

News Release



WYOMING SENATE DISTRICT 3

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WYOMING LEGISLATURE: SPEND OR SAVE?

CHEYENNE – Monday, Jan. 30 marked the first reading of the budget in both the House and Senate.

“**SF0001** and **HB0001** are mirror bills and each chamber makes amendments, and then a conference committee is appointed and they go through the differences between the two houses,” Senator Cheri Steinmetz said. “We were on first reading of the budget bill Monday (Jan. 30), so no amendments could be made. The Appropriations committee explained the bill to the floor, and now we will have an opportunity to amend the bill. As you know, we’re coming into record windfalls of \$1.4 billion revenue than we had anticipated, and so the issue will be: do we save, or do we spend?”

“I believe we should be saving money, not spending erratically,” Senator Steinmetz continued. “The governor put in his budget requests that we would save \$412 million from the General Fund into the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund. This is a significant amount of money, and it’s important to note that the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund is an inviolate account that generates 20 percent of the state’s revenue from its investment earnings.

“The governor also moved to put \$248 million from the School Foundation Program account into the Common School Permanent Land Fund. That is the permanent fund that helps to fund our schools. Both of those were denied by the House members on the Appropriations committee, who put them into budget reserve bills and other reserve bills with large amounts of money that can be violated. So, that will be a debate - a difference of opinion between the House and the Senate as to what we do with those funds, and how we protect them from being spent.”

The Appropriations bill, as it came out of the Appropriations committee, transfers \$491 million from the General Fund. It transfers \$282 million from the School Foundation Program account, \$129 million from the School Capital Construction account, \$393 million from the Legislative Stabilization Reserve account, and \$82 million from the School Foundation Program account.

“Yes, they are large, and there are millions of dollars at play, so be sure to watch and see what happens and how we reconcile our differences of opinion,” Senator Steinmetz said.

On Tuesday night, in the Ag committee, the Senate heard three bills: **SF0107 Acquisition, exchange and sale of trust land** - this is a bill allowing 80-acre parcels of land-locked land to be exchanged with the federal government; **SF0126 Barbering and cosmetology practice amendments** “has caused quite a stir in the cosmetology world - we’ve been hearing from a lot of people who are uncomfortable with some of the amendments, so we’re looking to amend the bill back to something more basic that everyone can live with and would work out well for the public and for our colleges and for our practicing barbers and cosmetologists,” Senator Steinmetz said; **SF0138 Unemployment insurance coverage period and reporting** reduces the coverage for unemployment insurance from 26 weeks to 13 weeks - changing the definition, and instead of calling it the ‘Unemployment Insurance Commission’, calling it the ‘Reemployment Insurance Commission’, and 6.5 percent of the weekly benefit would be the amount, rather than 13.

“So, that is an interesting bill for employers across the state,” Senator Steinmetz said. “Those will be up in the Senate Ag committee on Tuesday night, and then on Thursday night, we had been assigned many of the gun bills from this Session, because our bills have to be out of committee by Friday, or they will be dead and will not make it over to the other house.”

Wednesday, Feb. 1 marked the second reading of the budget in both chambers.

“Fortunately, we were able to get two amendments on to put money into permanent savings. \$412 million went into the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund, which is the inviolate, or the account which cannot be rated, that is constitutionally protected by a vote of the citizens,” Senator Steinmetz said. “I believe the account was set up in the ‘70s, and the state receives 20 percent of its budgeting revenues off that account. \$246 million went into the Common School Permanent Land Fund. This is the permanent fund that is there for K-12 and to help fund our schools, but it is the permanent fund there. So that was a big win for the Senate - I don’t believe the same action was taken on the House side - hopefully we will be able to hold that action and see a lot of money (over \$600 million) put into the permanent savings of the State of Wyoming.”

Thursday, the Senate saw third reading of Senator Steinmetz’s bill: The Wyoming Freedom Scholarship Act - this is a bill that sets aside \$30 million for scholarships for the money to follow the students where the parents deem appropriate for their education.

“The bill would designate a \$6,000 scholarship per student and the parents could decide where to fund their education. Passage of this bill would be a great win for school choice in Wyoming and for parents across the state,” Senator Steinmetz said.

Also on Thursday, Senate Ag saw three gun bills.

“We’ve become the gun bill committee for the Senate this year, as many of the other committees are stacked with other bills, and Friday was the last day for your bill to be reported out-of-committee,” Senator Steinmetz said.

Senate Ag debated **SF0148 Preemption of local firearm regulation** represents a tweak in local laws. **SF0149 Enhanced concealed carry permit for improved reciprocity** - this would allow the attorney general to grant an enhanced concealed carry permit, it also interplays with the next bill, which is **SF0150 Capitol carry** - if you possess the enhanced concealed carry permit, then you would be allowed to carry in the capitol building in the State of Wyoming. Senator Steinmetz called the bills “good steps forward as we see folks wanting to carry in the capitol legally.”

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The most controversial and heated debate in the House this week was **HB0066 Prohibiting masks, vaccine and testing discrimination**, according to Representative Scott Smith.

“This has been an interesting debate on the House floor,” he said. “I’d highly recommend going to Youtube and go to the Wyoming Legislature channel and look for the House day 14 AM recording.

“It amazes me to watch individuals who have contempt for liberty. These individuals will purposefully develop and vote for an amendment to sabotage the bill, like putting \$850 million in insurance for medical facilities just in case the federal government stops payment to our health care facilities. The amendment passed, but the same people who voted for it voted against the final passage of the bill.

Representative Smith listed several interesting facts, including: many people who voted against this bill were more concerned about the rights of businesses and their ability to receive federal dollars instead of our individual rights and freedoms. Many of these individuals received campaign funds during the 2022 election cycle from either one or all of the following: The Wyoming Hospital Association PAC, WyoPac (Wyoming Medical PAC), or directly from Pfizer.

“This week we are working on the budget,” Representative Smith said. “We have sat through two full days to just go over the budget amendment request since the state is flush with money. There has been a lot of debate on what to do with the funds. If it were me, we would refund the money to our property taxpayers. But, I’m in the minority. You can count on me to oppose overspending, and save as much as we can in hopes to build up our trust fund that currently pays for 30 percent of our state budget. My thought is the more we can count on our trust fund, funding our budget, the easier it will be to get rid of our property tax.

“We have to pay close attention to the budget, because it is easy for bills to stop spending but sometimes numbers are inflated to pay for things the body had already opposed. It’s a tricky beast.”

In other news, the House has been successful at stopping several bills from passing through.

“The more we vote against bills, the more money we save, the less regulations we propose, and the freer we remain, and time will tell what happens in that body with the bill,” Representative Smith said.

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“One bill I was sorry to see defeated was **HB0066 Prohibiting mass vaccine and testing discrimination**. I felt that this bill really protected personal liberty,” Representative Allen Slagle said.

The supplemental remained a major focus last week, “with lots of debate on second reading between spending and saving, and how we want to save the money the state has in small trust accounts or in the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund, from which we can only use the earnings. For the most part, it was decided to spend and put the money in small trust funds,” Representative Slagle said.

“Wednesday, the few bills that passed third reading that I thought were good were **HB103 Political party declaration and changes** - that is our bill preventing crossover voting; **HB0119 Medical prescription off label purposes** - this bill gives medical providers the freedom to prescribe whatever is the best for their patients; **HB0126 Trespass-removal of trespassers** - which I thought was a good thing to have in statute, along with another 11 bills.”

The House also passed 17 bills out of Committee of the Whole. **HB0156 Voter identification limitations** failed Committee of the Whole.

Thursday, the House had 17 bills for second reading, including **HB0100 Acquisition value study**, **HB0127 Healthcare facilities and clergy**, **HB0180 Brucellosis testing-notification requirements**; and on third reading, the House reviewed amendments for the supplemental budget.

As of Wednesday, over \$70 million was added to our already \$411-million budget,” Representative Slagle said. “Monday, Feb. 6 will be the last day for the bills on General File, and Wednesday, Feb. 8, will be the last day for bills on third reading in the House of Origin. Then, we will start working on the bills that came over from the Senate.

“It is great hearing from all of you, and I will try to respond to emails, as time permits.”

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More information about the legislative session can be found at wyoleg.gov.

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