

Wyoming Chamber of Commerce Executives - 2010 Legislative Session

The Wyoming Legislature holds its budget session for four weeks, from February 8 through March 5. Non-budget bills can only be introduced with a 2/3 vote of either the House or the Senate. Citizens can contact their legislators before and during the session by email, telephone or in person at www.legisweb.state.wy.us

Budget Issues

Support the Governor's Recommendations for the Wyoming Travel and Tourism budget.

- Tourism is an export industry and generates new money brought into the state.
- Provides thousands of career and part-time jobs, quality of life enhancements, tax relief for our residents, and immeasurable support of our various economic development initiatives through our promotions.
- The Governor's proposal for WTT is the same as the budget after the 10% cut July 1. It does not include the additional \$955,000.00 emergency advertising funding allocated last session.
- The Governor also recommended building the SE Wyoming Visitors Center because the land was donated, the project is already underway and studies prove that visitor's centers cause visitors to spend more time in the state.
- While the state marketing budget is \$11.7 million a year, the private sector spends well over \$14 million in marketing dollars. Neither the state nor private sector can be fully successful in Wyoming tourism promotion without the other!

Support the Governors Recommendation for the Wildlife Trust Fund. The budget proposal to administer the fund is the same as last biennium less the 10% reduction made July 1.

- The legislative appropriation provides for administration and augmentation of the permanent account and private donations.
- 160 projects in all 23 counties of the state have been funded since 2006 with over \$14 million allocated from WWNRT funds, with a total project value on the ground in excess of \$105 million.
- A reduction in the appropriation of the fund was cited as a possibility by Legislative Service Office staff during Joint Appropriations Committee meetings in December.

Support the Governors Recommendation for the Business Ready Communities/Community Readiness Grant & Loan Program through the Wyoming Business Council Budget for \$61.5 million.

- The Governors Recommendation is a 35% reduction from the previous biennium budget.
- A survey of local economic development organizations estimate that the amount appropriated is less than half what will be requested by local groups.
- The Business Ready Communities Grant and Loan Program (BRC) is the most important economic development tool available to local communities for job creation and economic growth.
- In light of Wyoming's highest unemployment rates since the 1980s, the BRC grant program will continue to diversify the state's tax base, create jobs and payroll, and allow Wyoming to compete with surrounding states for business recruitment, creation and expansion.

Business Development Issues

Support legislation to continue the sales tax exemption for equipment used in manufacturing production.

- Since state taxes are collected on the manufacturing product after it is produced, Wyoming joins over 30 states that provide a sales tax exemption for equipment used in manufacturing production.
- An annual report from the Department of Revenue indicates that the exemption has improved the manufacturing industry by making it possible for the industry to reinvest \$7.4 million in FY 2009 into employee wages, benefits and equipment.
- While the nation's manufacturing sector decreased over 6% from 2004-2008, Wyoming's manufacturing sector expanded.
- Excise taxes from manufacturing increased by \$4.8 million from FY 2008 to 2009.

Support the Economic Development Property Tax Exemption.

- A recent decision by the Wyoming Board of Equalization is forcing county assessors to assess economic development property as if it was ready to be sold tomorrow.
- One local economic development group estimated their property taxes would almost triple and they would have to re-evaluate whether or not they could support a business park, which is used for business recruitment and job creation.
- Business parks owned by non-profit Economic Development Organizations in Wyoming should have a property tax exemption in order to maintain this essential tool and should be exempt from property taxes until it is placed into private hands for "for-profit use".

Support Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for cities and towns.

- 48 states have TIF laws but Wyoming only has a similar law for downtown development authorities (DDA).
- Proposed legislation establishes a process for cities to identify 40-acre areas for development and utilizes sales and property tax revenue above a baseline to either assist development and/or issue revenue bonds.
- Does not increase taxes.

Support the Workforce Development Training Fund-Dept. of Workforce Services.

- The Workforce Training Fund is funded by a combination of designated funds from the unemployment tax and federal and state monies. A trained workforce is an integral part of the economic development process.

Tax Issues

Oppose the elimination of sales tax exemptions.

- Well-meaning legislation revising the sales and property tax laws for Wyoming can be dangerous for Wyoming businesses.
- Several sales tax exemptions were passed in previous years to stimulate or protect business from double taxation that include exemptions for aircraft manufacturing and airlines, manufacturing, free employee food and more.
- Statutory changes affecting business taxes need to be watched carefully in order to avoid unintended consequences.

Monitor

Senate File 1-80 Toll Road Study-

*Senate Joint Resolution _____ Health Care Freedom Act-*A constitutional amendment to the Wyoming constitution to prohibit government from requiring through penalties or legislation, for citizens to purchase health care coverage.

*House Bill 21 Minimum Wage-*Raises the state minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour and the minimum wage for tipped employees to \$5.00 an hour. Raises the training wage for new employees under 20 years of age to to \$6.15 an hour.

*House Bill 29-Taxation of Digital Products-*Directed towards the new world of digital products including in room lodging movies.

*House Bill 30-Authority of Department of Transportation-*Provides additional authority to purchase right of ways for safety reasons.

Senate File 23-Unemployment Compensation Amendments

Senate File 26-Eligibility Concealed Weapons Permit

Senate File 27-Government Competition- AN ACT relating to administration of government; providing a process for lodging concerns with and for review of competition by government entities with the private sector; requiring a report to the legislature; providing a sunset date; and providing for an effective date.