



**West**

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

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## Wyoming State Visit

On February 28 and March 1 of this year CSG West Director, Edgar Ruiz, and CSG West staff Rich Lindsey, visited the Wyoming Capitol where they met with legislative leaders to hear about policy challenges facing the state and to discuss CSG West programming, including the Western Legislative Academy (WLA) and the upcoming annual meeting in Utah in September. Key visits involved a joint meeting with the Speaker of the House and President of the Senate, the Legislative Service Director, Chief of Staff to the Governor, and a luncheon with WLA alumni and eligible applicants.

Also joining Mr. Ruiz during the visit was Marc Pelka, the Deputy Director of Programs State Initiatives for the CSG Justice Center. Mr. Pelka briefed legislative leaders on how the Justice Center can assist states through legislation to contain correction costs and lower recidivism. He also briefed leaders about his discussions with officials from the Wyoming Department of Corrections on organizing a “Public Safety” day conference in June that through panel formats will take an in depth look at the corrections system in Wyoming. Participation will involve all three branches of government and key stakeholders.

This year’s 64<sup>th</sup> Wyoming Legislature was a twenty-day budget session. Of the 330 bills introduced, 142 passed with a key piece of legislation containing the state’s biennial budget bill. Legislators faced a \$900 million structural deficit going into the session and as discussions continued it was clear there were differing funding philosophies between the House and Senate. This led to an eventual compromise in which House funding priorities will be utilized in one year of the biennium and the Senate’s in the other year. Overall the legislation passed and Governor Mead signed an \$8.63 billion budget with \$2.9 billion appropriated from the State’s General Fund. The session was extended by two days for the House and Senate to agree on separate budget funding for capital construction projects and education, areas that were separated out from the overall budget bill.

Legislators also addressed several other critical issues facing the state. Funding of \$41.5 million was approved for economic diversification efforts including stabilizing and improving the state’s commercial air service, increasing broadband capacity across the state, and ramping up the state’s workforce training programs. Lawmakers also approved a \$5 million appropriation to keep WyoTech, a technical school for auto mechanics and body work, open under new management in Laramie.

Bills were also passed that focused on health care. Of key importance to the Senate President was the creation of an opioid task force that will examine a broad range of topics to address opioid addiction in the state. The task force will consist of lawmakers,



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pharmacists, physicians, and other stakeholders. Additional bills passed will require providers to file controlled substance prescriptions to the Wyoming State Board of Pharmacy, as well as allow licensing boards to discipline health care providers for sexual misconduct.

One of the more contentious issues explored was a “crimes against critical infrastructure” bill. The bill was designed to bring tougher penalties against protesters at facilities such as oil pipelines. Penalties targeted trespassing on, impeding or damaging facilities including pipelines, power plants, telecommunications towers, dams, data centers and refineries. Although the bill passed both the House and Senate, Governor Mead vetoed the bill saying it was imprecisely crafted. The Senate voted to override the veto but only one third of House members voted in favor of the override resulting in the bill not becoming law.