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Author

Schuhmann, Robert A.

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Wyoming: “A Net Positive Session”¹

Robert A. Schuhmann
University of Wyoming

Introduction

Wyoming’s general legislative session concluded March 6, 2015 with the passage of 185 bills and nearly \$285 million in new spending.² Because this was a general session rather than a budget session, very few budget issues were addressed. However, key budgetary matters this year included: (1) addressing a \$222 million shortfall brought about by falling oil prices and (2) several new capital construction projects spread across the state and at the University of Wyoming. Wyoming democrats in the legislature were profoundly disappointed by one financial measure, the failure to pass a Medicaid expansion plan. According to Mary Throne, House Minority Floor Leader, “We had the ability to insure 17,000 people and save the state money. We had the support of business, local governments—certainly the support of my community, the largest city in the state—and yet for completely illogical reasons it was rejected” (Brown 2015).

State of the Economy

Budget Health of the State

According to the January 2015 Consensus Revenue Estimating Group’s (CREG) Revenue Forecast, Wyoming maintained a relatively stable revenue stream over the last year, although a mixture of reduced severance taxes and increased sales and use taxes left Wyoming with an approximate \$200 million projected shortfall.

Sales and use tax forecasts were projected upward by an additional .8 percent from the October 2014 forecast for a year-over-year increase of 7.7 percent, suggesting that the overall economy is stable if not continuing to improve. Wyoming’s major revenue malfunction is connected to the rapid drop in oil and gas prices. Severance tax estimates were revised downward for the FY16 biennium by 15.4 percent from earlier October 2014 estimates for a year-over-year decrease of 11.8 percent.

A small drop in projected federal mineral royalties coupled with a small increase in investment income lowers overall CREG projections by \$217.6 million. Should this projection be accu-

¹ Trevor Brown, *Wyoming Tribune Eagle*, Headline 3/6/15.

² This legislative session was a “regular” session rather than a “budget” session, meaning that only supplementary budget issues could be considered. Even-numbered years are reserved for budget sessions, while odd-numbered years are reserved for the general session.

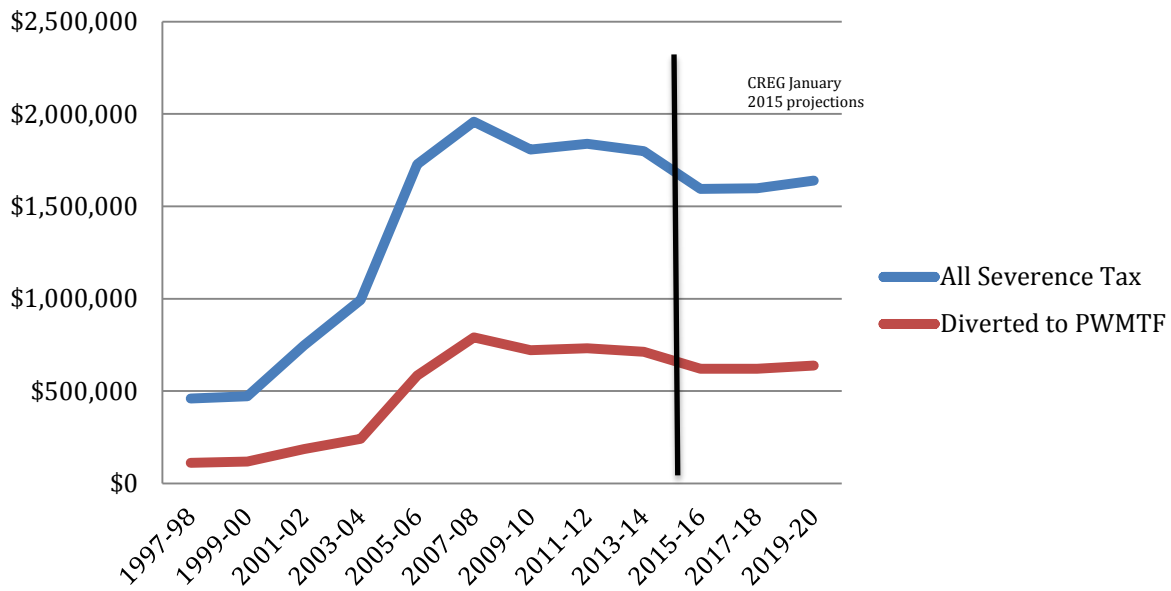
rate, the state may see a 15.7 percent revenue reduction in FY16. According to CREG, “although price has seen a significant decline, production continues to surge” (January 2015) (See Table 1). Specifically, despite lower prices, CREG expects production to rise by 3.7 million barrels in 2015 and by an additional 1.6 million barrels in 2016 (*ibid.*).

Wyoming’s economy tends to run counter to the economic trends experienced by the national economy. As the nation booms, Wyoming’s economy lags behind. As the nation’s economy cools, Wyoming’s fiscal situation often improves. Currently, Wyoming’s economy remains supported by three primary industries: extractive industries such as minerals/oil/gas, agriculture, and tourism. Projections indicate that the mining sector will continue to be an important contributor to the Wyoming economy as coal, natural gas, oil, and trona (a mineral later processed into soda ash) production expands to meet growing demand even though prices in some sectors have cooled. Luckily, much of Wyoming was spared from the subprime mortgage woes that impacted many other parts of the country over the previous decade. Wyoming never experienced the housing “boom” and therefore never experienced the full force of the housing “bust.” Unfortunately, the instability of oil and natural gas prices continue to cloud Wyoming’s budgetary landscape. Oil production is forecast up; natural gas production is slightly down, with coal and trona production predicted to be steady.

One of the most important sources of income for the Wyoming budget is the Permanent Wyoming Mineral Trust Fund (PWMTF). In 1975, when the Trust Fund was first established, the intent was to provide a much-needed stabilizing force during the creation of the biennial budget (the PWMTF was created by a constitutional amendment passed in 1974). Interest from the fund was to be utilized as a relatively consistent and predictable revenue source for the General Fund, the state’s main operating account. Legislators viewed this as something vitally necessary for the boom and bust cycles inherent in an economy built largely on mineral extraction (Western 2012). As of June 30, 2014, the market value of the fund sits at \$6.98 billion (Wyoming State Treasurer 2014, 5). Significant revenue in the recent years of the boom cycle, when natural gas prices reached an all-time high, was diverted to the fund in an effort to increase its corpus and hedge off the effects of the bust cycle. Article 15, Sec. 19 of the Wyoming Constitution guarantees that a tax of 1.5 percent be imposed on the value of all minerals extracted and that this tax flow automatically into the fund, but an additional one percent tax is currently deposited there at lawmakers’ discretion (Wyoming Constitution). In terms of the value of all severance tax dollars collected each year, of those, roughly 40 percent are deposited into the PWMTF; the remainder are directly allocated to the general fund budget (see, for example, Graph 1) (CREG 2015).

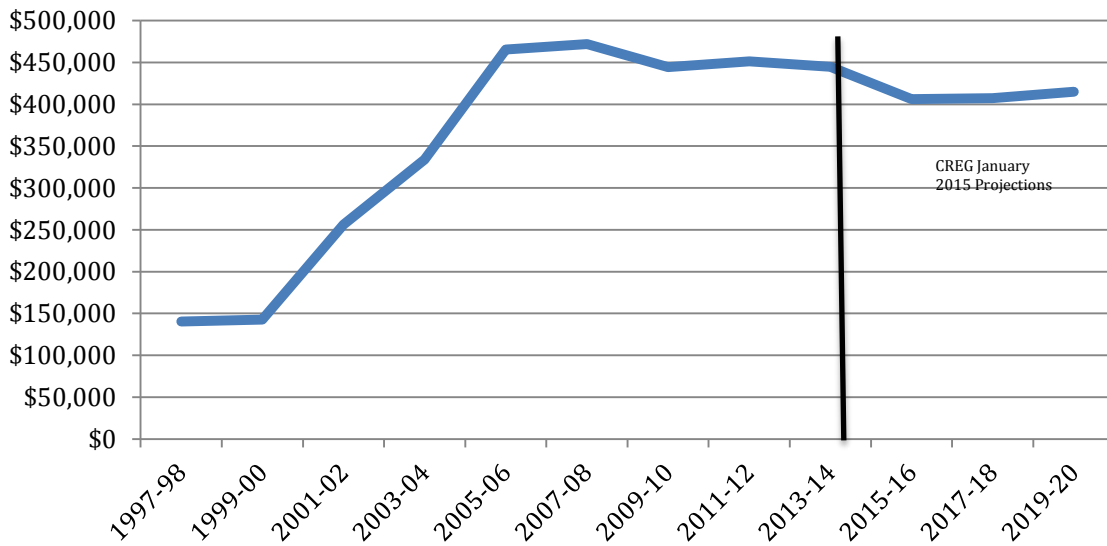
A number of economists indicate that the percentage of revenues earned from the PWMTF, going to the General Fund, is relatively high. According to Boettner, Kriesky, McIlmoil, and Paulhus (2012), only Wyoming and North Dakota deposit all fund earnings into their general fund (11). Current sentiment is that Wyoming simply has no other stable revenue stream available at this time. Samuel Western’s analysis “shows that from 1987–2011, interest from the PWMTF has supplied an average of 18.6 percent of the general fund revenue” (Western 2012), with that figure climbing to 28.6 percent in 2014 (Wyoming State Treasurer 2014) while direct severance tax collections poured into the General Fund over the last six biennia have accounted for an additional 20 percent, with a slight dip in 2014 to 17 percent. As Gregory Nickerson notes, “the Permanent Mineral Trust fund has grown by 55 percent over the past four years” (2014). Some argue this has created an attitude of complacency within the state in terms of economic diversification and tax diversification. There seems little incentive to diversify the economy more with the

**Graph 1. Severance Tax \$ Distribution into PMTF
(in thousands)**



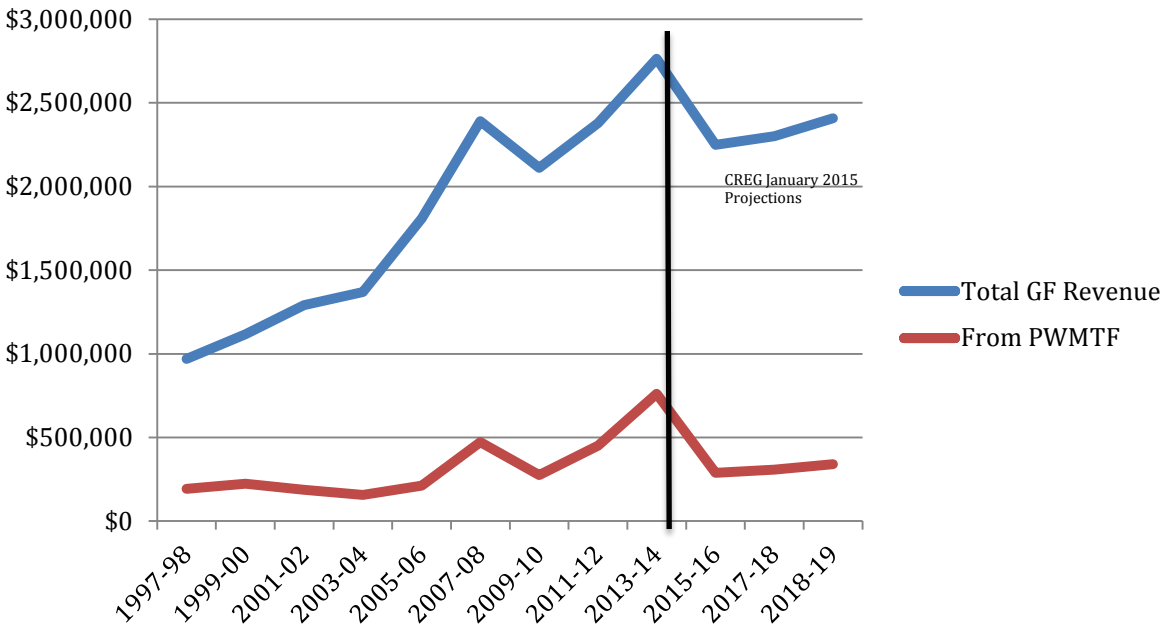
Source: CREG, January 2015, Table 4.

**Graph 2. PWMTF GF Income
(In thousands)**



Source: CREG, January 2015, Table 1.

Graph 3. General Fund Revenues
(in thousands)



Source: CREG, January 2015, Table 1.

relatively high percentage of interest from the WPMTF used for the General Fund. Indeed, when measuring economic diversity using the Hachman Index (HI), compared to the United States as a whole, Wyoming has the least economically diverse economy in the nation (with Alaska—energy, Nevada—tourism, West Virginia—coal and natural gas, and Oklahoma—mining and agriculture finishing the top five (Boettner, et al. 2012, 4).

In addition to the PWMTF, the state has a Legislative Stabilization and Reserve Account (LSRA). The so-called “rainy-day” account, as of December 2014, had \$2 billion, with an informal proposed savings goal of \$2.5 billion by 2018 (Nickerson 2014). One continuing concern over this fund is its “appropriate size” (Brown 2015). Some legislators maintain that this fund should amount to a full biennium’s expenses, which would put the target size at \$3.3 billion (Brown 2014b). Mary Throne, the House Minority Floor Leader, worried about the growing size of the savings account and suggests that the state could “use the money for immediate needs” rather than plow it into this type of savings (*ibid.*). The hope is that over the next year or so the state will take a look at how much this savings account should hold and what is needed to stabilize short-term revenue requirements.

In terms of the Wyoming tax structure, much of the state appears to be “business-friendly” and continues to have a supportive business environment. According to the Tax Foundation, the State Business Tax Climate Index (2015) continues to rank Wyoming #1 overall for its State Business Tax Climate (ranking South Dakota 2nd, Nevada 3rd, Alaska 4th, Montana 7th, and Utah 9th). The Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council’s latest (2014) Business Tax Index

shows Wyoming ranks 4th, behind Nevada (1st), South Dakota (2nd), and Texas (3rd) (SBE Council 2014).

Currently, Wyoming collects no taxes on intangible assets (bank accounts, stocks, or bonds), retirement income earned and received from other states, personal income, corporate income, or business inventory. According to the Business Tax Index (2014), Wyoming used to have the second lowest state gas tax of \$0.14, just behind Alaska (\$0.08), but is now mid-pack (21st) with an additional 10 cents on top of the 14. In addition, Wyoming is 45th for unemployment taxes, 44th for property taxes as a share of personal income, and 43rd for sales and excise taxes as share of personal income (*ibid.*). According to the Beacon Hill Institute, Wyoming has the lowest electrical prices per million BTU and according to Dun and Bradstreet, the 2nd lowest business failure rate (WY Sheridan Works 2013). Furthermore, the state only began taxing the mineral industry in 1969. With no personal or corporate income tax and relatively low fuel taxes, however, Wyoming is more reliant on the few taxes it does have and becomes more susceptible to price fluctuations for those commodities that it does tax. In addition, the state becomes more reliant on property and sales taxes to fund the costs of state and local government (and these taxes tend, therefore, to be higher as noted above).

Because Wyoming's economy is only loosely tethered to the rest of the country's economic condition, the state missed most of the recent recession. Historically, Wyoming lags behind the nation in entering recession, as well as in pulling out of it, and the state's economy has not been as negatively affected as it has been elsewhere. The past decade has been a period of incredible growth in Wyoming, with job growth close to 30 percent since 2001 and state government revenue doubling. Indicative of some continued economic growth, in 2014 the Goss Institute for Economic Research published the state's "business conditions index." Wyoming registered a 55.8 (down from last year's 59.4). According to the publishers, a number greater than 50 still points to an expanding economy over the next three to six months. By way of comparison, Utah's October 2014 number was 50.9 and Colorado's number for the same month was 44.9 (Goss Institute 2014).

Energy

According to the Consensus Revenue Estimating Group (CREG), natural gas continues to be the most significant component to Wyoming's mineral revenue stream, accounting for 35.5 percent of the state's total severance tax distribution in 2014 (CREG January 2015, Table 6). The price for natural gas in 2014 landed at \$4.70 and is expected to drop to \$3.80 by the end of 2015. Production, too, is projected to decline slightly year-over-year by four percent. Each \$1 change in the price per mcf of natural gas equals approximately \$120 million (up or down) in the state General Fund. According to one analysis, natural gas prices are the manic-depressive of the commodities (Western 2012). Unfortunately for Wyoming, changing prices coupled with variable demand keep the legislature on pins and needles.

After seeing its production decline in 2009 for the first time in a decade, Wyoming's coal industry bounced back slightly in 2010 and 2011 as prices and demand regained strength along with the national economy. Unfortunately, Wyoming coal production fell by 3.3 percent in 2013 to mark the fourth consecutive year of declining output, and has held steady in 2014. CREG forecasts that both price and production will remain stable over the next few years, with a slight rebound in subsequent years as natural gas prices climb and power generation plants switch back to coal from natural gas (see Table 1).

Table 1. Price and Production Level Assumptions for Major Mineral Commodities

Year	Crude Oil		Natural Gas		Coal		Trona	
	Price	Production	Price	Production	Price	Production	Price	Production
2014	\$80.00	74,900,000	\$4.70	1,925,000,000	\$13.50	385,000,000	\$75.00	20,000,000
2015	\$50.00	78,600,000	\$3.80	1,848,000,000	\$13.50	385,000,000	\$75.00	20,000,000
2016	\$55.00	80,200,000	\$4.00	1,793,000,000	\$13.75	385,000,000	\$75.00	20,500,000
2017	\$55.00	81,000,000	\$4.00	1,757,000,000	\$13.80	385,000,000	\$75.00	20,500,000
2018	\$60.00	81,000,000	\$4.00	1,722,000,000	\$13.85	390,000,000	\$75.00	21,000,000
2019	\$60.00	81,800,000	\$4.00	1,687,000,000	\$13.90	390,000,000	\$75.00	21,000,000
2020	\$65.00	83,500,000	\$4.00	1,653,000,000	\$13.95	390,000,000	\$75.00	21,000,000

Source: CREG, January 2015.

Trona production levels, however, have bounced back quicker than expected with production levels expected to be relatively stable for at least three more years. Prices are expected to stabilize at \$75 per ton, generating much-needed tax revenue (CREG January 2015) (see also Table 1 for mineral production estimates).

Although today’s oil production levels are far below those of the 1980s, as prices have risen (at least up until six months ago) over the last few years, so has production. Instead of projecting declines in Wyoming oil production, there is evidence that production has stabilized and is in fact growing. Indeed, the number of oilrigs operating in the state has grown by nearly 11 percent over the same period last year (for a total of 56) while the number of drilling rigs nationally fell by 17 percent (as of August 2014) (Storrow 2014).

Related to the extractive industries, 2014 sales and use taxes were up from 2013 by 8.25 percent, with an additional increase for 2015 projected to be an additional 7.68 percent. These increases are reflective of the improving (at least until late 2014) economic picture, including oil- and gas-related jobs as well an increase in personal income levels. As the January 2015 CREG report notes, sales and use tax collections have been revised upward, but this is mostly accounted for by “robust realized collections through the first half of the fiscal year” (p. 1).

Employment

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment in Wyoming in the third quarter of 2014 was 4.2 percent, still below the national average of 5.6 percent. In Wyoming, during a typical year, almost all county unemployment rates peak in January, and then decline through the spring and summer months, reaching their lowest point in August or September.

As the US economy has slowly been improving, unemployment in Wyoming continues to fall due, in large part, to the “continuing growth in the state’s mineral and energy extraction industries, particularly in oil extraction endeavors across the state” (Chilton 2014a). As noted in Table 2, employment was up in almost every sector of the economy compared to the same time last year (*ibid.*). Interestingly, according to the state’s principal economist Wenlin Lieu, “residential construction hasn’t seen much of an increase, so we think lots of the increase [in construction jobs] is from school construction, business construction, and some pipeline construction” (*ibid.*). Unemployment, despite being below the national average, did increase slightly from last year due

Table 2. December 2014 Wyoming Nonfarm Employment (Preliminary)

Category	Number of Jobs	12-month % change
Statewide	297,100	1.4%
Mining and Logging	27,000	2.3%
Construction	21,600	0.9%
Leisure and Hospitality	35,600	0.3%
Professional/Business Services	19,700	4.8%
Government	71,900	0.0%
Trade, Transportation and Utilities	56,700	2.5%
Manufacturing	9,800	0.0%
Information	3,800	0.0%
Financial Activities	11,300	(0.9%)
Education and Health	27,400	1.1%
Other	12,300	7%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, <<http://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.wy.htm>>.

to factors like students aging into the workforce (*ibid.*). Despite recent employment growth, overall unemployment remains high compared to the period of 2005–2008, where unemployment rates were in the 2–3 percent range. This means that while growth has occurred in Wyoming, the state has yet to recoup the total job loss that occurred as a result of the recession in 2009 and 2010.

One additional positive impact of low unemployment and the growth of the oil and gas industry is that wages in Wyoming are on the rise. According to Jim Robinson, principal economist for Wyoming’s Economic Analysis Division, “Wyoming has the seventh highest income per capita in the country” (Peterson 2014). Wyoming’s average wages in 2013 were \$52,826 compared to the national average of \$44,765.

Demographics

Wyoming, while still the least-populated state in the nation, had the 14th fastest population growth from 2000 to 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). That trend continues with 2014 numbers showing an overall increase in the state’s population from April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014 of 3.6 percent with a total population of 584,153 (Census Bureau Quickfacts 2015). As noted earlier, much of the state’s population increase can be attributed to the recent job growth, the bulk of which has taken place in the oil and natural gas industry. However, for the first time since 2001, between July 2013 and July 2014, Wyoming’s net immigration was nearly 2,200 people outward (but the state’s total population grew by just 930 when accounting for natural births and deaths).

This recent outmigration is tied to the energy sector—namely, the drop in natural gas prices and subsequent loss of jobs in that portion of the state’s energy sector” (Chilton 2014a). Add-

Table 3. Political Composition of State Government

Session	63rd		62nd		61st	
Year	2015–2016		2013–2014		2011–2012	
	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep	Dem	Rep
Governor		*		*	*	
House	9	51	8	52	10	50
Senate	4	26	4	26	7	23

Source: www.nga.org; <http://soswy.state.wy.us/Information/docs/LegComposition.pdf>.

ing to this trajectory is the fact that “other states with lots of mineral extraction industries like Colorado, North Dakota, and Texas were really expanding fast during that period” (*ibid.*).

The median age in Wyoming has climbed over the last three decades from 32.1 (1990) to 36.2 (2000) and then 36.8 in 2010, according to the US Census Bureau (2012). The “graying of Wyoming” has slowed, but this trend is not expected to last. The population of persons over the age of 65 continues to increase slowly but steadily, showing an increase from 12.7 percent in 2011 to 13.1 percent in 2012, and another increase to 13.5 percent in 2013. The rise in the overall median age is kept in check by increased employment in the oil and gas industry. As this employment sector slows (and overall employment growth slows), Wyoming is expected to return to previous trends where younger populations out-migrate, leaving behind older workers (Census Bureau 2015).

Political Composition of State Government

Wyoming has a strong conservative history. Eight of the 10 territorial governors were Republican and of the 31 governors the state has seen, 18 have represented the GOP (National Governors Association 2014). For the last two decades Republican state legislators have outnumbered Democrats by at least six to one; the 63rd legislature has 51 Republicans and nine Democrats in the state House and 26 Republicans and four Democrats in the Senate. This partisan distribution is not surprising. According to the Secretary of State’s Office (2015), in March of 2015 79 percent of the state’s 196,206 registered voters were Republican and 19.4 percent were Democrat; the remainder classified as Constitution, Libertarian, or unaffiliated. In addition, the state has a Republican governor, replacing a Democrat who was term-limited. In the last general election in 2014, Republicans maintained all five of the top state elected positions and control both Houses with an overwhelming majority. Indeed, Republicans hold every statewide office.

In the spirit of Wyoming’s part-time “citizen legislature,” Wyoming legislators may meet for *not more than* 60 days in odd-numbered years, although the governor may convene additional days for special sessions. Every other year, 20 days are reserved for the budget session (occurring in even-numbered years). Furthermore, Wyoming legislators do not maintain offices in the Capitol, and rarely do so in their home districts. Instead, they have a desk on the chamber floor and possibly a file cabinet in a committee meeting room. Legislators also lack the resources of a personal staff. The Legislative Services Office (LSO)—a nonpartisan central office—and temporary session staff are used in lieu of individual professional support personnel. The LSO staff

evaluates executive branch programs, provides technical support, and audits school finances. The Legal Services Division of the LSO provides general and legal research in addition to drafting bills for committees and individual legislators. The LSO's Budget and Fiscal Section provides support to the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC) and to the rest of the legislature on budget matters and general state expenditures. The manager of this section also serves as cochair of the state's Consensus Revenue Estimating Group (CREG). CREG is responsible for projecting state revenues from the general fund, mineral severance tax, federal mineral royalties, and the Common School Land Income Account, and for the state's assessed property valuations.

The Budget and Major Current Issues

During this year's general legislative (nonbudget) session, elected officials approved a nearly \$285 million budget bill for supplemental state spending that was "heavy on capital project spending" (Associated Press 2015). This supplemental budget augments the regular, two-year, \$3.5 billion General Fund budget that lawmakers passed last year during the regular budget session (*ibid.*). In addition, the legislature approved "intercepting" approximately \$200 million originally intended to go into the "rainy day" account and placing it into the state's general coffers to make up for a similarly sized expected shortfall for the upcoming fiscal year.

As a nonbudget year, very few financial issues came to the attention of elected officials. In the end, a few highlights of this year's supplemental budget include:

- \$37.5 million for the restoration and rehabilitation of the State Capitol
- \$20 million for the University of Wyoming High Altitude Sports Performance Training Center
- \$15 million for UW unconventional oil and gas research
- \$5 million for community college matching funds
- \$4 million for UW athletic competitiveness
- \$2.5 million for UW literacy program matching funds
- \$30 million for the UW science initiative account
- \$25 million for the state facilities construction account
- \$20 million for state facilities in Casper
- \$15 million for community college STEM education matching funds
- \$8 million for Corbett Pool at UW (*ibid.*)

And in a new form of revenue, which was approved during last year's budget session, the new Wyoming lottery's ticket sales have been brisk since its August 2014 start date. Over the last six months the lottery has sold more than \$6.5 million worth of tickets, with individual players winning more than \$843,000. Until mid-January 2015, players have had access to only the two largest multistate lotteries (Powerball and Mega Millions). Now, players have access to state-level games where individuals will compete against other lottery players from within Wyoming (which apparently is something that consumers have asked for) (Chilton 2015).

The new lottery began with a \$2.6 million private loan to get it up and running. By the end of January, the lottery had \$500,000 of that paid back and will continue to pay the private loan down before it begins remitting revenues back to the state. Once the private loan is paid off, according to lottery CEO Jean Clontz, the law requires [the lottery] to pay up to 50 percent of the revenue

back to the players in prizes, then we pay operational costs” (*ibid.*). Afterward, the first \$6 million in profits go to local governments. Anything beyond \$6 million goes into the Wyoming Education Trust Fund.

The Budgeting Process

Appropriating public funds is one of the greatest challenges faced by the Wyoming State Legislature. Budget requests are prepared by agencies in conjunction with the Budget Division of the Department of Administration and Information. Each summer prior to a budget session, the Budget Division prepares a standard request for each agency to submit to the governor. This template contains budget figures that are roughly equivalent to the amount the agency received in the prior biennium with adjustments made for fund transfers and changing revenue streams. After the agency reviews this standard outline they may make “exception” or “expanded” requests if changes in funding are necessary to: (1) maintain current levels of service, (2) transfer funds from intra-agency programs, or (3) expand services.

Once the requests are completed, agency budget requests are returned to the Budget Division in the fall (September or October). A package of agency requests is then presented to the governor. The governor compares the agency request with revenue forecasts developed by CREG. Next, the governor, in conjunction with the Budget Division, prepares his budget recommendations to give to the legislature. This can take place no later than the first of December, prior to the beginning of the budgeting session. It is interesting to note that the budget requests for the legislative and judicial branches are not included in this package—they are submitted separately.

The governor’s budget request is analyzed by the LSO. The LSO’s “detailed reports” help the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC) review agency requests while its “summary reports” provide the committee with an overview of the administration’s total request, taking into account forecasted revenues. The JAC—a bipartisan committee made up of members of both chambers—meets in December or January prior to the budget session to hold agency budget hearings. During these hearings, agency heads present their department’s achievements, goals, and action plans, along with detailed explanations of their budgets. Although the JAC will ask questions during this time, formal action is not taken. After hearings with all of the agencies, the JAC examines each budget, program-by-program, resulting in a recommendation to approve, deny, or adjust the agency’s funding request. Although this hearing/recommendation process takes four or five weeks, this procedure expedites the short legislative budget session. After the JAC finishes its preliminary budget work, the LSO’s budget staff writes two identical general appropriations bills for concurrent introduction into both the Senate and the House. Sections of each bill are then assigned to JAC members for explanation on the floor of each chamber.

The budgeting process in Wyoming makes it difficult for ordinary citizens to learn about how the state handles its finances. Like other states, it must balance its budget every year. Yet the money available to the legislature in a given year is difficult to determine in advance and can be manipulated by the legislature itself. Having billions of dollars in a trust fund is a boon to the state budget each year, but it also means that the amount of money the fund earns varies based on larger, national market forces. Wyoming legislatures can have increased revenue to spend, while cutting taxes, if the trust fund’s returns are high. Conversely, lawmakers can find themselves pinched, despite their efforts to raise revenue, if the markets cause a drop in the trust fund’s return.

The complexity of these budgeting factors is illustrated almost every year when the legislature seems to “find” money in the multitude of state accounts. This state of affairs is perhaps exacerbated by Wyoming’s tradition of having citizen legislatures, who are perhaps unable to devote the time or resources to investigating the budget in as much detail as they would like.

Summary and Conclusion

This year’s 40-day legislative session was completed in only 37, and was marked with little financial fanfare. Diverting money intended to be plowed into the rainy day account made up a \$200 million budget shortfall, and \$285 million in additional supplemental appropriations were targeted at statewide capital improvements. Lower-than-expected severance taxes, along with a slight uptick in sales and use taxes caught the state off-guard and rattled the legislative cage more than usual. Thankfully, as the January 2015 CREG report noted, “the retail trade and tourism industries are expected to drive growth in the state and to some extent help offset some of the drag that could be experienced from a projected slowdown in crude oil exploration and drilling” (p. 2). In addition, “investment income estimates for both the PWMTF and Pooled Account are on the rise due to better than projected performance of fixed income” (*ibid.*). Given the drastic reduction in oil prices, Wyoming finding itself with a 5.7 percent budget shortfall seems like a gift—especially when the state’s economy has so few economic legs to stand on.

As noted earlier, the debate over spending and savings continues. One line of thought is that the Legislative Stabilization and Reserve Account (LSRA or the “rainy day account”) should be equal to the amount that the state spends on its two-year general fund budget—\$3.3 billion, suggesting that it should be a “rainy season” account rather than a rainy day account. Others argue that there is “no justification for getting the fund up to that level. We have no justification for one full biennium’s worth of savings” said House Minority Floor Leader Rep. Mary Throne (Brown 2014b). In part, the reason for the concern is that the LSRA earns lower interest than the PMTF, which itself earns approximately five percent. To this last point, during this legislative session, elected officials passed a bill that would allow a potential constitutional amendment be placed on the 2016 ballot allowing for the state to invest this rainy-day fund (and other accounts) in stocks and equities in the same way that the PWMTF can. The idea is that millions are lost each year to the strict investment practices currently allowed by law (Brown 2014a).

The single most frequently uttered question, rhetorical or otherwise, is “what about the rainy day fund?” Are we putting in too much? Too little? Or is it finally time to make a withdrawal? These questions plague citizens, editorial writers, legislators, and the governor (and academics). No answer appears imminent. The state now has somewhere in the neighborhood of four rainy day accounts: Permanent Wyoming Mineral Trust Fund, Legislative Stabilization and Reserve Account, Budget Reserve Account, and a new account (apparently nameless), into which \$150 million was deposited in 2013 should the governor run out of money to pay bills while the legislature is out of session. This does not include almost countless other state savings accounts into which the state deposits all sorts of severance tax, many of which legislatively can only be spent on certain line items, such as K-12 education. With Wyoming’s narrow economic footprint, the forecast is large, steady-savings into the foreseeable future.

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