

Wyo Dems Session Priorities

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WYOMING LEGISLATURE'S DEMOCRATS PRIORITIZE POCKETBOOKS, COMMUNITIES, AND ECONOMY FOR THE UPCOMING 2024 BUDGET SESSION

JACKSON – How do we address the real problems that Wyoming families and communities face? That question guides the priorities of the Wyoming Legislature's Democratic Caucus as it looks to the start of the 2024 budget session on Feb. 12.

As many of their Republican colleagues divide themselves between warring factions, the Wyoming Legislature's Democrats remain committed to finding common ground and creating common sense policy solutions.

"We know people in Wyoming are worried that there are too few good-paying jobs in our state, that healthcare and housing cost too much, and that no matter how hard you work it's tough to save and get ahead," House Minority Floor Leader Mike Yin said. "Wyoming is a great state, but we've struggled to figure out how to diversify our economy for the next generation. The Legislature's Democrats are ready to work hard in 2024 to give our constituents what they need and demand right now, and also to build a better future."

Education and job training, improving healthcare access, property tax relief, voter transparency, and protecting public

lands and individual freedoms are some of the major themes Wyoming Democrats will focus on during the upcoming budget session. Despite the heated controversies some of these topics inspire, the Democrats vow to take a civil approach to their duties on behalf of the people of our state.

“The level of bickering and dishonesty is really at an all-time high in politics, and the Wyoming Legislature is unfortunately not immune to that,” Senate Minority Floor Leader Chris Rothfuss said. “But, as Democrats, we believe too strongly that the people of Wyoming can get together as neighbors and find solutions to take part in that kind of thing. We will always put what’s best for Wyoming first.”

The Legislature will have more than a half-billion-dollar surplus to work with as it crafts the state’s next two-year budget. This comes after the 2023 general session, when lawmakers voted to put a record-breaking \$1.4 billion into savings. The Legislature’s Democrats are joining a growing bipartisan chorus to give Wyoming taxpayer money back to the people in the form of better services and tax relief where it’s needed in 2024, instead of hiding more away in permanent savings.

“There are incredibly innovative things we can do to improve our communities that cost nothing or very little,” Rep. Trey Sherwood said. “At the same time, it’s our duty as legislators to use taxpayer money in a way that benefits residents right now and creates a better state for our children. This is the year we should be doing that.”

Community investments that the Legislature’s Democrats plan to support this year include funding for increased K-12 teacher pay, mental healthcare and suicide prevention, affordable housing, preschool and childcare, and funding for the Wyoming

Departments of Health and Transportation.

Rep. Sherwood said she hopes that these strategic investments can work side-by-side with other, low-cost proposals—like a bill she’s sponsoring to make it easier for cities to clean up or renovate abandoned buildings—in order to incentivize communities to thrive.

A portion of the budget surplus that the Legislature will manage this session comes from property tax payments, which have been rising dramatically in some areas of the state as property values increase.

Democratic Legislators are eager to bring ideas and solutions to the property tax conversation that carefully balance residents’ need for relief against the critical role that property tax revenues play in funding local public services, particularly in Wyoming’s rural areas.

“We need to be honest about our tax structure and what some of the proposals on the table right now would do to education, law enforcement, local hospitals, and local government if they passed,” Rep. Liz Storer said. “I represent a part of Teton County that’s been hit hard by tax increases and some people certainly do need relief. But we have a shared responsibility to ensure Wyoming remains a place where hardworking people can afford to raise a family, where our children can succeed, and future generations can thrive. That doesn’t happen if we dismantle our tax structure and local government.”

While Wyoming’s Democratic legislators are ready to address the bread-and-butter issues that directly impact residents’ pocketbooks and the state’s economy in 2024, they are also determined to continue to protect individual freedoms that are increasingly under threat.

Reproductive healthcare, public land access, and overzealous law enforcement are all areas where Wyomingites have felt threatened in recent years by government overreach. Rep. Karlee Provenza said she plans to sponsor a version of a bill that overwhelmingly passed the Legislature in 2015 but was vetoed by then-Gov. Matt Mead, which would have required criminal suspects to be convicted of a crime before the government could legally seize their property.

Provenza said she also plans to sponsor a budget amendment for a Department of Health program that decreases unwanted pregnancies by funding long-acting birth control, as well as reversals.

"Freedom is fundamental to who we are as Wyomingites, and I bring that fact with me to every conversation I have at the capitol," Provenza said. "Whether it's freedom to step over the corner of a millionaire's ranch in order to enjoy my public lands, or the freedom to choose when and how to grow my family, this is an essential value that I hold, and I know my Democratic colleagues do, too."

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