

To: Wyoming LWV members
From: Marguerite Herman, LWVWY Lobbyist
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Re: 2023 Wyoming Legislature preview
Date: Jan. 10, 2023

The 2023 session of the 67th Wyoming Legislature gaveled into session on Jan. 10, with Speaker Albert Sommers presiding in the House and President Ogden Driskill presiding in the Senate. Legislative leaders in the Management Council set a (tentative) session calendar that consumes 37 days and ends on March 3.

This is a general session, and Wyoming finds itself with a \$3 billion surplus, so we can expect debates over spending/saving. Proposals to give ad valorem tax relief to residential property owners seem to have broad support. There's not much talk of taxes aside from a bill to remove many excise and sales tax exemptions, following South Dakota's reliance on sales tax instead of minerals.

In the 30-member Senate, there are four new members, although one has long experience in the House (Eric Barlow of Gillette). Two seats are held by Democrats. In the 60-member House, there are 27 new members (although David Northrup served previously) and five Democrats. The number of new legislators means leadership, especially in the House, must help members master both the process and the substance of legislating, at least for the first few weeks. Please get familiar with the resources on the Legislative Service website www.wyoleg.gov. Many resources are a click from the home page:

- Keep handy the session schedule and the deadlines for bills through the process, which can kill measures without a vote or other notice.
- Find daily floor calendars and committee meeting schedules, which usually are posted at least 2 days in advance.
- Find the bills and resolutions filed for the session to track their progress, all roll call votes and all amendments. Use the PDF versions of the bills to track page and line numbers.
- Find guides to testify in writing, in person or virtually before a committee.
- Find some background and contact information for legislators.
- Track committees and their meetings (agendas, materials, video links, minutes). I have compiled committee membership lists onto one page, for easy reference.

LWVWY is working with national League on a 2023 session bill tracking program called "Quorum," accessed here www.quorum.us/spreadsheet/external/RfeAZatgWJauorqjDnyE/. It will update automatically with information from LSO, and LWVWY will add its own information about status or stance, as necessary. It will let you know when bills are scheduled for committee meetings, as well, so you can plan to attend/testify/contact legislators in a timely manner.

The state League has a committee of members interested in following the Legislature and being available to contact lawmakers on short notice. Margaret Brown (Laramie League and former legislator) leads the group. Let her know if you want to join their email. wyoleg@wyominglwg.org.

The LWVWY State Board has selected priority issue areas for 2023 and has communicated those positions in a letter by LWVWY President Nancy Lockwood to all legislators. They are:

- Elections: Expanding voting rights, enhancing representation and making elections free, fair and accessible
- Funding for Education, Health and Legislators: Fair, equitable and responsible funding for education and schools, healthcare and legislator compensation
- Missing persons: Missing Person Alert Systems for persons of all ages, needs and circumstances that are statewide, particularly the Wind River Indian Reservation.

Heading into this session, legislators have a lawsuit filed by the Wyoming Education Association and joined by some school districts claiming the Legislature has failed to meet its constitutional duty to adequately fund school operations and construction. As of the session start, none of the education funding bills address the delinquent External Cost Adjustment (ECA) requirement or school capital construction. We will see a supplemental budget bill from Joint Appropriations later, which may address those issues. HB34 does include a Wyoming Department of Education mental health services grant for K-12, and SF50 gives charter schools the status of Local Education Agencies to apply for federal and state grants.

School funding also is implicated in various measures to lower people's property taxes on primary homes, because property taxes (on all property) are a big piece of K-12 school funding. HJ1 would amend the Wyoming Constitution with a new property class, to let the Legislature create lower assessment rates. Bills that lower residential tax bills may include appropriations to make up the losses to schools and local governments.

Two bills apply to healthcare funding: to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 2 months to 12 (HB4) and to open our state Medicaid program to low-wage, uninsured adults (HB80).

Two bills would help Wyoming residents afford legislative service: SF61 would increase per diem payments from \$109 to \$155, and SF62 would let legislators join the state health insurance group. Also, HB51 would increase the constituent service allowance.

Several bills can be expected to address elections and voting, including one, HB79, to let people use their conceal carry permits as a voter ID. Primary cross-over voting is still one of the state GOP's big complaints, which may be countered by the LWVWY position to use open primaries, where all candidates appear on the same ballot. HB49 would allow local governments to hold rank choice primaries for nonpartisan offices, responding to complaints about plurality victories. Related to openness is HB5, which would bar sharing voter information that candidate campaigns use in their canvassing and GOTV efforts, i.e., whether a person has already voted.

Let me know if you have questions about bills or the legislative process, and let me know if you are coming to the Capitol and would like some help in getting oriented.