



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT FOR THE DOTNET GENERATION

HOW TO MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD IN THE WYOMING LEGISLATIVE PROCESS


SIX STEPS TO STAY INFORMED AND SPEAK UP

Chances are, if you are a student, you may feel cynical about politics and the legislative process. The process itself may seem overwhelming and intimidating to you. Perhaps you believe that politicians don't care what you think. You may even believe that if you aren't old enough to vote, that you have no voice. In fact, a survey conducted by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) finds that the DotNet Generation – which represents approximately 40 million young Americans between 15 and 26 years of age who were born after 1976 – confirms this level of disengagement in public policy on the part of young people. In *Citizenship: A Challenge for All Generations*, NCSL summarizes the public opinion survey noting, “young people do not understand the ideals of citizenship, they are disengaged from the political process, they lack the knowledge necessary for effective self-government, and their appreciation and support of American democracy is limited, at best.” According to NCSL, “when it comes to political activities – such as contacting a public official or working on or contributing to a political campaign – very few of the young people say they have done it.” Although this assessment sounds dismal, as a member of the DotNet Generation – which is defined by coming of age along with the Internet – you are in an ideal position to actively participate in the legislative process, because of the wealth of legislative information available on the Internet. You can find everything you need to participate by logging on to the Wyoming Legislature’s Web site at: <http://legisweb.state.wy.us> or just Google “Wyoming Legislature.” During legislative sessions, the Web site is updated daily with important legislative information. Although you may not be old enough to vote, legislators really do care what you think. In fact, the Wyoming Legislature has created a number of avenues for you to actively participate in public policymaking in Wyoming during legislative sessions. The steps below will help you find your voice.



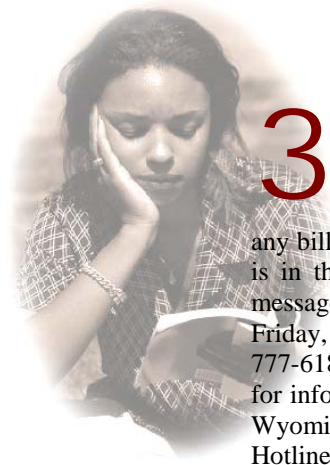
1 Get Informed – Read the Bills

One of the first steps in getting involved is to learn what issues the Legislature is considering during its legislative sessions. There's no better way to do that than to read the legislation and amendments sponsored by legislative committees and individual legislators. Many of these issues affect young people like you, including issues related to the age at which you can drive solo and requirements to graduate from high school. The text of each bill is posted on the Legislature’s Web site as soon as the legislation is assigned a bill number. The text of each bill that passes one house (called “engrossed bills”) and bills that are passed by the Legislature (called “enrolled acts”) are posted on the site as they are approved. If you do not have Internet access to obtain copies of bills, you should call the Legislative Service Office at 307-777-7881 to request paper copies of legislation. The Office is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on days the Legislature is in session. Paper copies of bills are available for a minimal fee. You can also track amendments to bills as they move through the legislative process on the Legislature’s Web site. Amendments that are under consideration each day are posted on the Web site when they are released for distribution. Amendments that have been adopted are compiled daily and will also be listed on the Web site.



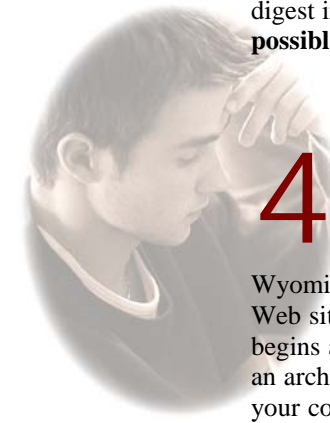
2 Find the Dates – Track the Calendar

To actively participate in the process, you need to know when standing committees and the Senate and House of Representatives are meeting. Calendars for floor proceedings in the Senate and House of Representatives are posted on the Legislature’s Web site in the late afternoon for the next day’s floor proceedings in each chamber. The calendars include the legislation under consideration and the general order of business. During the session, when a bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House, it is sent to a standing committee for study and to receive public comment. You are welcome to attend standing committee meetings in Cheyenne and to testify for or against legislation. A schedule of standing committee meetings and the bills that will be considered by each committee for the next legislative working day will be posted on the Legislature’s Web site each day in the late afternoon.



3 Know the Latest – Track the Status of Bills

Now that you've done your homework and know which bills you want to track, you can use the Bill Status Information Service toll-free within Wyoming at 1-800-342-9570 to obtain the current status of any bill in the legislative process. This is a limited service that only provides information about where the bill is in the process, but does not provide information about the details of the legislation. You can't leave messages for legislators at this telephone number (see Step 5). This service is available Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. on days the Legislature is in session. Out-of-state callers should dial 307-777-6185 for this service. If you have a hearing impairment, you can call the toll-free Wyoming Relay Service for information on any bill. The telephone number is 1-800-877-9965 for TDD or Text Telephones. Ask the Wyoming Relay Service operator to dial 307-777-6185 to obtain bill status. In addition to the Bill Status Hotline service described above, you can log onto the Legislature's Web site for information about the current status of each bill under consideration, as well as previous actions on the bill (journal digest.) The journal digest includes the dates actions were taken on the bill, **all roll call votes related to the bill posted as soon as possible after each vote**, and the text of all amendments offered regarding the bill.



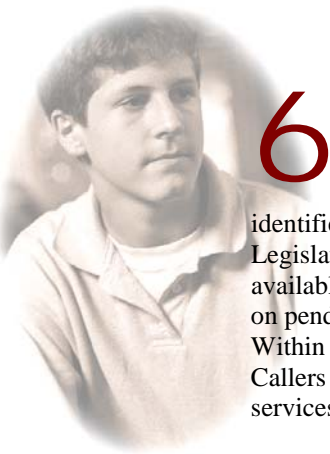
4 Listen In – Hear Debate on Streaming Audio

Each day during legislative sessions, you can listen to legislators debating the bills you are interested in tracking on the floor of the Senate and the House. These live and archived audio proceedings of the Wyoming Senate and the Wyoming House of Representatives are available on the Wyoming Legislature's Web site. A link to the streaming audio feed will be prominently displayed on the Web site when the session begins and will provide the option of listening to live proceedings, if the House and Senate are convened, and an archive of daily legislative proceedings throughout the session. If you are having trouble hearing sound on your computer when the House or Senate are in session, please click on the Audio Troubleshooting Guide for assistance. The system will not stream live audio when the House and Senate are adjourned, at recess, or at ease for more than 15 minutes.



5 Speak Up – Contact Your Legislator

If you would like to leave a telephone message for a legislator, you can call the Senate Receptionist at 307-777-7711 or the House Receptionist at 307-777-7852. You can also write your legislator a letter. Written mail may be directed to a designated legislator in care of the Wyoming House or Senate, State Capitol, Cheyenne, WY, 82002. Fax messages may be sent to a designated legislator at 307-777-5466. You can also communicate with members by e-mail. Many legislators use e-mail to correspond with their constituents and other members of the public and this is one of the most effective ways to communicate with legislators. Legislators who communicate by e-mail are listed on the Legislature's Web site.



6 Weigh in – Online Hotline & Telephone Hotline

During the legislative session, you can recommend support for or opposition to a particular piece of legislation by using the new Online Hotline. In addition to expressing support for or opposition to an identified bill, you can also leave a short comment regarding the bill. This service is available on the Legislature's Web site at <http://legisweb.state.wy.us/postcomments/onlinehotline.aspx>. Comments will be available to all legislators but keep in mind that legislators consider a variety of factors when making decisions on pending legislation. The Telephone Hotline is also available toll free for those without internet access. Within Wyoming the number is 1-866-996-8683 and for local callers within the Cheyenne area 777-8683. Callers will not be able to leave comments regarding a bill. The information that you provide using these services is considered a public record.

