

News Release



WYOMING SENATE DISTRICT 3

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VITAL BILLS FALL VICTIM TO HOUSE ‘SHENANIGANS’

CHEYENNE – The legislative session is nearing its end, and uncertainty continues to swirl around several important bills – largely due to the actions of the House.

“Things are winding down, and we are starting to look at our final bills,” Senator Cheri Steinmetz said Tuesday, Feb. 21 – the 29th day of the 2023 Wyoming Legislative Session. “Up today, **HB0195 American rescue plan act appropriations** on second reading – this should finalize the funding from the American Rescue Plan. This bill reappropriates some of the monies that are not currently being utilized in the programs they were originally directed to.”

Also, up on third reading was **HB0100 Acquisition value study** – a study bill which considers transferring property tax valuation from market value to acquisition value, or the amount a person pays for their property.

“This is just a study at this time, and we are hoping that our good assessors can give us input into whether this process would work for the State of Wyoming and our property owners,” Senator Steinmetz said.

“On first reading, the bill sure to take center stage [Tuesday]: **HB0103 Political party affiliation declaration and changes**,” Senator Steinmetz said, with a statement from her husband and National Committeeman for the Wyoming Republican Party, Corey Steinmetz.

“For many, many years, we’ve all witnessed what’s come to be known as ‘crossover voting’, where people from the democrat party cross over into the republican party to vote, or the independent party, or unaffiliated candidates register as republicans to vote,” he said. “A political party primary exists for the sole purpose of that political party putting their nominee on the ballot in the general election. You hear discussions about disenfranchising voters – no, that’s not the case. In a political party primary, republicans elect the republican for the ballot, and the democrats elect the democrat for the ballot. But if you’ve chosen to be unaffiliated, it simply means that you don’t subscribe to the political will and wishes of either party, and so, your opportunity to vote comes in the general election once the party has put a candidate forward.

“This has been the No. 1 issue among the republican party for many, many years, and we have tried – as Cheri mentioned – unsuccessfully a number of different times to get this crossover limitation in place. So, frankly, the way it works is you have to declare your political party affiliation prior to the filing period for any candidate to get on the ballot, and we think it’s a simple solution to this issue, and we’ll see how this works going forward.” The bill passed third reading unamended on Friday, which means it will head to the Governor’s desk.

On Thursday, Feb. 23, the Agriculture committee considered **HB0152 Life is a human right act**.

“This act is very important because of the pending court case, and the Dobbs decision, which allows states to make decisions on how they will regulate abortion,” Senator Steinmetz said. “The legislature is taking the opportunity to provide a complete statement of Wyoming’s position on the protection of life with this legislation:

‘As a legislative branch responds to the actions of the judicial branch in a variety of settings every day, and throughout the history of our country, this body is doing the same thing. The body recognizes that because unborn babies are members of the human race from conception, they are entitled to the rights of all humans. The body also recognizes that Wyoming has a legitimate interest and a duty to preserve life for all humans no matter what stage of life they are in, and the body also recognizes that this branch has the authority to interpret and define terms found within the Constitution.’

“This act also redefines abortion based on 1970’s legislation which has not been updated since the Dobbs decision. The bill also provides clarity for physicians as to what is an abortion and what is not.” HB0152 passed unanimously out of the Agriculture committee and will be on first reading in the Senate on Monday.

Also up in the Senate Agriculture Committee upon adjournment Thursday: **HB0222 Colorado River Advisory Committee** – this is a bill that sets up an advisory committee in the state engineer’s office and one full-time employee to deal with compact issues and issues regarding drought in the Colorado River Basin; **HB0076 Licensing board amendments** will be modified as the sponsor of the bill will bring an amendment which refines bill to two licensing boards; and **HB0171 State land leases** was amended to refine the bill to providing only notice to leaseholders and affected communities.

“Also of note, recently in the Senate and House dealings with one another, the House has been dropping substitute bills on Senate sponsors of bills,” Senator Steinmetz said. “This is an action that up to this point has been rarely used, especially without contacting the prime sponsor of the bill in advance. It is unfortunate that the legislature has devolved to these types of tactics.”

“We had two bills on ESG (environmental, social, and governance) from Senator Biteman, of which the House Appropriations Committee dropped substitute bills on both and then killed the bills. The pharmacy benefit provider bill suffered the same fate in the Revenue committee, however the bill was not killed. Shenanigans are being played within the state legislature. We hope they don’t continue and that we can pass some important legislation for the State of Wyoming and our citizens. However, the Speaker of the House is continuing to hold many bills of vital importance to the citizens of Wyoming in his desk drawer. We had several bills that passed the senate dealing with

parental rights, educational choice, and the protection of children that have been killed in the speaker's drawer."

Senator Cheri Steinmetz serves as Chairman of the Agriculture, State and Public Lands and Water Resources Committee and Vice Chairman of the Education Committee. Contact Information: (307)534-5342; e-mail: cheri.steinmetz@wyoleg.gov

"The committees are still meeting and working at getting bills out to be debated by each body," Representative Scott Smith said. "The pace of bills getting through the process is slow going. It seems that each bill has multiple amendments and has taken much time to be discussed and debated."

SF0178 Mountain lion pursuit season is one such bill, according to Representative Smith.

"Some people were concerned that the mountain lions would get smart being chased by dogs during the off season. Others were concerned for the cat, and another was concerned for the dogs in training and that they might get tired of chasing cats. The consensus was that dogs never get tired of chasing cats. Before third reading, some legislators are researching the constitutionality of allowing this special training season for Wyoming residents only. We will keep you updated on this debated bill."

There were several bills that hadn't made it to committee as of the beginning of last week.

"Chloe's law, which is the prohibition of gender change of minors in Wyoming. I believe it needs to come out and be debated," Representative Smith said. "Another bill on the Senate side that hasn't seen the light of day is **HB0152 Life is a human right act**. This is making all abortion illegal in Wyoming and answers the court's questions about last year's trigger law that is held up in court and won't be heard in the Jackson District court until December. Wyoming has about 200 abortions/year. Passing this legislation would save hundreds of kids' lives. There is a group that wants to work for the people they represent, and there are others that like spending money and debating if dogs like chasing big cats."

Representative Smith said last week was full of a lot of drama.

"On Tuesday, Feb. 21, there were two separate committees that hijacked different bills and completely changed the intent of the bills by bringing in a completely new bill as an amendment. Getting a substitute bill happened in Revenue in the morning with Senator Hutching's **SF0151 Wyoming prescription drug transparency act**," he said. "This also happened in the Appropriations Committee with two of Senator Bo Biteman's Bills: **SF0159 Stop ESG-Eliminate economic boycott act** and **SF0172 Stop ESG-State Funds fiduciary duty act**, and with Jeremy Haroldson's **HB0105 Repeal gun free zones** and preemption amendments.

"I watched two of these committee meetings on YouTube and both seasoned senators were angry with the committees for going rogue and hijacking their bills that were in the last stages of the legislative process.

"What normally happens is if a committee doesn't think that it is a good bill, they usually vote it down, and it doesn't go before the body to be debated. But these two committees have taken five good bills and proposed new bills possibly drafted by lobbyists.

“When I spoke with one of the Legislators, they said this is pure evil, deceptive, possibly illegal for meeting and drafting a bill without the public being notified and goes against the legislative process.”

The high-profile bill **SF0144 Chloe's law-children gender change prohibition** was also heard in the Appropriations Committee and died.

“The Freedom Caucus tried to re-refer the bill to Labor and Health, which the bill probably should have been assigned there to begin with and probably would have had a more favorable outcome to be heard on the floor and debated,” Representative Smith said. “We are trying to help protect our children, but once again we are fighting an uphill battle.”

Representative Scott Smith serves on the Transportation, Highways, and Military Affairs Committee. Contact Information: (307)575-3742; e-mail: Scott.Smith@wyoleg.gov

Representative Allen Slagle echoed the sentiments of Senator Steinmetz and Representative Smith.

“Yesterday was kind of a disappointing day,” Representative Slagle said Wednesday, Feb. 22. “It started off with an enjoyable Ag committee meeting with the FFA team from Cheyenne Central debating the pros and cons of the issue crossing private land to get to public land for the purpose of hunting. It brought out a lot of the issues that, we as legislators, have to deal with when we’re trying to make statutes dealing with these sort of things.

“Then, in Revenue committee, the **SF0151 Wyoming prescription drug transparency act** was heard and basically, they ended up replacing it with a substitute bill, which amended it – taking out all the protections for small pharmacies and leaving it so it mostly benefited Big Pharma and the mail-order prescriptions. The one good point out of our third-reading bills was **SF0102 Food freedom act amendments** passed, which gave more freedom to individuals wanting to sell eggs and dairy products at farmers markets and other places like that.

“The other disappointing thing was, in Appropriations committee, we had two good ESG bills that were to help stop ESG. Basically, ESG is ways that by looking at how you believe regarding climate change and that sort of thing, they will either fund you or won’t fund you at banks, and both of those bills were also gutted by being substituted in with other bills.

“Then, the final thing that was the straw that really made it a bad day for me is **HB0106**, I was a sponsor of that put a moratorium on eminent domain for distribution lines from wind chargers - the governor vetoed that bill this evening.

“Today, we will be looking at a lot more bills, and it’s just kind of been a rough year for those who are fiscally and morally conservative. A lot of our votes are pretty close.” Representative Slagle added he enjoys receiving feedback and will continue to try to respond to emails as time permits.

Representative Allen Slagle serves on the Agriculture, State and Public Lands and Water Resources Committee. Contact information: (307)306-7384; e-mail: allen.slagle@wyoleg.gov

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

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