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The Wyoming Legislature adjourned its 2021 session on April 7, with several issues pending – including approval of interim work, an expected special session in July to deal with a new round of federal stimulus funding and a plan for redistricting to produce a proposal for the 2022 session.

Meanwhile, the governor and his executive branch will start working soon on preparing budget recommendations for the Legislature to take up in the 2022 session for the 2023-24 biennium. The process is complicated by fluctuating oil and gas income and the estimated \$1.3 billion in federal funds that is coming to the state, local governments and schools.

In the final week, the Legislature decided to let stand the line-item vetoes of the governor on a supplemental budget bill that ended up cutting about \$430 million from the biennial budget that we are midway through.

The Management Council is scheduled to meet 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 16 to assign work and set budgets for the interim committees. (A 2021 bill to let committees set their own interim work failed.) Among highlights will be a request by Joint Revenue to take up Medicaid expansion and plans by Joint Corporations for redistricting work, despite not getting Census data until September. LWV Wyoming has offered its help to explain the process to the public and make sure people know how to read the plans and comment. We also have recommended that the committee look at multi-member districts,

Management Council also is expected to make plans for a special session (probably in July) to decide how to handle an infusion of federal stimulus funds.

In final week action, the House and Senate could not reach agreement on a school funding bill (HB173), so it died without a conference committee report. The committee met for several hours on April 7, all caught on YouTube, finally coming to a standstill on the Senate's insistence that it determine how much districts could spend from its federal stimulus funds, when they could spend it and how they could spend it — all that in addition to a proposed \$135 million state funding cut (\$45 million x 3 years). The House gave up its proposed half-penny sales tax in the opening round of the conference meeting.

The demise of a school funding plan, which also included diversion of revenue to the School Foundation Program, means that districts have the same funding level as previously. It also means they will be trying to draw out spending of federal funds, but they are still stuck with a low 15 percent-of-funding reserve limit. This, after a year-long recalibration study by experts to figure out a good evidence-based and cost-based funding model, for all the good that did.

From the 5,000 foot level: the House trying to help districts through difficult times vs. the Senate trying to make the districts feel the pain. Frustrated at the impasse, Sen. Charles Scott (chairman of Senate Ed this year) delivered a tirade on the Senate floor that branded the entire House as “tax and spend” scoundrels. (You can listen to THAT, too, on the wyoleg youtube channel, starting about 9 minutes into the second afternoon floor session.)

A bill (SF130) to put a big “Welcome” sign out for charter school businesses made it through a conference committee process that received little notice but could be a bad deal for public education in Wyoming. People or businesses that want to set up a publicly-funded charter school in Wyoming could sidestep the evaluation and support by school districts and go to the Department of Education and State Loan and Investment Board for help and approval. There was unsubstantiated reference to unfair treatment by districts and a need by charter companies for another route. These schools could screen pupils and limit its services. Superintendent Balow was a strong supporter.

Disappointments include failure of Medicaid expansion as SF154 (in Senate COW) and HB162 (in Senate Labor) and rejection of death penalty repeal (SF150) in Senate COW.

HB75 Voter ID passed with amendments that allow a wide range of documents (without photos) that will be accepted at the polls. It was sold as a solution to potential fraud (none proven) and a lack of confidence (nurtured by the bill sponsors) in our elections security. It is busy work for both voters and poll workers. It potentially could depress voter turnout, which is not great anyway, but we shall see. Secretary of State Buchanan supported the bill.

One health orders restriction bill emerged, HB127, with some recognition that health orders may be emergencies and may be necessary to control contagion. But it offers some comfort to legislators who want elected officials and the public to opine on orders that restrict gatherings and commercial activity. The governor will appoint a state health officer, too.

Rep. Harshman (former Appropriations chairman and Speaker) is fond of remarking how wealthy Wyoming is, with its reserves and permanent funds. The 2021 Legislature passed SF121 that reconfigures how revenue flows to those spending accounts, liquid reserves and permanent funds.

Meanwhile, all revenue-raising attempts failed once again.

Joint Corporations wants to study the effects and practicality of runoff primary elections, to avoid the occasional instances of Republican Primaries that are won by a candidate with a plurality of the vote. LWV Wyoming has asked that the study, if approved, look at options that include ranked-choice voting.

As you read 2021 bills, a few things to note: you can use the filter and keywords (bill number, catch title and sponsor) to narrow your searches. The history of each bill—including the conference committee reports—can be found in the digest. If you want the final version that passed, read the “enrolled” PDF on the upper right side of the page.

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