

LWV Wyoming Report #1 -- 2-14-22
2022 Wyoming Legislature
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The 2022 Budget Session starts Feb. 14 (Happy LWV Birthday!) with the state of the state and state of the judiciary addresses by the governor and chief justice, before a House Chamber filled with 90 legislators who have just 20 days to complete a lot of work. That includes approving a budget to fund state government for fiscal 2023-24, redistricting the Legislature and allocating some \$350 million in Covid-related federal funds.

Things to note for this session:

- The budget and redistricting bills are the results of months of committee work, but expect amendments as they work their way through the process of deliberation and debate of both sessions. Be particularly vigilant with the mirror budget bill process, to keep track of different amendments to the same bill at the same time. The bills are House Bill 1 and Senate File 1.
- Only the budget and redistricting bills are exempt from the requirement of getting a 2/3 vote just for introduction. (There's a proposed constitutional amendment to end that requirement, by the way.) So the drama begins for most bills just to get in the front door to get into the process. In fact, the 3-minute opportunity to sell a bill to the House or Senate might have the incentive to write bills that have no chance of passage but give supporters that 3 minutes at center stage. That is, IF leadership agrees to bring bills up for introduction – an additional screening process.
- All the committee meetings will be streamed on YouTube and will have a Zoom option to testify, but the public has to “register” to testify. That option should be available on a committee meeting tab. (See next item.)
- The Legislative Service Office Website has lots of information about the bills and the legislators. But one of the features to check before the session and every day are the schedules for the session, the House and Senate chambers and the committees. You will see opportunities to testify and to lobby lawmakers on individual bills and amendments.
- The other LSO Website page you will use every day is the bill page, which provides the previous action for each proposal, bill versions as they pass from one chamber to the other and amendments coming up in debate.
- Electronic handouts are required for the chamber floors and are recommended for committees. LSO no longer handles large deliveries (of anything) during sessions.
- The LSO online hotline is activated to leave messages for ALL members of a chamber on a specific bill. The telephone hotline is 866-996-8683 or 307-777-8683.
- Find links to LSO guides “Attending Legislative Sessions” and “Attending Legislative Meetings” at the top of the home page.

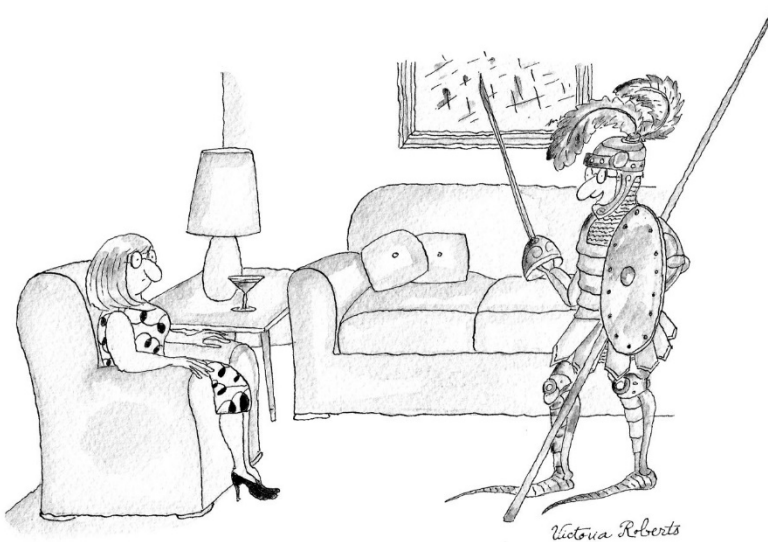
The Joint Appropriations Committee heard 3 months of testimony from agencies and courts and are forwarding a proposed biennium budget that looks a lot like the one from Gov. Mark Gordon. It includes a pay raise of about 5 percent (about \$31 million) for state employees, in hopes of stemming the loss of workers. Legislative leaders will give legislators a week to digest the bill and then start working it in Committee of the Whole (Senate and House simultaneously) on Feb. 21 (no holiday). The House and Senate will pass their versions on Friday and send them over to the other chambers.

Joint Corporations managed to approve a redistricting plan at the last minute with two additional House seats and one additional Senate seat (so-called “62-3.”) That is HB100. There still are a lot of legislators who didn't

get the district lines they wanted for their counties, so expect floor amendments. A plan reached on Feb. 11 was possible only when a few legislators agreed to back off non-negotiable demands.

Meanwhile, SF60 is a competing version that keeps the current 60-30 House-Senate breakdown. With 62 as a divisor into the state's population, districts can be a little smaller in number and still meet the requirement that population vary only plus-or-minus 5 percent from the ideal number. Check out LSO's redistricting page for details.

Caption for cartoon to the left: "Of course we haven't got dragons, but only because we're hypervigilant." Might be words from Wyoming lawmakers.



Several legislators may find themselves living outside their new district lines and inside someone else's district. We'll see if/how they are spared running against a fellow lawmaker.

Education gets its fair share of "direction" in prohibitions against teaching critical race theory and in requirements for districts to post all materials online, which would be a financial burden for many of them. HB30 would increase their reserves cap and allow them to spread out federal Covid funds. And HB58 revives an often-rejected requirement for high school students to take a citizenship test generally considered to fall short of any test requiring critical thinking.

Medicaid expansion is HB20 Medical treatment opportunity act, approved by Joint Revenue during the interim.

Election bills include one absolutely necessary to the speedy reporting of absentee ballots. HB52 allows county clerks to open up the absentee envelopes to ready for them for counting on election day. HB49 tightens up campaign finance reporting for groups that work on behalf of candidates or issues. Runoff elections are back, with a proposed constitutional amendment and enabling legislation (HB74) from Rep. Neiman to move up political primaries to May and convert the August election to primary runoffs.

Proposed constitutional amendments include:

- HJ1 to extend the retirement age for judges and justices from 70 to 75 years old
- HJ4 to remove the 2/3 introduction votes for bills in budget sessions
- SJ1 to assign legislative redistricting to non-partisan 5-member commission, removing the current assignment of that duty to sitting legislators during a budget session.

Constitutional amendments require a 2/3 vote of both House and Senate to qualify for the ballot.

I am including with my report a long list of POSSIBLE bills for consideration this session, and there will be more before the deadline of Feb. 16 for all bill drafts to be in final form at LSO. It will be pared down drastically by leadership's discretion in which ones to bring up for the 3-minute appeal and introduction vote. That can eat up a lot of valuable time in a budget session. We also shall see how serious legislators are about keeping out bills that can wait until the 2023 General Session. The count so far: House 102 bills and four amendments, Senate 82 bills and 1 amendment.

If you need help navigating the LSO Website or the Capitol, I am happy to help. My cell is 307-630-8095. Also, Margaret Brown of the Laramie and Wyoming Leagues is a great resource and sends updates to an email list of interested League members, so let her know if you want to join that.

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