JONAH BUSINESS CENTER WILL HOST THE WYOMING LEGISLATURE
WHILE THE STATE CAPITOL UNDERGOES A MAJOR RENOVATION

2016 Legislature Guide
FEB. 6-7, 2016
YOUR ROADMAP TO THE 63RD WYOMING LEGISLATURE’S BUDGET SESSION

PRODUCED BY
THE WYOMING TRIBUNE EAGLE

IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE LARAMIE DAILY BOOMERANG
THE ROCK SPRINGS ROCKET-MINER
THE RAWLINS DAILY TIMES
By Trevor Brown
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Spend enough time around some of Wyoming's senior legislators and you are bound to hear about the energy bust of the 1980s and the lean years that followed in the 1990s.

"The last time we had a bust, we didn't do anything for years," said Rep. Steve Harshman, R-Casper, who co-chairs the Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee. "There was no capital construction, major maintenance or anything.

"That lasted for years. And, boy, did we have to play catch up afterward."

Fast forward a couple decades and Wyoming is staring at another potentially long and painful economic downturn.

Natural gas prices—when adjusted for inflation—have been at historically low prices for the past several months. And oil markets continue to flounder as new drilling activity largely has stalled throughout the state.

Meanwhile, the coal industry, once the foundation of the state's revenue base, is battling against the headwinds of looming environmental regulations and changes in the nation's energy strategy.

It's hard to overstate the importance of energy
BUDGETING DURING A BUST
Lawmakers prepare spending plan as energy sector slumps

By Trevor Brown
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

February 6-7, 2016

It’s hard to overstate the importance of energy to the state’s revenue picture.

Wyoming gets almost three-fourths of its revenues from mineral taxes, giving it one of the most volatile revenue bases in the country.

This is shown clearly in the state’s latest revenue projections.

For the upcoming two-year budget period, the general fund and reserve account revenues – known collectively as the state’s “traditional funds” – are expected to be more than half a billion dollars less than the current 2015-16 biennium.

But as Gov. Matt Mead and lawmakers prepare to tackle the state’s spending plan for the next two years, they say the situation is much different than previous downturns.

“It has been bad news since October,” Harshman said. “But the key thing is we have saved and we have options.”

The biggest difference between now and the past is the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account, more commonly known as the LSRA, or just the rainy-day fund.

The Legislature has continuously socked away money into the account since it was created in the mid-2000s. And it largely has been untouched as it has grown to more than $1.8 billion.

But that could change this year.

A cornerstone of the governor’s 2017-18 budget recommendations is his plan to use about $450 million from the rainy-day fund to pay for a range of projects. These include providing aid to local governments and funding road and building projects.

But Mead says he wants to just “borrow” the rainy-day funds. He would backfill that money by changing a law that requires 1 percent of mineral tax revenues to flow into the state’s Permanent Mineral Trust Fund.

Still, the question will be how much lawmakers want to cut, save and spend.

Those questions are likely to dominate this year’s 20-day budget session that is set to run until the first week of March.

Mead’s budget largely avoids cuts to state agencies or other programs.

“I do not believe that across-the-board cuts can deliver the meaningful savings or that they are prudent,” Mead said in his budget address. “If we are to reduce standard budget expenditures, we need to evaluate agency programs and eliminate those that are a lower priority.”

But some lawmakers – eyeing the potential for more economic woes in the coming years – are likely to push for greater cuts.

Many of those fears are prompted by warnings that the state’s school foundation account will face a multi-hundred million dollar shortfall in the 2019-20 budget cycle.

And then there will be competition and debate over where to spend the limited money that is available.

Wyoming’s cities, towns and counties, the University of Wyoming and infrastructure projects throughout the state are all at risk of getting fewer funds than normal.

But one thing Mead and many top lawmakers agree on is that Wyoming can’t afford to panic or shut down over the budget fears.

“The journey to build for the future must continue – that’s the Wyoming way,” Mead said at the close of his budget address. “We are capable folks, no matter the circumstances, and I am confident we can do the right budget for right now.”
### ASSET FORFEITURE

One of the more contentious issues from last year’s legislative session will return this year.

The Joint Judiciary Interim Committee is sponsoring a bill that would reform the state’s asset forfeiture laws.

Unlike a bill that was vetoed by Gov. Matt Mead last year, the proposal would not end the state’s civil forfeiture policy.

This allows police and prosecutors to confiscate property, including vehicles or cash, as long as law enforcement reasonably believes it is linked to a drug crime.

But the legislation would place additional hurdles for law enforcement to jump over before it would be able to seize the property.

Among the changes is a requirement that a hearing be held in circuit court within 30 days of the seizure to determine whether probable cause existed for the property to be seized.

An additional hearing within 120 days of the seizure would be required before the property is forfeited to the state.

The proposal also issues a number of guidelines for courts to use in determining whether a forfeiture is “grossly disproportionate” to the suspected crime.

The bill that would have ended civil asset forfeiture altogether passed both the House and Senate in 2015. But Mead used a rare veto to block the bill.

The Senate attempted to override the governor’s veto. But only seven of the 30 members supported that move.

The Joint Judiciary Interim Committee considered sponsoring a similar bill for this year’s session.

But its members rejected that proposal and decided to advance the bill that would reform the practices instead.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

### K-12 FUNDING

Looming funding problems for Wyoming’s K-12 education system will be a hot topic this legislative session.

A recent University of Wyoming report estimates the School Facilities Department, which is in charge of K-12 major maintenance and new construction, will face a $771.3 million spending gap between 2017 and 2022.

This comes as coal-lease bonus payments, which largely pay for these projects, are drying up.

Meanwhile, the downturn in the state’s energy sector is expected to impact property tax revenues, which are a key K-12 funding source, in the coming years.

Gov. Matt Mead is recommending lawmakers convene a “blue ribbon” task force to look at potential solutions.

But many lawmakers say they might have to act sooner.

“I think the longer we wait, then our options start running out,” said Rep. Steve Harshman, R-Casper, during a Joint Appropriations Committee budget hearing in December.

Options for lawmakers to consider include diverting mineral tax revenues that currently flow into savings, finding cuts throughout the state’s budget or raising taxes.

But Mead said he is not ready to support any tax increases.

“I believe it’s the wrong time to do that, not that I don’t think there’s an issue that needs to be dealt with,” he said while presenting his budget to the JAC in December. “But I think the greatest burden of any increase would be put upon the industries that are struggling now.”

The governor is recommending the state prioritize maintenance projects instead of building as many new schools during the next two years.

His budget includes a school facilities budget of $218.9 million. Of that amount, $118.5 million is for major maintenance.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

### TOBACCO SETTLEMENT CUTS

Several health and corrections programs could see their budgets slashed as the state faces a shortfall in its tobacco settlement funds.

A trust fund set up after a 1999 settlement with tobacco companies helps fund a number of state programs that focus on substance abuse, health issues and tobacco cessation.

The account has historically generated about $50 million per biennium. But the state is only projected to receive about $37.8 million for the upcoming two-year cycle.

To address the shortfall, Gov. Matt Mead is recommending cuts for many of the agencies that have received this funding.

This includes:

- $7.4 million from the Department of Health
- $2.9 million from the Department of Corrections
- $1.6 million from the Department of Family Services
- $42,000 from the Attorney General’s Office

One of the biggest cuts would come from the Department of Health’s Court Supervised Treatment Program, which offers sentencing alternatives to individuals with substance-abuse problems.

The governor’s plan would cut the program’s funding from $8.5 million to $3.7 million for the biennium.

The Legislature’s Joint Revenue Committee briefly considered a proposal this fall to increase the state’s tobacco tax to help reduce the need for cuts.

Wyoming’s 60-cent tax on a pack of cigarettes is among the lowest in the country. A number of health advocates called on the committee to raise the tax by $1 per pack.

However, the panel decided against sponsoring a bill for this session.

It is possible, however, that an individual lawmaker could still sponsor a proposal to raise the state’s tobacco tax.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

### Key lawmakers:

**ASSET FORFEITURE**


**K-12 FUNDING**


**TOBACCO SETTLEMENT CUTS**

**MEDICAID EXPANSION**

Lawmakers have defeated Medicaid expansion proposals in each of the past three legislative sessions.

But Gov. Matt Mead is calling on the Legislature to reconsider its opposition to the proposal that would extend health coverage to about 20,000 low-income residents.

Wyoming is one of 29 states that have rejected the optional expansion. Mead said this is causing Wyoming to lose out on hundreds of millions of federal dollars that could be used to offset rising costs in the Health Department budget.

The state estimates that accepting the expansion would bring in $268.4 million over two years.

“These dollars would be spent on hospitals, doctors, nursing homes, mental health centers and other providers located in communities across the state,” Mead wrote in his budget proposal.

The state further expects that the expansion would free up general fund money that the state is already spending on legislatively mandated health programs for residents in need.

These offsets would allow the department to self-fund the $16.4 million that would be the state’s share of the expansion.

It also would produce enough savings to more than cover the health department’s $23.7 million in exception requests for the 2017-18 budget.

But there remains strong opposition to the expansion in the Republican-dominated Legislature. Several lawmakers say they fear the federal government will eventually hike the states’ share of costs for the expansion group.

The success of the proposal could depend on how supporters seek to pass the expansion this year.

A standalone bill would require a two-thirds majority vote for the proposal to be introduced. Or lawmakers could seek to include the expansion in the 2017-18 budget bill, which isn’t subject to the two-thirds requirement.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

**STATE BUILDING PROJECTS**

This year’s legislative session will provide an ever-present reminder of the $300 million project to renovate the State Capitol and the adjacent Herschler Building.

Lawmakers will hold the 2016, 2017 and 2018 sessions in a temporary location at the Jonah Business Center—about three miles east of the Capitol—while the work is being done.

Some lawmakers have suggested postponing the project as price overages and other issues have come up over the past year.

But Gov. Matt Mead said he wants to see the project continue. He is proposing to use $37.5 million in rainy-day funds to complete repayment of the money that was borrowed from the Permanent Wyoming Mineral Trust Fund for the project.

Mead also is proposing that a number of other state building projects receive funding in his two-year budget plan.

This includes $65.2 million for major maintenance projects throughout the state and $6.9 million for a new Department of Forestry building in Cheyenne.

The governor also is seeking to partially fund several projects that would need additional funding in the coming years.

He is asking for $10 million this session for a new state office building in Casper, which would carry a total price tag of between $37 million and $44 million.

The state also is looking at long-term projects to renovate the State Hospital in Evanston and the Wyoming Life Resource Center in Lander.

It is estimated that the two projects would cost about $155 million. Mead is recommending the Legislature add $10 million this session to a fund that is earmarked for state-run health facilities projects.

The governor’s budget also calls for $25 million to repair structural issues at the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

**PRIVACY BILLS**

A legislative proposal would add privacy and open-government protections to Wyoming’s Constitution.

The Joint Corporations, Elections and Political Subdivisions Interim Committee voted this fall to sponsor a bill that, if passed, would put the proposed constitutional changes on the 2016 general election ballot.

The proposal states that individual privacy is “essential to the well-being of a free society and shall not be infringed without the showing of a compelling state interest.”

It goes on to say that the amendment “will not deprive a person of any right provided by law to examine documents or to observe the deliberations of an agency or political subdivision of the state, except in cases in which the demand of individual privacy clearly exceeds the merits of public disclosure.”

Lawmakers originally considered a version of the bill that didn’t include the open-government protections. But the extra provision was added after press and government transparency advocates argued the amendment could be used to prevent public information, such as criminal records of public officials, from being released.

If the Legislature approves the bill—and voters accept it—it would make Wyoming one of the few states in the nation with privacy protections in their constitutions.

Supporters say the amendment is needed because there is no explicit privacy protections in the state’s Constitution and little protections on specific issues in statutes.

A similar proposal—but without the open-government protections—was considered during the 2015 session. It failed on a 17-13 vote in the Senate.

The Legislature will consider several other bills related to residents’ digital privacy rights this session.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

**Key lawmakers:**


**Key terminology:**

**Adoption:** Action compelling all members to be present in the chamber.

**Bill:** A proposed law, introduced during a session for consideration by the Legislature. Called a file in the Senate (House Bill 101, Senate File 101).

**Calendar:** A daily listing showing bills ready for action.

**Call of the House or Senate:** Action compelling all members to be present in the chamber.

** COLA:** Cost-of-living adjustment.

**At ease:** An announcement from the chairman indicating a short break.
ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

The downturn in the energy markets is a reminder of how important oil, gas and coal revenues are to Wyoming.

But Gov. Matt Mead and other state officials want Wyoming to be less reliant on the energy industry.

Several proposals this legislative session would do this by strengthening the state’s tourism and technology sectors. This includes Mead’s plan to boost the Wyoming Tourism Board’s funding for the next two years.

The state agency has a standard budget of nearly $25 million per biennium. But the governor is supporting an exception request that would use $5 million in general funds to help sustain and expand the Tourism Board’s marketing campaigns.

Mead also wants to use $3 million in rainy-day funds to expand Wyoming’s international tourism marketing efforts.

“Tourism provides economic diversity and much-needed revenue,” Mead wrote in his budget message to lawmakers. “It offers a broad spectrum of job opportunities.”

Meanwhile, several legislative proposals seek to help Wyoming’s growing high-tech industry.

Mead announced in the fall that he used $13.4 million in unspent money earmarked for economic development and data center recruitment projects to help bridge a $159 million shortfall for the 2015 fiscal year.

But he said he will be asking the Legislature for borrowing authority to use on economic development projects if an opportunity presents itself.

The Legislature’s Joint Minerals, Business and Economic Development Interim Committee also will sponsor a bill that would provide up to $250,000 for high-tech startups in the state.

The funds would be used for products and ideas that have the “possibility” of returning an economic benefit to Wyoming’s economy.

 Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

UW, COMMUNITY COLLEGE FUNDING

The University of Wyoming and the state’s community college system could see cuts after this legislative session.

Gov. Matt Mead’s proposed budget for the upcoming two-year cycle calls for reducing UW’s nearly $320 million block grant from the state by $5 million.

UW President Dick McGinity told lawmakers this fall that the university has been able to shield academic programs from budget reductions in past years. But he said that might not be the case this time if the proposed cuts are accepted.

The governor’s plan also rejects UW’s request for staff and faculty pay increases—the top exception request for the university.

Mead’s budget, however, does recommend approval of nearly $70 million in other UW exception requests.

This includes $38.5 million for campus science and engineering facilities, $11.5 million for the university’s matching funds program and $8 million to help boost UW’s athletic programs.

Like UW, community colleges also could see cuts from the state.

Mead is recommending a new funding formula backed by the Wyoming Community College Commission that cuts state funding for community colleges by $2.3 million.

But Mead is supporting a number of building projects on community college campuses throughout the state.

This includes spending $6.51 million in general funds for an Agriculture and Animal science facility at Central Wyoming College in Riverton.

The governor also is recommending the Legislature use $7.3 million in rainy-day funds for Central Wyoming College’s Jackson Center Project and $8 million in rainy-day funds for an expansion and remodel of the Technical Education Center at the Northern Wyoming Community College District’s Sheridan campus.

 Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

FUNDS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Wyoming’s revenue problems will likely trickle down to the state’s cities, towns and counties.

Gov. Matt Mead’s 2017-18 biennium budget proposal provides just $90 million in state aid to be split among the local governments for the next two years.

That is not even half of the $183 million that the localities are scheduled to receive for the current biennium.

The governor said this area is a priority of his, and he would like to add more funds. But he said the $90 million is all the state can do—for now, at least.

“As the state tightens its belt, so too must local governments,” Mead wrote in his budget message to lawmakers in December. “At the same time, we understand the importance of continuing forward with services, infrastructure investment and economic drivers.

“We must continue to invest in our communities and to ensure that any plan addresses the needs of cities, towns and counties.”

Richard Ladwig, president of the Wyoming County Commissioners Association, said local governments are facing many of the same budget problems as the state. But he said he and others understand that difficult decisions need to be made.

“With revenue down significantly, counties are painfully aware of the difficult choices we all face,” Ladwig said. “As a proven advocate for Wyoming’s communities, we know Gov. Mead did the best he could to leave no stone unturned in this request for local government.”

The governor is proposing to spend the $90 million out of the state’s rainy-day fund.

He said if the state’s revenue picture improves, he hopes the Legislature will consider increasing that amount.

 Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Key lawmakers:


NEW STATE SAVINGS PLAN

The Legislature will consider a major change that could decide how the state uses much of its mineral revenues.

Gov. Matt Mead is proposing lawmakers change a state law that currently requires 1 percent of oil, gas and coal severance tax revenues to flow into the state’s Permanent Mineral Trust Fund. The nearly $7 billion trust fund generates interest and investment income for the state. But lawmakers are barred from touching the corpus, or principle, of the account.

The state’s Constitution requires 1.5 percent of the mineral revenues to flow into the PMTF. But the extra 1 percent is only required by state law.

Mead wants lawmakers to amend that law by diverting the 1 percent of mineral taxes, which usually totals about $100 million a year, into the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account.

Also known as the state’s rainy-day fund, lawmakers are free to spend any of the $1.8 billion that is currently in that account whenever they choose.

The law change is a centerpiece of Mead’s 2017-18 budget plan.

Mead is asking lawmakers spend about $450 million from the rainy-day fund for one-time expenses.

But he said he plans to just “borrow” this money, since the diversion of the mineral revenues into the rainy-day fund would eventually backfill the money that will be spent.

The governor has proposed diverting the statutory 1 percent to help fund local governments and infrastructure projects in the past. However, those proposals have failed to receive much traction in the Legislature.

But some top lawmakers – including Sen. Tony Ross, R-Cheyenne, who co-chairs the Joint Appropriations Committee – are backing the governor’s proposal this time.

In addition, Mead says he supports making the law change a temporary fix, instead of permanent move.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

HIGHWAY FUNDING

Wyoming’s cash-strapped highway system could get some help this year.

Wyoming Department of Transportation officials told lawmakers last fall that the agency needs $62 million a year over its current state and federal funding mix just to maintain highways and bridges in their current condition.

That shortfall comes despite the extra funds generated by the 10-cent fuel tax increase that was passed in 2013.

But the state received some good news at the end of 2015 when Congress passed a new five-year federal highway bill.

In addition to providing Wyoming with assurances that its federal funding will continue, the legislation will increase the state’s federal funding by about $22 million a year.

Meanwhile, Gov. Matt Mead is proposing to use $25 million in rainy-day funds for the upcoming two-year budget cycle to help fund state transportation projects.

“The highway system has always been and must remain a priority,” Mead said. “As with all infrastructure projects, delayed maintenance not only creates havoc, it raises the cost of later improvement.”

WYDOT officials say the extra funds are crucial because the state’s roads will gradually get worse if they are not properly maintained. According to a WYDOT computer model, 3.7 percent of the miles of interstate highways are considered to be in poor condition. But if the 2015 funding levels remained flat, the percentage of interstate miles rated as poor would rise to 7.4 percent in 2020 and 9.1 percent in 2025.

The situation is even worse for non-interstate highways.

About 12.5 percent of non-interstate roads in Wyoming’s National Highway System are currently rated as poor. That number would rise to 23.1 percent in 2020 before dropping to 18 percent in 2025, according to the projections.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Key lawmakers:

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS

State lawmakers plan to tackle sentencing reforms and other judicial system topics this session.

The Joint Judiciary Interim Committee is sponsoring a 24-page bill that gives judges more discretion to place offenders on probation or parole – instead of ordering prison time – for many types of crimes.

It also gives courts more options to reduce probation conditions or dismiss charges after an offender has been on probation for a certain amount of time. The proposal additionally opens up new ways for offenders to seek treatment or complete other requirements in order to have their probation, parole or prison time reduced.

The legislation comes as the Department of Corrections is facing increased budget pressures as the number of inmates continues to rise.

Meanwhile, Rep. James Byrd, D-Cheyenne, is sponsoring a bill that would make it a civil penalty for those caught with up to one ounce of marijuana on their first or second offense.

Possession of up to three ounces of marijuana is currently a misdemeanor that carries a penalty of up to one year in jail and a $1,000 fine.

Meanwhile, possession of more than three ounces is a felony, punishable by up to five years in prison and a $10,000 fine.

But Byrd’s proposal would have possession of up to one ounce of marijuana carry a civil fine of up to $100. His plan also would set a fine of up to $50 for possession of up to half an ounce of the drug.

It additionally would make possession of up to an ounce on a third or following offense carry penalties that could include mandatory counseling, a fine of $500 to $1,000, imprisonment of up to 30 days and probation for up to a year.

Byrd sponsored a similar proposal during last year’s legislative session. But it failed on a 38-22 decision on its first vote in the Wyoming House of Representatives.

– Trevor Brown, Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Key lawmakers:
The process starts with an idea from citizens, legislators or a legislative committee. Then House bills go to the House. Their Senate counterparts, Senate files, go to the Senate.

Bills must pass a First Reading on the House or Senate floor to be referred to a Standing Committee.

In a House or Senate Standing Committee each Standing Committee reviews the bills and invites the public to appear and present testimony, as well as discusses the proposed legislation. When the Standing Committee is ready for a decision, a vote is taken:

- Do Pass
- Do Not Pass
- Do Pass As Amended

Committee of the Whole Endorses or rejects the Standing Committee’s recommendation on the bill.

Second reading of the bill This is where the bill is first openly discussed on the House or Senate floor. Amendments are frequently introduced. A bill must be voted on to reach third reading.

Third reading of the bill Amendments are again permitted during third reading. Final passage of a bill on third reading is by a roll-call vote. If the bill is amended in the House and passed on third reading, it is then engrossed (amendments are inserted into the bill) and sent across the Capitol to go through a similar process in the Senate. Vice versa for Senate files. If a bill passes both houses without amendments in the second chamber, it is then signed by presiding officers in the House and Senate and sent to the governor for action.

Request for concurrence If the bill is amended by the second legislative body, a message is sent to the other chamber requesting hat the legislators approve, or “concur,” with the amendments. If the legislators vote to “concur,” the bill is enrolled, signed by the residing officer and sent to the governor for action.

Joint Conference Committee If the original body votes not to concur with amendments made in the second chamber, the bill is sent to a Joint Conference Committee to work out a compromise between the House and Senate positions.

A Joint Conference Committee consists of three members of the House and three members of the Senate. When a bill has been passed in identical form by the House and Senate, it is then enrolled, signed by the presiding officers and sent to the governor for action.

Governor’s action on the bill Upon presentation of the enrolled act, the governor may:

- Approve and sign the bill
- Allow the bill to become law without his signature by taking no action
- Veto portions of the bill
- Veto the bill

(If the governor vetoes the bill, it may still become law if both the House and Senate vote to override the veto. The vote to override requires a two-thirds vote in both the House and the Senate.)

Session laws and Wyoming state statutes Once the bill becomes law, it is then printed and bound into Wyoming Session Laws. The new law is then placed into the appropriate parts of the Wyoming State Statutes.

Attendin committee meetings to voice your opinion on issues before the Legislature is a great way to take part in the process. Here are a few guidelines:

If you would like to attend

When you arrive at the committee meeting room, please sign the official meeting Attendance Sheet indicating your attendance at the committee meeting.

You can keep track of the committee’s schedule by reading the notices on the committee room door; by following the daily calendar available outside the Senate.

GUIDELINES FOR ATTENDING LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

10 steps to a bill becoming a law

Your Education Dollar Goes Farther at Wyoming Community Colleges!

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WESTERN
Wyoming Community College
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GUIDELINES FOR ATTENDING LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE MEETINGS

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If you would like to address the committee
Individuals who wish to address the committee will be recognized and called on by the chairman to speak. After the chairman has recognized you, please stand and address the chairman (i.e. “Mr. Chairman”). Then clearly state your name and the name of the organization you represent prior to addressing the committee.

If you want to give a handout to the committee
If you would like to provide written information to the committee and you would like your handout to be part of the official committee record, please fill out the Committee Handout Form when you arrive at the meeting room and give the form and a copy of your handout (including an electronic copy, if available) to the committee staff. Please bring enough copies of your information for the committee staff, the committee staff and interested members of the audience.

You can also email an electronic copy to legdocs@wyoleg.gov. Please include the committee name, meeting date, document author, document provider and agenda item in the body of the email, or include an electronic copy of this form along with your submission. Electronic copies of the form can be downloaded on the Legislature’s website.

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

During the legislative session, you can recommend support for or opposition to a particular piece of legislation by using the Online Hotline.

In addition to expressing support for or opposition to an identified bill, you can leave a short comment regarding the bill. This service is available on the Legislature’s website at http://legisweb.state.wy.us/postcomments/onlinehotline.aspx. Comments will be available to all legislators, but keep in mind legislators consider a variety of factors when making decisions on pending legislation.

The telephone hotline also is available toll-free 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for those without Internet access. Within Wyoming, the number is 866-996-8683. For callers within the Cheyenne area, the number is 777-8683. Callers will not be able to leave comments regarding a bill. The information you provide using these services is considered a public record.

No Internet access?
Be involved and updated by phone Legislative Service Office: 307-777-7881
Legislative Service Office FAX: 307-777-5466
Senate Receptionist: 307-777-7711 (message for senator)
House Receptionist: 307-777-7852 (message for representative)
Voter Hotline and Bill Status: 866-996-8683 or 777-VOTE (in Cheyenne). Use only to recommend a vote for/against pending legislation.
Hearing Impaired Service: 800-877-9965 (Wyoming Relay Service)

THANK YOU.

Thank you, Wyoming legislators, for your hard work on the public’s behalf.

As you embark on a busy general session, the Wyoming Press Association applauds your commitment to keeping the public’s business public.
Even the worst technophobes have easy access to up-to-the-minute information directly from the Legislative Service Office. This is by no means meant to be a comprehensive look at the Legislature's website. But it does show that the ability to keep an eye on your elected representatives and let them know what you think is at the tip of your fingers.

**www.wyoleg.gov**

**ONLINE HIGHLIGHTS**

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**Bill info**

This leads to the area where you can follow the progress of each bill, see the amendments added to it and the final version. More about this area of the website on page 11.

**Audio recordings**

All of the floor debates and proceedings will be available here and posted daily. But the files will be large MP3s covering many hours. A text index-transcript also will be available, but the Legislative Service Office can't guarantee its accuracy with quick turnarounds. Researchers can expect to spend hours if looking for something specific.

**Don’t overlook these links**

These links are worth exploring. The numbers, the law and a quick Google search of this site are available. The General Information link will take you to the session rules of the proceedings, as well as the rules for attending committee hearings.

**Identify leaders/committee members**

Here the leadership and committee members are identified, and the links lead to their phone numbers and email addresses.

**Direct contact with legislators**

You can, of course, send an email to your legislator. The effectiveness depends on your legislator's ability and willingness to check email during a busy session. Phone numbers also are available.

**When are debates and hearings?**

The schedules, calendar and meetings link tells you when to go to the Jonah Business Center if you are interested in hearing debates or committee hearings on a particular bill.
There are several ways to track bills through the legislative process. Committee-sponsored bills traditionally have a better shot at making their way into law than those introduced by individual members. On the 2016 Bill Information Page, you can view summaries of committee-sponsored bills that are linked to PDF files of the actual bills, track a bill's status and find technical information, such as bill abbreviations.

**Look up the votes by bill**
Click on a bill to bring up committee or floor votes.

**Look up the votes by floor or committee**
Pull-down menus allow you to choose committee votes or floor votes for review and to select the chamber.

**All previous action**
All previous action on a bill is available in the digests.

**A handy drop-down menu for sorting bills**
A pull-down menu allows you to view the bills by house or all at once. Though they are all pieces of proposed legislation, in the House they are called "House Bills," while in the Senate they are called "Senate Files." This page is updated as bill status changes and is a good spot to see where any bill is on a given day.

**Grid outlines legislative process**
This allows you to see the pieces of a bill as they are added during the process. The bills are listed by number and usually referred to by a short catch title. You can see each bill introduced. You also can see the amendments accepted under the "Engrossed Version" column. "Enrolled Acts" shows the completed bill as it awaits the signatures of the Legislature's officers and the governor. The "Chapter" column will tell you where the new legislation will appear in the law when it is accepted.

**Amendments for consideration**
When amendments are proposed, a "yes" will appear in this column. Clicking on the "yes" brings up a list of all the amendments.

**www.wyoleg.gov**
For the first time in Wyoming’s history, a legislative session will be held in a privately owned building outside of the State Capitol. The Jonah Business Center, located on East Pershing Boulevard in Cheyenne, will host the Legislature for the next three years while the State Capitol undergoes a major renovation. State leaders signed a lease last year to be one of the several tenants in the office building. The state paid for improvements and renovations to create space for House and Senate chambers, meeting rooms and space for staff to work. In addition to hosting the legislative sessions, the building will be the year-round home of the Legislative Service Office until the State Capitol renovation is completed.
Building layout for the budget session
The Jonah Business Center is located at 3001 E. Pershing Blvd., across the street from the Okie Blanchard Sports Complex. Public parking is available in the east parking lot in front of the building via Pershing Boulevard to the north or Omaha Road to the south.

Tentative schedule
Assumes Legislature will not convene Saturdays; schedule subject to change without notice. (Note: Additional three days may be added to schedule, if needed.)

Day 1: Monday, Feb. 8
Session convenes at 10 a.m.

Day 3: Wednesday, Feb. 10
Noon deadline for all bill drafts to be in final form at Legislative Service Office.

Day 5: Friday, Feb. 12
Last day for bill introductions.

Day 9: Thursday, Feb. 18
Last day for bills to be reported out of committee in house of origin.

Day 10: Friday, Feb. 19
Last day for Committee of the Whole in house of origin.

Day 11: Monday, Feb. 22
Last day for second reading in house of origin.

Day 12: Tuesday, Feb. 23
Last day for third reading on bills in house of origin.

Day 15: Friday, Feb. 26
Last day for bills to be reported out of committee in second house.

Day 16: Monday, Feb. 29
Last day for Committee of the Whole on bills in second house.

Day 17: Tuesday, March 1
Last day for second reading on bills in second house.

Day 18: Wednesday, March 2
Last day for third reading on bills in second house.

Day 19: Thursday, March 3
Concurrence on amendments/Joint Conference Committee reports.

Day 20: Friday, March 4
Joint Conference Committee reports due to front desk by 2 p.m. Adjourn by midnight.

Senate members
James L. Anderson, R-Casper
Paul Barnard, R-Evanston
Eli Bebout, R-Riverton
Brian Boner, R-Douglas
Bruce Burns, R-Sheridan
Cale Case, R-Lander
Leland Christensen, R-Alta
Henry Coe, R-Cody
Stan Cooper, R-Kemmerer
Bermadine Craft, D-Rock Springs
Dan Dockstader, R-Afton
Ogden Driskill, R-Devils Tower
Fred Emerich, R-Cheyenne
Floyd Esquibel, D-Cheyenne
Gerald Geis, R-Worland
John Hastert, D-Green River
Larry Hicles, R-Baggs
Wayne Johnson, R-Cheyenne
Dave Kinskey, R-Sheridan
Bill Landen, R-Casper
Curt Meier, R-LaGrange
Phil Nicholas, R-Laramie
Stephan Pappas, R-Cheyenne
Drew Perkins, R-Casper
Ray Peterson, R-Cowley
Tony Ross, R-Cheyenne
Chris Rotlisfuss, D-Laramie
Charles Scott, R-Casper
Michael Von Flatern, R-Gillette
Jeff Wasserburger, R-Gillette
OF RELEVANCE TO LARAMIE COUNTY

Local understaffed judicial system could see some relief

By Trevor Brown
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Laramie County’s understaffed judicial system could get some help after this year’s legislative session.

Wyoming’s most populated county has seen its misdemeanor and felony caseload increase 39 percent from 2008 to 2014.

Laramie County District Attorney Jeremiah Sandberg attributed this to the county’s recent population growth and law enforcement being more efficient at clearing cases.

He and other local officials say the extra work has strained the DA’s office, as well as the First Judicial District court system that hears many of these cases.

This has caused a backlog of civil cases, such as child custody or divorce hearings, since criminal cases tend to take precedence.

But the Legislature will consider several proposals this year that could help the situation.

Sandberg is seeking a nearly $800,000 state funding bump—a nearly 20 percent increase above the office’s $4.1 million base budget—for the next two-year cycle.

The extra funds would be used to hire three entry-level attorneys and a legal assistant. They also would pay for computer upgrades and move a receptionist from a part-time to a full-time position.

“I’m asking for the entry-level attorneys so they do speeding tickets and the like,” Sandberg told lawmakers during a December budget hearing. “That will let my more experienced attorneys focus on the more major felonies that they don’t have the time to do.”

But Gov. Matt Mead is recommending the Legislature fund only part of the requests. His 2017-18 biennium budget plan includes the $137,529 request for the legal assistant and a $65,974 request for computer upgrades. But it leaves out the funding for the three new attorneys and moving the receptionist to a full-time position.

Meanwhile, the Legislature will consider a bill this session that could pave the way for adding a new judge to Laramie County’s First Judicial District.

The proposal would authorize the addition of a fourth judge to the local district court. But the new position—and the $1.3 million in state funding per two-year period to pay for the salaries of the judge, a new judicial assistant and two law clerks—would only come after certain conditions are met.

This includes Laramie County adding a new courtroom and other facilities to accommodate the new judge.

The Legislature is additionally expected to tackle sentencing reforms that could reduce the number of people going through the legal system.

One bill would give courts more options to place some first-time offenders on probation, instead of having them face jail time.

It also would give judges more discretion to reduce probation, parole or prison time if certain requirements, such as if an offender completes substance-abuse treatments, are met.

The proposal comes as lawmakers and the Wyoming Department of Corrections have been working to find ways to reduce the state’s incarceration costs.

Corrections officials say the inmate population is increasing and, unless trends are reversed, the state will need to pay for expensive expansions to its prison system.

Rep. James Byrd, D-Cheyenne, said he supports sentencing reforms because he wants to see more nonviolent offenders stay out of the prison system.

“We need to address this as a society,” he said. “We need to determine whether the sentences we are attributing to certain nonviolent crimes, especially related to drug possession, are still as appropriate as it was years ago when we came up with them.”

Byrd is sponsoring a bill that would decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana, which currently is a misdemeanor crime that carries a penalty of up to one year in jail and a $1,000 fine.

His proposal would make possession of up to ounce of marijuana carry a civil fine of up to $100 and possession of up to half an ounce carry a fine of up to $50.
Laramie County Legislators

**Senate**

Fred Emerich, Republican  
*Senate District 5, Cheyenne*  
SD 5 primarily covers the area north of Pershing Boulevard on the west side of Cheyenne near Interstate 25 and north of Interstate 80. The northern boundary is the intersection of I-25 and Lodge Pole Creek all the way to the Albany County line.  
*Legislative experience:* Sixth year in the Senate  
*Age:* 70  
*Current employment:* Retired  
*What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?:* “Balance the budget within reason using the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account in a prudent manner without breaking the bank.”  
*Session contact info:* 307-634-8783, Fred.Emerich@wyoleg.gov.

Floyd Esquibel, Democrat  
*Senate District 8, Cheyenne*  
SD 8 primarily covers the area south of Pershing Boulevard to the Colorado state line and west of Central Avenue toward Albany County.  
*Legislative experience:* Eighth year in the Senate, 12 years in the House  
*Age:* 77  
*Current employment:* Retired  
*What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?:* “I agree with our governor about the need to ‘tighten our belts.’ However, I would want to stress and focus on those in our state who have no ‘belts,’ our homeless, our disabled, our medically insecure, our mentally ill and others that are on the fringes of our society. Their voices are often not heard, and I would hope that those voices are not further silenced due to our financial situation.”  
*Session contact info:* 307-638-6529, Floyd.Esquibel@wyoleg.gov.

Wayne Johnson, Republican  
*Senate District 6, Cheyenne*  
SD 6 covers all of Eastern Laramie County, with an appendage extending into part of the northeast portion of Cheyenne; since redistricting, it also includes a narrow portion of Goshen County.  
*Legislative experience:* 12th year in the Senate, 12 years in the House  
*Age:* 73  
*Current employment:* Retired  
*What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?:* “My priorities are always in the area of transportation: Roads, streets, highways. And, of course, I’m always working with and on the Wyoming Military Department and their needs – the items the state has to either match or pay for to support the Air Guard and the Army Guard. In general, I think we’ll find that we’re doing pretty good in the 2017-18 biennium. I worry about 2019-20 more. I was in the Legislature in the early 1990s when we had the last really bad bust, and I remember that well; that’s why I worry more far ahead, because I can remember the problems we had then.”  
*Session contact info:* 307-635-2181, Wayne.Johnson@wyoleg.gov.

Stephan Pappas, Republican  
*Senate District 7, Cheyenne*  
SD 7 generally covers the area of southeast Cheyenne. It includes some areas south of Pershing Boulevard, east of South Greeley Highway and east of Central Avenue.  
*Legislative experience:* Second year in the Senate  
*Age:* 65  
*Current employment:* President of Pappas & Pappas Architects P.C.  
*What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?:* “Obviously constitutionally we need to balance the budget, so while I realize we’ll be looking at reducing our expenditures, I do not want to see us adversely affect services if we can help it. My priorities would be to look at ways to make our spending more efficient, if we can. We need to look at different programs and whether they need to stay or go away, but that should be done every year, not just a year where we’re in the hole.”  
*Session contact info:* 307-630-7180, Stephan.Pappas@wyoleg.gov.

**Know Your Legislature Terminology**

**Indefinitely postpone, To**  
If the motion carries, it kills any future possibility for reconsideration of the bill in a session except by reintroduction as a new bill.

**Introduce a bill, To**  
The only way to pass a law is to introduce a bill for consideration, amendment and passage by both bodies, and with the governor’s signature.
Tony Ross, Republican

*Senate District 4, Cheyenne*

SD 4 primarily covers the central and northern portions of Cheyenne.

**Legislative experience:** 12th year in the Senate, nine years in the House

**Age:** 63

**Current employment:** Attorney at Ross, Ross and Santini LLC in Cheyenne

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?** "As chairman of the Appropriations Committee, my first and foremost priority is that we deliver a budget that meets the constitutional mandate of being balanced. Secondly, I think it's important we continue to invest in Wyoming, so investing in infrastructure and in capital construction is important to keep jobs going in the state. The last priority I would have is, as chairman of the Capitol renovation project, to make sure we keep that fully funded and within budget."

**Session contact info:** 307-632-8957, Tony.Ross@wyoleg.gov.

Harlan Edmonds, Republican

*House District 12, Cheyenne*

HD 12 primarily covers the area from Interstate 80 south to the Colorado state line. Its eastern border is South Greeley Highway, and its western border is the Albany County line.

**Legislative experience:** Second year in the House

**Age:** 52

**Current employment:** Project manager for Wyoming Department of Transportation's right-of-way program

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?** "To prioritize the state budget. There are probably going to be cuts. We need to keep what's important and get rid of fat. During the Freudenthal administration, the state government more than doubled in cost, and not all of that was necessary. We also want to avoid imposing a state income tax, and I know my constituents can't afford that."

**Session contact info:** 307-214-8125, Harlan.Edmonds@wyoleg.gov.

John Eklund, Republican

*House District 10, Albin*

HD 10 covers the eastern half of Laramie County and a small portion of Goshen County. Albin, Burns, Carpenter, Hillsdale and Pine Bluffs are part of this district.

**Legislative experience:** Sixth year in the House

**Age:** 64

**Current employment:** Farmer/Rancher

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?** "To balance the budget that will work for everybody in the state. We are tasked with covering a shortfall for the remainder of the current biennium, then the next two years there's a huge shortfall, so we have 90 people in there working on this budget, and everybody has a little different idea of how it should be. I'm not very excited about dipping into savings just yet; I'm very cautious about going into the savings account."

**Session contact info:** 307-630-6232, John.Eklund@wyoleg.gov.

Ken Esquibel, Democrat

*House District 41, Cheyenne*

HD 41 primarily covers the central to northern areas of Cheyenne.

**Legislative experience:** 10th year in the House

**Age:** 56

**Current employment:** Railroad engineer for Union Pacific

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?** "I think the most important issue will be to show the general public as simply as possible how the revenues flow from them, the taxpayers, to the different accounts the state has; then how the state moves that money to those different accounts. It is my hope that the public will be able to see that the state is a lot better off financially than they hear it is."

**Session contact info:** 307-630-6096, Ken.Esquibel@wyoleg.gov.

James Byrd, Democrat

*House District 44, Cheyenne*

HD 44 primarily covers the downtown Cheyenne area, south of Pershing Boulevard and north of Interstate 80.

**Legislative experience:** Eighth year in the House

**Age:** 61

**Current employment:** Computer networking analyst

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?** "Make sure we don't do anything silly like draconian cuts when we don't need them, and support my bills that I'm bringing forward: ban the box (asking about criminal history) on job applications, raise the minimum wage and decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana possession."

**Session contact info:** 307-634-5803, James.Byrd@wyoleg.gov.
Bob Nicholas, Republican  
House District 8, Cheyenne  
HD 8 primarily covers the area north of Pershing Boulevard on the west side of Cheyenne near Interstate 25.  
Legislative experience: Sixth year in the House  
Age: 58  
Current employment: Attorney with Nicholas Law Office in Cheyenne  

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?  
"I want to develop and work on a fair budget and prepare for short-range, medium-range and long-term protection of our state and our economic situation with the downturn and extrapolate out how best we can do that in the next two, four and six years, at the least, in the most efficient way possible."

"For Laramie County and Cheyenne, I want to protect the respective interests of those two entities; and any cuts or modifications we do to the budget, that's still premature and we're working on that."

"My third priority would be to further develop and define funding for education and education facilities over the short, medium and long term; how we're going to find those funding sources and put together a package that doesn't diminish other aspects of state government."

Session contact info: 307-634-6057, Bob.Nicholas@wyoleg.gov.

Mary Throne, Democrat  
House District 11, Cheyenne  
HD 11 primarily covers the central part of Cheyenne, south of Pershing Boulevard and north of Campstool Road. College Drive is the district's eastern border, and Central Avenue is the western border.  
Legislative experience: 10th year in the House  
Age: 55  
Current employment: Attorney, Throne Law Office P.C.  

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?  
"Passing a budget that puts Wyoming on solid footing, despite the revenue challenges."

Session contact info: 307-630-6728, Mary.Throne@wyoleg.gov.

Sue Wilson, Republican  
House District 7, Cheyenne  
HD 7 covers the area north of Melton, Bluegrass Circle, Storey Boulevard extension and Dell Range Boulevard in Cheyenne all the way north to Platte County, with major borders being Interstate 25, the Albany County line and Christensen Road.  
Legislative experience: Fourth year in the House  
Age: 55  
Current employment: Owner, La Frontera Language Services  

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?  
"The big issue, of course, is the budget and dealing with the revenue downturn. That's going to have priority over everything. Aside from that, I do always try to keep an eye out on opportunities to improve the health-care system in Wyoming, access to care and providers."

Session contact info: 307-316-7497, Sue.Wilson@wyoleg.gov.

Dan Zwonitzer, Republican  
House District 43, Cheyenne  
HD 43 covers south-central Laramie County, including eastern Cheyenne. It includes all of the Sun Valley area south of Pershing Boulevard and east of College Drive, as well as the area south of Allison Road to the Colorado state line east of South Greeley Highway.  
Legislative experience: 12th year in the House  
Age: 36  
Current employment: Management consultant  

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?  
"My goals for session this year: Passing a new Wyoming Securities Act to prevent some of the egregious fraud we saw in the state this year, as well as work toward Medicaid expansion, reducing our ever-increasing insurance rates, and try to keep our energy industry thriving during the last year of the Obama Administration."

Session contact info: 307-214-7826, Dan.Zwonitzer@wyoleg.gov.

David Zwonitzer, Republican  
House District 9, Cheyenne  
HD 9 covers the area north of Dell Range Boulevard from the post office on the east side of Cheyenne. It includes attendance areas of Dildine, Buffalo Ridge and Anderson elementary schools, as well as some areas on the south side of Dell Range Boulevard.  
Legislative experience: 10th year in the House  
Age: 62  
Current employment: Real estate investor, auctioneer  

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?  
"I think it's the same as everybody's, trying to keep the budget straight. I'm taking a strong look at our school facilities and our future long-term arrangements on how money gets spent in that area. Other than that, making the money work with our budget this year."

Session contact info: 307-635-7247, David.Zwonitzer@wyoleg.gov.
Dipping into the rainy-day fund occupies minds of legislators

By Tyler Hanes and Gregory R.C. Hasman
Rock Springs Rocket-Miner

A projected $617 million decline in mineral and oil and gas revenues during the next three years have caused Gov. Matt Mead to consider tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund.

Many southwest Wyoming legislators are in favor of the proposal because it will help the state get through a rough patch.

Not everyone agrees, however, as to what extent the fund should be used.

Some said it should only be used for programs that are in dire straits, while others think it should be spent based on the needs of the entire state, such as local government and Medicaid expansion.

What issues do Sweetwater County legislators think should be given more priority as they prepare for the legislative budget session in Cheyenne?

Stan Cooper, SD 14

Sen. Stan Cooper, R-Kemmerer, said lawmakers should look at cutting as much as they can from the budget before resorting to the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account, also known as the rainy-day fund.

“Some of our state agencies have openings; maybe we can leave unfilled vacancies,” he said.

However, Cooper said he is willing to dip into the account to subsidize areas that are in dire need.

“We have to be careful. We need to use things that are absolutely necessary for operation in the state,” he said. “If it’s a need, rather than a want, so to speak, then that’s different, i.e., maintain facilities; (for) that sort of thing, then we probably need to take a look at that. If there are operations the state can do without, we may not want to use money on that.”

Bernadine Craft, SD 12


She said while it is important to save money, the state has to have the wherewithal to fund areas that are important to the state.

“We need to look at that very closely and need to be careful before we start cutting from projects and the forms of government that affects us, and that’s our local government,” she said.

She said the return of payments from the Abandoned Mine Land funds, as stated in the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act, may help cities and counties as they ride through the economic downturn.

“Restoration of AML funds could be extremely helpful to affected cities such as Rock Springs, and could go far to ease the 50.8 percent reduction in funding,” she said.

John Hastert, SD 13

Sen. John M. Hastert, D-Green River, said he supports Medicaid expansion.

“We are showing that the extension for Medicaid would save the Department of Health $32 million annually, and that it will bring in $274 million of federal money into the state of Wyoming,” he said. “If you’re having an economic downturn, why would you turn it down? I have been a proponent of the expansion all along.”

Hastert said providing funds to highway safety is another important issue.

“There are some safety projects I’d like to see. Safety items like an additional lane on the interstate across the state. Wyoming is kind of a pinch point for traffic with Utah. Any converging outside the state causes a lot of traffic and safety issues across the state. I would like to see money put toward safety on the interstate at some point,” he said.

John Freeman, HD 60

Rep. John Freeman, D-Green River, said the rainy-day fund should act as a cushion for the state.

“(The) rainy-day fund is supposed to be a buffer, and I think it’s appropriate (for it) to be used,” he said.

When the Legislature convenes in February, he expects tumultuous debates.

“I know the Legislature says it will be like walking into a hurricane,” he said.

Despite the sense of urgency, Freeman said Wyomingites should not get flustered.

“I don’t think Wyoming should panic. The revenue forecasts we have are very conservative. They don’t include capital gains, and as Wyoming and the energy sector is kind of winding down, the rest of the country seems to be perking up, (which) usually is par for the course. I think, again, to the point of let’s look at our policy for saving,” he said.

JoAnn Dayton, HD 17

Rep. JoAnn Dayton, D-Rock Springs, said she is also concerned about the budget cuts in the tobacco settlement funds.

Mead is proposing to slash $12 million from the funds, including $7.4 million from the Department of Health.

“Another concern I have is with the tobacco trust fund, with those agencies (that) are being cut. I understand why, but I don’t have to like it, nor do the agencies have to like it. We’ll have to manage within it,” she said.

She said treatment courts may be heavily impacted by the cuts.

“Talking with county coordinators, they are afraid they won’t be able to operate with the amount of the cuts (over 50 percent) and some of those counties that have a great success story, she said. “Production for people being treated 1.5-2 years is up to 80 percent with few repeaters, and they track them. This prevents them from getting prison sentences.”

Mark Baker, HD 48

Rep. Mark Baker, R-Rock Springs, said he would not oppose dipping into the rainy-day fund as a last resort.

Before doing that, though, he said he wants to see the state use the $241.9 million in AML funds that are coming from the federal government.

Baker said he has put out feelers to the Appropriations Committee and Mead for funding of Bitter Creek restoration.

He said the governor supports the project, but not funding it at this time.

With AML money coming into the state, he said he would like to see some of those funds used for that project. Baker said he and Dayton have pushed for the project because it is a good opportunity to benefit their constituents.

“That’s one of the things I’ve been working on for nearly a year now,” he said.
ROCK SPRINGS
AREA LEGISLATORS

Senate

Stan Cooper, Republican
Senate District 14, Kemmerer
SD 14 covers central and southern Sublette County, a small portion of southeastern Lincoln County, far southern Lincoln County, western Sweetwater and northwestern Uinta County and western Sweetwater County.

Legislative experience: House, 2003-04; Senate, 2005-present
Age: 75
Current employment: Retired electrical contractor

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?
"One of the things we probably have to concentrate on, at least have pretty good considerations, are ongoing budget items like several state agencies that have to be funded for, like highways, WYDOT programs for maintaining our highways, several items in the Department of Health. We have a long ways to go on developmental disability issues.

"Probably another big issue we'll have to work pretty hard on is cities, towns and counties. (We have to) make sure we are funding them in a way that allows them to maintain, at least in a time of downturn in our revenue.

Session contact info: 307-777-7711, Stan.Cooper@wyoleg.gov.

John Hastert, Democrat
Senate District 13, Green River
SD 13 includes parts of Rock Springs and Green River and the area extending along Interstate 80 between them.

Legislative experience: House, 2004-06; Senate, 2007-present
Age: 57
Current employment: Mechanic

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?
"I am not in favor of an across-the-board cut. Every agency provides a budget, and we on Appropriations have been asking questions to determine and get a better understanding of what each of the agencies and each of the programs do, and then we will make those decisions come January, which ones are necessary and which ones should be cut. I don't think we should make any cuts without understanding how it will affect people.

"I support school funding. I think education is critical for the people of Wyoming. I want to make sure we adequately support our university to make sure we are (giving a) good education for our kids."


Bernadine Craft, Democrat
Senate District 12, Rock Springs
SD 12 includes central and southern Sweetwater County.

Legislative experience: House, 2007-12; Senate, 2013-present
Age: Would not disclose
Current employment: BOCES executive director and priest of Episcopal Church of Holy Communion in Rock Springs

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?
Craft said supporting Medicaid expansion would benefit Wyoming citizens and hospitals. "Not only would you provide insurance coverage to almost 17,600 Wyoming citizens who currently have no insurance, it also helps our hospitals greatly. They have to provide charity care and uncompensated care. Those private-for-profit hospitals can't accept Medicaid patients, which puts a great burden on the hospital."


House

Mark Baker, Republican
House District 48, Rock Springs
HD 48 covers southwestern Fremont County up to Louis Lake and central Sweetwater County north of Interstate 80 to Point of Rocks and part of Rock Springs north of the Elk Street-Bridger Avenue intersection and south along U.S. 191 to Tri-Territory Road.

Legislative experience: Fourth year in the House
Age: 36
Current employment: Real estate agent

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?
Baker said he would prefer to wait for the Appropriations Committee's session to end before expressing any concerns about the budget. He said he was interested to see how the AML money coming from the federal government will be utilized to cover any projected budget shortfalls.

Terminology
Know Your Legislature

Rise and Report
A motion to adjourn the body of the House or Senate.

Second Reading
Usually is ordered at least a day after adoption of recommendation of Committee of the Whole. The short catch title is read and notifies members the bill will be up for Third Reading and final passage the following day. No action is required, but any action, including amendment, may be moved on the bill by any member.

Sponsor
The lawmaker or lawmakers who filed a given bill. Committees can also sponsor legislation.

Fred Baldwin, Republican
House District 18, Kemmerer
HD 18 includes parts of Lincoln, Sublette and Sweetwater counties.
Legislative experience: Second year in the House
Age: 59
Current employment: Physician’s assistant at South Lincoln Medical Center

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? Baldwin said the increase of funding to mental health is an absolute need for residents of Wyoming, and not just his constituents. Instead of just maintaining the present funding in the mental health field, he said the funding needs to increase. Education funding also is threatened by the recent economic downturn, he said. With the drop in revenues from mineral withdrawal, Baldwin said education funding will need to be reexamined in the upcoming budget session.

Session contact info: 307-777-7711, Fred.Baldwin@wyoleg.gov.

JoAnn Dayton, Democrat
House District 17, Rock Springs
HD 17 includes southern Rock Springs and southern Sweetwater County eastward to Carbon County and as far as Wamsutter.
Legislative experience: Second year in the House
Age: Would not disclose
Current employment: Retired from OCI as an executive assistant for the site manager

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? “Education. We need to provide an education program from K-12; that has to stay as one of our main priorities.”

Session contact info: 307-382-5262, House message line at 866-966-8683, JoAnn.Dayton@wyoleg.gov.

Stan Blake, Democrat
House District 39, Green River
HD 39 includes part of Green River and the area along Interstate 80 between Green River and Rock Springs.
Legislative experience: 10th year in the House
Age: 61
Current employment: Union Pacific Railroad conductor

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? Blake said his priority is to have a budget that will not harm the people who can’t afford it. He said when a budget needs to be reduced, the programs that are the first cut are the ones that help people. “The most vulnerable people are the people who can least afford it,” he said. His goal for the upcoming budget session is to make sure cities, towns and counties remain funded, along with the schools in those communities.

Session contact info: House message line at 866-966-8683, Stan.Blake@wyoleg.gov.

John Freeman, Democrat
House District 60, Green River
HD 60 covers a section of Sweetwater County consisting of Green River, south of the river.
Legislative experience: Fifth year in the House
Age: 61
Current employment: High school transition coordinator at Western Wyoming Community College

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? "I would like to see money that is available for school resource officers, especially in small districts that can’t afford them. I think (it’s best) being proactive in addressing school security, (rather) than being reactive. “In my day job, I work as a school coordinator, and that’s a fancy title of saying how you get … students to take college classes before they graduate high school. (They are) more likely to go to college and more likely to finish. Large districts from large communities can afford that, tuition and fees, so again smaller communities and smaller schools have problems to get that done. (We need) to give aid to districts so they can pay for the tuition and fees so those students can take college classes; places like Mountain View and Lyman have difficulties.”

Session contact info: House message line at 866-966-8683, John.Freeman@wyoleg.gov.

FOR DAILY LEGISLATIVE COVERAGE DURING THE 2016 BUDGET SESSION:

Rock Springs Rocket-Miner coverage of the session will be published daily, as well as online, along with links to ongoing legislative issues and legislators, at rocketminer.com.

Rawlins Daily Times coverage of the session will be published in the newspaper and posted to rawlinstimes.com.

Laramie Boomerang coverage of the session will be published daily and posted to laramieboomerang.com.
Senate
Larry Hicks, Republican
Senate District 11, Baggs
SD 11 covers all of Carbon County and parts of Albany County, including Rock River.
Legislative experience: 2011-present
Age: 57
Current employment: National resource coordinator for the Little Snake River Conservation District

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? “Right now, I may have an individual bill, but I’m going to focus the majority of my time on the budget. It’s not going to be fun.”
Session contact info: 307-777-7711, Larry.Hicks@wyoleg.gov.

House
Donald Burkhart, Republican
House District 15, Rawlins
HD 15 covers all of Rawlins, excluding the state penitentiary, the city limits of Sinclair, and land between Sinclair and Rawlins on Interstate 80.
Legislative experience: 2011-present
Age: 67
Current employment: Safety engineer; Wyoming-Montana Safety Council, board of directors

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? “I have a number of proposals out there, and I’ve made a position that this budget needs to be a minimum of two percent less than the last biennium budget. You can’t go in looking for money to keep the budget the same when times are as tough as they are. You have to make some cuts, and we need to look at that.”
Session contact info: 307-321-7074, Donald.Burkhart@wyoleg.gov.

Jerry Paxton, Republican
House District 47, Encampment
HD 47 covers all of Carbon County, except the towns of Rawlins and Sinclair, and parts of Albany County, including the town of Rock River. About one-third of Sweetwater County is also covered, including Bairoil, Wamsutter and Farson-Eden.
Legislative experience: 2013-present
Age: 71
Current employment: Retired school principal and former Carbon County commissioner

What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget? (Did not respond)
Session contact info: 307-327-5373,jpaxton@union-tel.com.

OF RELEVANCE TO RAWLINS
Senator discusses budget priorities, challenges
By David Louis
Rawlins Daily Times

As Wyoming legislators prepare to meet for a 20-day budget session in Cheyenne, we asked Sen. Larry Hicks, R-Baggs, to discuss what he sees as his main priorities and the Legislature’s largest challenges this year.

Q: What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?
A: “Right now, I may have an individual bill, but I’m going to focus the majority of my time on the budget. It’s not going to be fun.”

Q: With the governor predicting more than $400 million less in revenues for the next biennium than what was anticipated earlier this year, what are some of the challenges when you consider such tight numbers?
A: “It’s priorities. We have to start looking back now, because we’ve made so many obligations to long-term future projects. It’s not just looking forward as a result of what I think was some mismanagement in the last session.

Unfortunately, we’ve obligated funds when we went about the supplemental budget last year that I was adamantly opposed to by not funding projects in a sequential order as money became available. By not doing so, it effectively tied the hands of this Legislature. We need to look back and determine if they are still priorities today.”

Q: When the supplemental budget session was finally over in March of 2015, what were the ramifications?
A: “The last supplemental budget took a significant departure from what had historically been done. In my opinion, it was as close as you can get to deficit spending without deficit spending, and I think it set a very bad precedent.”

Q: Is it a slippery slope once you start dipping into savings to solve budget problems, or is it a reasonable direction to take?
A: “Once you tip the coffee can, it all starts to spill out. In my opinion, it’s reckless and completely irresponsible not to look back and consider how the state’s funding cycles have run. If we tap into the savings at what the governor is proposing, within four to four-and-a-half years, it’s gone.

Quite frankly, I’m not a fan of the governor’s budget. The best thing we can do is have a fiscally sound budget, with reserves used for emergency shortfalls. For the past six years, we’ve spent between $3.4 billion and $3.6 billion, so let’s continue to do that. The reason we put money away is to continue to provide services in times of crisis, and, quite frankly, I don’t think we are there yet.”

Q: What is the future?
A: “Realistically, we could be looking at a shortfall of $600 million, and this could become the new norm for a protracted period of time. Historically, economic downturns will run anywhere from six to 12 years. I’m looking out, and I think it’s irresponsible to drain our savings in four years because we want to maintain a $3.6 billion budget. I’m going to tell you there are a lot of things that could be cut out of state government.”

Q: What about using the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account, or rainy-day fund, as the governor would say, as a smoothing effect on budget constraints?
A: “I’m not opposed to dipping into the rainy-day account, but first we need to ask ourselves, ‘What can we do to be more efficient?’ We saw government over a 10-year period of time in the state of Wyoming almost double. We’ve managed to rein it back a couple hundred million, but I think given the rate of growth that we had and where we are at with the number of state employees needs to be considered.

“I interact in my professional career with a lot of state agencies, and I see a lot of areas that we can modify and streamline how government operates versus just jumping into the rainy-day fund.”

Q: What are the chances of Medicaid expansion happening this time around?
A: “I think it’s a fantasy. It’s been soundly rebuked the last two sessions. I guess I don’t understand where the governor is coming from. We are looking at anywhere from $10 million to $23 million being put in to do that. It makes more obligations and an additional strain on the budget. I’m cautiously optimistic the Joint Appropriations Committee will cut it out and it will never make it unless it comes back as an individual amendment on the budget bill.

“I can tell you, on the Senate side, and I believe on the House side, there’s no way you’re going to get Medicaid expansion through the Wyoming Legislature.”
OF RELEVANCE TO LARAMIE AND UW

Lean times: Laramie will feel cuts in state funding for local governments

By Joel Funk
Laramie Boomerang

While many Wyoming cities, towns and counties boom and bust depending on the fortunes of mineral industries, the city of Laramie and Albany County’s budgets are more intimately tethered to state funding for local governments.

Accounting for 43 percent of sales and use tax collections, retail trade is Albany County’s biggest source of revenue, according to Wenlin Liu, principal economist at the Wyoming State Economic Analysis Division.

Though this makes its economy more stable than mineral-rich counties, Albany County is one of the highest populated and poorest counties per capita in the state. Its largest employer, the University of Wyoming, has many features, including the smallest gender wage gap in the state, but it does not pay taxes into the city of Laramie’s coffers. As such, Laramie is heavily dependent on state funding for municipal governments to keep day-to-day operations funded.

Leaders from the Wyoming Association of Municipalities and the Wyoming County Commissioners Association jointly recommended Gov. Matt Mead keep funding for local governments as close to the last biennium as possible for direct distributions, or operational funds that can be used for matching funds, infrastructure and general operations, but not for personnel or raises.

In order to give local governments more control over how to disperse funds, WAM and WCCA asked Mead to forgo consensus funding, which is restricted to capital construction projects.

This is preferable for Laramie, City Manager Janine Jordan said, because direct distribution funds can still be used for capital construction projects that would have been funded by consensus appropriations.

“By appropriating funds to cities under direct distribution, it gives the local elected officials more latitude on where, when and why to use those funds,” Jordan said. “We can use it for whatever is most needed.”

Though local leaders would have the latitude to use those appropriations as they see fit, Mead’s recommendation for funding for local governments in his 2017-18 biennium budget was cut in half from the previous biennium.

Laramie’s elected officials and city staff have always known its funding would ebb and flow with the state, Jordan said. Even so, she said the cut is “significant and going to be very challenging.”

The city has a hiring freeze in place, as well as a freeze on requests for proposals on bids that were going out for projects as Laramie city staff and elected officials reassess capital plans for the next three years, Jordan said. Austerity measures would be felt in existing services for residents.

“We need to make sure we can pay the bills for those projects,” Jordan said. “We’re talking to council about what projects are viable to move forward and what are not. We also have to address how we may have to reduce services for programs we already have in place.”

UW PREPARES TO WEATHER FISCAL STORM

Gov. Matt Mead’s recommended budget cuts $5 million from state university

By Thaddeus Mast
Laramie Boomerang

About a third of Wyoming’s annual budget goes to education, be it K-12, community colleges or the University of Wyoming. All of these could take a hit if the Wyoming Legislature passes Gov. Matt Mead’s proposed 2017-18 biennium budget.

One of UW’s missions is to remain as nearly free as possible to students. That means the state foots most of UW’s bills through a block grant—more than $300 million in that grant alone. Mead’s budget recommends a reduction of $5 million. While it can seem like a drop in the bucket, $5 million can be used to fund several of UW’s programs.

“We’ll see how it all comes out in the end, but the university is going to have to make it work,” said Bill Mai, vice president of administration. “That’s 10 percent or so, maybe a little less, of the university’s utilities budget. It’s a lot of money.”

Even though the reduction will affect several university operations, Mai understands the situation the state is in and thinks UW will fare well in the budget-slashing storm.

Every year, the UW Board of Trustees creates a list of budget exception requests—normally, projects or programs the annual block grant cannot easily fund. This year, the trustees requested $160 million—the bulk for capital construction.

Mead’s budget recommended approval of about $60 million worth of projects, including about $6 million for a new fiscal system and $30 million for the science initiative, which Sen. Phil Nicholas, R-Laramie, strongly supports.

“It’s a matter of keeping (the initiative) active,” he said. “In this environment, trying to figure out how we accumulate the resources—it’s difficult. It’s a $100 million project. The idea was to put away about $30 million a year until we get there. It is in the governor’s budget, but the budget’s being crowded, so that’s my single largest effort or interest.”

Salary and staff compensation or raises were not in the budget. Nicholas said finding the funding in the upcoming budget would be very difficult.

“You find these long-term environments where raises are difficult, if at all, and we’ve been through that,” he said. “It’s difficult when there’s no way to increase your budget each year to offset rising salaries.”

Supporting education also is a top priority for Sen. Chris Rothfuss, D-Laramie.

“I was disappointed to see the university lose $5 million from the block grant—that was the one aspect that I really wasn’t happy about when it comes to the university,” he said.

“Holding the budget was one thing, but actually cutting the block grant was another. I don’t think we’ve reached a point where we need to start cutting our investment in the state, and I think education is the biggest investment we have.”
Phil Nicholas, Republican

**Senate District 10, Laramie**
SD 10 covers Albany County and the east side of Laramie.

**Legislative experience:** House, 1997-2004, Senate, 2005-present

**Age:** 60

**Current employment:** Attorney for Nicholas & Tangeman, LLC

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?**
"My highest priority is to complete the funding package for the science initiative, and it's a pretty ambitious project in and of itself. It's not a project that can be funded in a single year. It's got to be funded over multiple years, so it's a process of keeping legislators interested in the project and keeping the university. On the budget itself, my highest priority is to develop a legislative policy with respect to how we access the rainy-day funds – how long do we (use it), how do we plan them in our budgets, at what rate do we dissipate the funds and for what purposes."

**Session contact info:** 307-742-7140, Phil.Nicholas@wyoleg.gov.

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Chris Rothfuss, Democrat

**Senate District 9, Laramie**
SD 9 covers the west side of Laramie and parts of Albany County west of Laramie.

**Legislative experience:** Senate, 2011-present

**Age:** 43

**Current employment:** Independent chemical engineer consultant and half-time University of Wyoming faculty member

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?**
"My first priority is again going to be finding a way to expand Medicaid to accept that $250 million the state would receive in federal funds to ensure almost 18,000 Wyoming citizens have access to affordable health care, which will lead to an approximately $33 million budget savings. This is a great opportunity – to simultaneously save money for the state at a time of need and expand health-care coverage for our citizens. It's a huge win-win. I want to make sure that, as we go into this budget session, we don't simply come from a state of panic where we're afraid the sky is falling and we start slashing programs that are essential for the operation of the state and important to the people of the state of Wyoming."

**Session contact info:** 307-399-3556, Chris.Rothfuss@wyoleg.gov.

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Glenn Moniz, Republican

**House District 46, Laramie**
HD 46 covers parts of southwestern Albany County, including the communities of Centennial, Albany and Woods Landing-Jelm.

**Legislative experience:** House, 2008-present

**Age:** 71

**Current employment:** Business partner on commercial property

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?**
"Since I am on the Joint Appropriations Committee, obviously my first priority is to present a balanced budget to the floor of the House at the beginning of the session in February. I will also continue to support the University of Wyoming in all ways possible. At the present time, the governor has been kind (to UW) with his present budget proposal. This will be a challenge to maintain throughout the budgeting process, but I feel confident."

**Session contact info:** Glenn.Moniz@wyoleg.gov.

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Charles Pelkey, Democrat

**House District 45, Laramie**
HD 45 covers parts of central and western Albany County.

**Legislative experience:** Second year in the House

**Age:** 57

**Current employment:** Attorney at Neubauer, Pelkey and Goldfinger, LLP

**What are your priorities for the 2017-18 biennium budget?**
"I think at this point in time, it's probably not the time in panic. Obviously, we are suffering from a decrease in state revenues, largely because we have a single source of revenue – revenue for taxation of mineral exploitation and oil and gas. The good thing is, is that the Wyoming State Legislature has historically socked away a great deal of money in the past for just such a contingency. My hope is that we don't impose draconian cuts that will cost us more in the long run, and that we're able to use those reserves for the purposes for which they were intended."

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