

## Gov. Freudenthal: Tough times ahead for Wyo

By Bill McCarthy  
[bmccarthy@wyomingnews.com](mailto:bmccarthy@wyomingnews.com)



Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal speaks during his annual State of the State speech during a joint session of the 60th Wyoming Legislature on Wednesday in Cheyenne. Freudenthal spoke of the need to focus on the state's strengths in dealing with lower state revenues. Michael Smith/staff

CHEYENNE -- Gov. Dave Freudenthal turned to conservative icon Barry Goldwater Wednesday to encourage legislators to forego divisive debate on social issues.

"When I look at some of the proposals, I hope that you have other things to occupy your time," Freudenthal said in his State of the State address to lawmakers in the state House.

There are "a series of bills that I view as simply telling people how to run their lives and how to run their businesses," Freudenthal said without being specific. "I would encourage you to be cautious."

He quoted the late senator from Arizona who ran for president in 1964: "The conservative movement is founded on the simple tenet that people have the right to live life as they please as long as they don't hurt anyone in the process."

Added Freudenthal, "It was good wisdom then and it's good wisdom now. Sometimes the best use of power is to not use it."

Some lawmakers are sponsoring a bill to prevent recognition of gay marriages in Wyoming, for example.

The governor also quoted President George Washington, who feared political party factionalism would undermine the Constitution as well as discourse.

"Politics is the way we organize the discourse; it cannot be used to control the discourse," he said.

He added that getting caught up in social issues could produce "an incredibly unproductive session."

As he has for weeks now, Freudenthal urged spending restraint and a lowering of expectations of what lawmakers can accomplish in the 40-day session that began on Tuesday.

In July, it appeared as if the state would have a \$1 billion or more to spend this year on top of the \$8 billion two-year budget adopted last year.

As of last week, the estimates are that the state has \$259 million to spend.

The dramatic decline in the economy has taken a toll.

"We have a false sense of immunity in Wyoming," Freudenthal said. "And I believe (the economy) is going to get much worse before it gets better."

Data, such as the low unemployment, paint a better picture than actually exists and that is borne out in recent layoff announcements and increasing demand for government services, the governor said.

"Wyoming is traditionally a state that enters a recession late and exits a recession late," he said. "That pattern is being repeated today."

And that means lawmakers and the executive must sharpen priorities, he said.

"Many good ideas have fallen; they've been taken out of the budget," Freudenthal said. "And many good ideas that have been offered by the interim committees will also fall.

"But the other thing that I had to do in this (proposed) budget is forego some things that are near and dear to me."

He cut his original proposals to add money for wildlife and library and cultural trusts. And he said lawmakers and citizens will have to lower their expectations as well.

"But bear in mind that we are in remarkably good condition compared to other states," he added. "It was a generous budget that was adopted last time."

He urged lawmakers to look at the current budget before spending more in areas such as mental health, development disabilities and education.

In education, he said, the state gets an "A" for spending but gets low grades in every other area.

Because of high expectations and fear of change, the governor said, lawmakers are getting mixed messages from their constituents.

For example, he said he was shocked that the news Wyoming grew by 9,000 people led to complaints about allowing newcomers into the state.

That is the kind of growth that Wyoming has longed for years to create a diverse economy, Freudenthal said.

"I would argue in the context of representative democracy that those are messages that we need not represent in our public life," he added.

He said it is the responsibility of lawmakers to continue to support growth and to represent "the best angels of the spirit of our constituency."