

## 2024 Budget Session of Wyoming Legislature End-of-Session Summary – March 11, 2024

The 2024 budget session of the Wyoming Legislature came to an end right on time the night of March 8. However, that was about the only thing that went as leaders expected for the 20-day session that is supposed to focus on the state's biennial budget and urgent matters that cannot wait until the next general session.

The FY25-26 budget authorizes expenditures of General Funds, special accounts, and federal revenue totaling about \$10.8 billion. The House approved the budget 41-21 and the Senate 17-14. That allowed the Legislature to adjourn by the midnight deadline and send the budget to Gov. Mark Gordon. There had been speculation about using the three days "saved" from the 2023 session, for any gubernatorial vetoes of line items or footnotes, but it ended with adjournment, and any vetoes will stand without the challenge of an override vote.

The final budget eliminated a proposed \$95,000 expenditure for voter education in advance of two new election restrictions: proof of residency and 90-day party-change blackout period. The compromise budget removed a prohibition on the University of Wyoming gender studies program, but it preserved a Senate defunding of UW's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Once again, a hot budget topic was school capital construction and the vagaries of Wyoming's system for prioritizing school facilities construction (a constitutional mandate). The exemplar this year was Rock Springs High School, which has bounced around on the priority list while its needs become more dire. The final budget includes \$150 million for RSHS.

As in most years, the budget provided a battleground of politics, personalities, and chamber rivalry, but the 2024 session surprised people for how those battles were fought openly and at the expense of decorum and deference to traditional process and leadership. Nothing was sacred, it seemed.

The House Freedom Caucus started out the session by blocking the 2/3 introduction votes of several committee bills and a capital construction bill (HB135) that was partially revived in budget amendments. Bills were "recalled" from committees where they had been voted down, including the controversial HB128 repeal of gun-free zones, and the Senate challenged committee appointments by President Ogden Driskill (one was successful, one failed). Members of the House and Senate frequently insisted on roll-call votes on controversial topics (e.g., guns, vouchers, and so-called "woke" questions), so expect those to feature in Primary and General Election campaigning. Pistols were not drawn, but one may speculate about the 2025 session.

The Legislature can claim residential property tax relief as a solid accomplishment for 2024. Proposals that made it to the governor's desk include HB3 to give an exemption to long-term homeowners. HB4 increased access to a homeowner tax refund. HB45 limited the taxable value to a previous tax bill. And SF54 applies an exemption to the first \$2 million value of a single-family residence.

If you check the legislative calendar on the Legislative Service Office Website, you can find the recordings of some of the joint conference committee meetings that met to find compromise versions on various bills, including the budget bill.

During the interim session, check the legislative meeting page to keep current with joint interim committee action on work assigned by the Management Council. You can find materials and opportunities to testify online and to watch on YouTube. Joint committees have been sorting through interim topic requests, and they will submit a list to the Management Council. The council, composed of top legislative leaders, will meet in a couple of weeks to decide what is important and what committees can spend on the topics. Joint committees typically meet 3 times for a couple of days each to research and write bills for the 2025 session. This work can take them to far corners of the state, and I encourage you to take advantage of opportunities to watch and perhaps testify at a committee meeting. LWVWY submitted two interim topics for Joint Corporations: open primaries and online voter registration. The Equality State Policy Center asked to revisit two proposals that failed introduction: protection of election workers and a so-called “dark money” resolution.

LWVWY prioritized three issues for the 2024 Legislature: Constitutional Issues, Election and Voter Services, and Government Accountability and Transparency. The [LWVWY 2024 Bill Tracker](#) included bill information and the position (support, oppose, monitor) on related bills. LWVWY maintained a less detailed version for the public on its home page. We will be evaluating the platform and how well it worked for League members and others. Please contact Nancy Lockwood, [nanlockw@gmail.com](mailto:nanlockw@gmail.com) or Dee Buckstaff, [deebuckstaff@gmail.com](mailto:deebuckstaff@gmail.com) if you have comments on the Bill Tracker used this year.

Management Council also continues work on proposed rules on handling complaints from fellow legislators and the public about alleged unethical conduct of lawmakers both in and out of session.

LWVWY and local Leagues will work on voter information concerning election changes and a proposed constitutional amendment to create a separate tax assessment rate for residential property. That amendment, which would allow a special lower rate for all homes, will be on the November ballot. Debate and disagreement continues as to whether relief should be targeted to lower-income owners or should be extended to everyone. Debate and disagreement also persist on how to “backfill” the accounts that rely on property tax revenue: namely, schools and local government.

Meanwhile, please contact me if you have any questions. We will report on interim topics when the Management Council meets.

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