are high profile enough to merit online meetings. So watch the LSO Website for the YouTube links. If HB173 fails, the status quo will continue.

Failure of Medicaid expansion (HB162) in Senate Labor 2-3 was heartbreaking after an impressive grass roots campaign and three hours of powerful testimony. That was on Wednesday morning. I urge everyone to go back and listen to both the testimony and the uncomprehending debate by committee members, particularly Sens. Brouchard, Hutchings and McKeown. Compliments to Chairman Baldwin, Sen. Furphy, Medex sponsors Sen. Rothfuss and Rep. Martinez and the three House champions (Reps. Sweeney, Harshman and Sommers). They argued with reason, with fiscal responsibility and with compassion. But in the end, the misery and lives of 25,000 uninsured Wyoming people just didn't matter. Opponents clung to several false assertions, including the idea that Montana Medex was a disaster, while all the evidence is that it has been a grand success. (Again, watch the video.)

Thank you to all the LWV members who contacted legislators about Medicaid expansion. The legislators who voted “no” should have to answer to their constituents when the session is over. If you need any background information, Healthy Wyoming has assembled several documents that will help. If you want to stay involved, Healthy Wyoming has several county-based groups that will keep working through the interim. In fact, Joint Revenue has Medicaid expansion on its list of requested interim study topics.

The bill that has become the vehicle for recalibrating the school funding model for the state – HB173 – passed the Senate Friday in a form that makes it unlikely the House will concur. That will send the fate of Wyoming public schools to a conference committee and an uncertain fate in the 2021 session. The Senate cut a provisional ½ sales tax, which the House considered a

responsible and important part of the bill. The Senate also dabbled in tying districts' hands in dictating how it could spend teachers' salaries. Meanwhile, districts are waiting for the Legislature to finish up before they know how much to cut from their FY2022 budgets.

Predictably, HB75 Voter ID won approval from the House and Senate to fix a non-existent problem of Election Day impersonations with pointless busy work of presenting IDs at the polls. The bill was amended so poll workers can accept almost anything as a valid ID, which makes you wonder what it is going to fix, except create confusion for people who forget their IDs and have to cast provisional votes. I suggested that a purported lack of confidence in our elections could be fixed quite easily if all the sponsors stood up and declared our elections secure. But this, apparently, was the "fix."

Joint Corporations has the job of working through the 2020 Census data and proposing a redistricting plan for the Legislature in 2022. Unfortunately, the data are coming late (September), but the committee is going to get together early and set up procedures – one of which is consideration of creating multi-member districts. LWV will have a role to monitor the process and help the public understand/get involved.

Joint Corporations also wants to study the effects and practicality of runoff primary elections, a subject that should look at ranked-choice voting.

For the fate of those interim study requests and those from the other 11 standing committees, follow the Management Council deliberations at its meeting 8:30 a.m. on April 16.

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