

House Corporations Committee Sponsored Election Bills

These bills shift the state's electoral framework toward restrictive manual processes and centralized partisan oversight. These are measures that act as "solutions" to problems that do not exist within Wyoming's currently secure system. By introducing doubt regarding chain of custody and ballot integrity, this legislation risks undermining public confidence. Furthermore, the expansion of partisan poll watcher proximity and the increased authority granted to the Secretary of State represent a negative shift toward a more exclusionary and administratively burdened election cycle.

Key Legislative Themes

1. Physical Ballot Integrity and Manual Verification

These bills emphasize human-led, paper-based processes over modern electronic systems.

- **HB0048 (Pen and Paper Ballots):** Mandates paper-and-pen as the default for all in-person voting. Only impacts Laramie County; despite extremely high support.
- **HB0051 (Random Hand Count Audit):** Requires a random hand-count audit of one precinct in every county after each election.
- **HB0052 (Hand Counting for Recounts):** Mandates that automatic recounts for major offices be conducted exclusively by hand.

2. Restrictions on Ballot Return Methods

These measures limit how absentee ballots can be collected, targeting "chain of custody" issues for which there is no documented evidence of fraud in Wyoming.

- **HB0049 (Ballot Box Prohibition):** Bans ballot drop boxes; currently used in 7 counties
- **HB0050 (Ballot Harvesting Prohibition):** Prohibits third-party delivery of absentee ballots; criminalizing assistance provided to voters with limited mobility or accessibility.

3. Partisan Oversight and Transparency

This centralizes oversight and expands the presence of partisan observers during the voting process.

- **HB0053 (Poll Watchers):** Grants watchers the authority to be close enough to "see and hear" voters during check-in and to observe every aspect of the election.

4. Candidate Access and Barriers to Competition

This bill increases the procedural hurdles required for individuals to appear on the ballot outside of the major party system.

- **HB0054 (Independent Candidate Requirements):** More than doubles the signature threshold for independent candidates and moves deadlines to align with partisan primaries.

Overall Impact on Free, Fair, and Accessible Elections

- **Artificial Doubts and Reduced Confidence:** While these bills are presented as integrity measures, they introduce doubt into a secure system by solving non-existent problems. By suggesting that current chain-of-custody and electronic tabulation are insufficient—despite years of error-free audits—the legislation may actually decrease voter trust.
- **Inaccuracy and Financial Costs:** Extensive research and post-election data indicate that manual hand counting is consistently more inaccurate, costly, and time-consuming than electronic tabulation. Shifting to these methods increases the likelihood of human error while imposing significant unbudgeted labor costs on county governments.
- **Erosion of Accessibility:** The prohibition of drop boxes and the ban on third-party ballot delivery removes vital assistance for eligible voters facing physical limitations or time constraints. These restrictions, coupled with the lack of a "cure" process for delivery errors, create a high risk of voter disenfranchisement.
- **Increased Barriers to Participation and Competition:** Raising signature thresholds for independent candidates from 2% to 5% creates a significant barrier to entry that has no known administrative basis. When combined with expanded partisan oversight and centralized Secretary of State power, these bills serve to limit competition and participation in Wyoming elections.