

Wyoming Politics: A Look into the Effects of Conservative Political Traditions

Connor Bergman

University of Wyoming

Abstract

Wyoming has always been known as a conservative, Republican majority state. One of the core principles of conservatism is the value of tradition and the importance of sticking to the things that have always worked. That core value of tradition is transferable to other parts of Wyoming other than its moral values. As many voting Wyoming citizens subscribe to the value of tradition and conservative idealism, many voters also tend to vote in kind. This research seeks to determine Wyoming's relevance in political standing with the rest of the nation by comparing policies and political norms based on the understanding that Wyoming tends to value tradition and pursue consistency. In seeking to answer this question, this research will include interviews from seven members of the Wyoming Legislature from the House and the Senate, both Republican and Democrat, to gauge perspective on Wyoming's policy stances and whether we are ahead, behind or on par with the rest of the nation. The interviews will be conducted by a qualitative survey which will be given to each elected official. Background policy research will be included to determine Wyoming's current stance on each of these issues and whether the state's policy status is consistent with the opinion and expertise of the state's legislators. The findings generated by this research were predictable in areas like cannabis legalization and other progressive social movements but surprising in areas like carbon dioxide emissions, renewable energy, and educational funding provisions.

Introduction

Many voters will vote for the same elected official in as many elections as that official sees they are fit to run. As these officials often hold historically consistent ideals, when these officials represent the Wyoming people in their elected bodies, they tend to vote for changes

which allow Wyoming to maintain the status quo. As the world is ever changing and the problems and challenges the country and state face are changing, it is worthwhile to consider how Wyoming's tendency to elect incumbents and stick to traditional policies affects Wyoming's political position on policies and issues in relation to the nation. Wyoming political tendencies may put the state ahead in areas like carbon dioxide emission reduction, education funding and air quality and behind in others like Medicaid expansion, affordable healthcare access, and Good Samaritan protections. This research seeks to determine the overall effect of Wyoming's policy stance in comparison with the rest of the nation.

Method

This research will be based on comparison of Wyoming policies to the policies of other states as well as national political standing. The research conducted consists of background policy research which will gather facts and statistics regarding each policy with the intention of comparing those statistics to legislators' opinions and experiences. The method with which legislators will be surveyed is a qualitative survey in which their responses are open unrestricted by the researcher in length or detail. The survey can found in the Appendix. The responses will be recorded by typed transcript which will be recorded solely by the researcher. The data collected in this manner will be kept anonymous and destroyed after the publication of these research findings. The information collected from legislators will then be compared to figures collected from the background research to check for consistency and congruency. Secondly, the information gathered during the research process will be compared with other states to determine the likeness of other states in these policies. This research congruency will be determined by the researcher's use of the term "on par". The way these policies will be compared is whether other states have, or lack, a similar policy. For Wyoming to be considered on par with

other states, Wyoming must be within 75% of the number of other states who also have a similar policy. The term on par does not necessarily indicate a positive or negative connotation but simply indicates the level of sameness Wyoming has with other states.

Limitations

This research is limited by its sample size. This research was intended to interview twenty elected officials to allow for findings that could be generalized to the holistic population of elected officials. Only seven elected officials participated in the survey and due to the low participation in the survey, the findings generated from this research cannot be generalized to the larger elected bodies. Consequently, this research has become a study whose purpose is simply to gauge the level at which a sample of the Wyoming State Legislature understands the policies and political standings of Wyoming in a national and local arena.

Results

Wyoming is a conservative state and has been since its inception in 1889. Inherently with conservatism comes a focus on tradition. Tradition in politics can mean that elected officials tend to stay in office for an extended period. Therefore, incumbency is a discussion within this research. In the survey provided by the researcher, incumbency was not discussed but a brief history of incumbency in Wyoming is provided below as to allow for background information regarding the state's political climate. Results will be divided into each category in which legislators were asked to provide their input. Within each subsection, not all topics covered within the survey are associated with background research as its comparison to the other states were either deemed inconsequential to compare or not of use in the context of this research.

Incumbency

Wyoming as a state has generally favored Republican, or conservative elected officials except for a brief period during the New Deal as well as during the 1970s after the Watergate scandal. The Republican majority returned in the 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan. Curiously, Wyoming tends to forgo this tradition when electing the governorship. Wyoming elects a Democratic governor just over 50% of the time (Clark & Clark, 1991).

Environmental Management

carbon dioxide management.

Although Wyoming is considered a fossil fuel production giant its carbon emissions are surprisingly low. Based on EIA data from 2018, Wyoming ranked 31st in carbon emissions with 61 million metric tons of CO₂ emissions compared to Texas at the number one spot with 657.4 million metric tons of CO₂ emissions (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2018). While this number may be small, when compared to carbon emissions per capita, a more comparative measure when considering other states, Wyoming ranks among the top ten with 103.7 metric tons per person with other states like Oregon, in the double digits (EIA, 2018). While both measures indicate roughly the same thing, it is important to consider each figure individually as Wyoming's small population is an important distinguishing factor.

renewable energy development.

Wyoming is well known for its coal and other natural gas production and that famous assertion is confirmed with data from the US Energy Information Administration. According to the Administration, as of 2018, Wyoming produced roughly 40% of all coal mined in the United States and comprises about a third of the countries reserves (EIA, 2018). Similarly, Wyoming is within the top ten natural gas producing states and its reserves are among the top five of US states (EIA, 2018). Wyoming ranked 16th in the country for wind-produced electricity in 2017

and in 2018 produced 51.3 trillion BTU's of renewable energy but produced 5,169.9 trillion BTU's of coal energy. Wyoming produced 3,452 thousand megawatt hours of electricity via coal-fired electricity and only 355 thousand megawatt hours of non-hydroelectric renewable energy (EIA, 2018). Further, Wyoming ranks as the number one producer of coal in the country by 223,693 tons and Wyoming ranks 31st in its renewable electricity generation with 4,271-gigawatt hours compared to Washington as the number one generator at 74,905-gigawatt hours (EIA 2018).

air quality.

In the year 2018, of the nine major Wyoming cities the EPA regularly monitors and collects air quality figures, only two of those cities were listed as having one or more days of unhealthy quality air. Of the cities measured each city had at least 200 days of a 365-day period with air quality measured good. The scale used to measure air quality consists of good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive populations, unhealthy and very unhealthy. None of the cities listed under the report generated for Wyoming had a single day in which they were marked unhealthy or very unhealthy (Environmental Protection Agency, 2019). Two cities in the state of Wyoming rank in the top three cleanest cities in the country for air quality and the air quality grades for six of the other major counties in the state are A's and B's. Comparatively, of the 64 Colorado counties, 15 received a C or below grade in air quality (American Lung Association, 2019).

Education

Wyoming has always put an emphasis on ensuring that it's education, both public and postsecondary education, are of a quality nature. In the academic year 2013-2014, the state of Wyoming spent \$965,160 on funding public education which amounted to 54.5% of public education's revenue. The amount of money that was contributed on a local level totaled at almost

40% of the rest of public education funding for the state of Wyoming. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017), Wyoming's student to teacher ratio in 2015 was 12.4 with only four other states having smaller ratios than the state of Wyoming. While this low ratio could be attributed to Wyoming's small population, there is a provision in the Wyoming constitution that emphasizes the importance of maintaining a quality education system which includes keeping ratios down. In the academic year 2016-2017, the average teacher salary for the entire country was about \$60,000. In the same academic year, Wyoming's average teacher salary was about \$58,600. This indicates that while Wyoming may not have the best teacher salary to offer compared to states like New York whose average teacher salary was about \$70,000 for the 2016-2017 academic year, Wyoming's salary is still competitive with the national average (Center for Education Statistics, 2017). As for Wyoming's provision on higher education, Wyoming provides a scholarship to every high school graduate in the state of varying amounts dependent upon academic merit to attend a community college or the University of Wyoming for a four-year duration. In the year 2015-2016, Wyoming appropriated \$373,000 for postsecondary education in the state.

Healthcare

medicaid expansion.

In a growing age of individuals lacking proper access to quality healthcare for an affordable price, some states have turned to Medicaid expansion via accepting a 90% federal funds injection to match a 10% contribution by the state to allow more individuals to be eligible to receive Medicaid care. With Wyoming as the state with the second highest healthcare cost in the country, the expansion of Medicaid is an option that could be fruitful in alleviating the healthcare financial burden for residents seeking medical care (Henry J. Kaiser Family

Foundation, 2018). According to the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation (2018), as of November of 2018, Wyoming is one of fourteen states who has opted out of Medicaid expansion and denied the use of federal funds to expand care for individuals who could be covered by Medicaid. This information would indicate that thirty-six other states have chosen to expand Medicaid.

affordable healthcare.

With health care costs rising to absurd rates, especially in rural states like Wyoming, it is important to consider the affordability of healthcare services. In 2017, one in five uninsured adults went without healthcare (Kaiser Foundation, 2018). In Wyoming as of 2017, 12% of residents do not have health insurance and an average inpatient hospital stay for one day is about \$1,500. According to the American Hospital Association, as of 2016, the average adjusted expenses per inpatient day for Wyoming was around \$1,300 with five other states within that range (American Hospital Association, 2018). Comparatively, 13% of Wyoming's population is covered by Medicaid and 14% are covered by Medicare (Kaiser Foundation, 2018). Eleven other states fall within 10-17% of their population lacking health insurance as is the case in Wyoming. In terms of Medicaid coverage, seven other states have population percentages that fall within the 11-14% margin which Wyoming also falls under (Kaiser Foundation 2018). While these numbers may seem smaller and less intimidating than those of other states, it must be considered that Wyoming is the state with the smallest population in the country and its numbers must be understood within that context.

Criminal Justice

incarceration rates.

According to The Vera Institute of Justice (2015), Wyoming's total prison population was about 2,500 of the 500,000 which composes the state population. While compared to the

United States prison population of just under 1.5 million that number is small, but those 2,500 individuals compose .5% of Wyoming's total population. This data indicates that Wyoming is following the national trend of increasing incarceration rates as the trend for incarceration in the United States as a whole is also increasing.

marijuana legalization and decriminalization.

As of January 2019, according to the National Cannabis Industry Association (2019), ten states have legalized cannabis for adult recreational use, twenty states have legalized medical use and the remaining states have no provisions for cannabis use with Wyoming belonging in the category of states who have no provisions for cannabis use. As of the Wyoming 2019 Legislative Session, a bill to decriminalize cannabis possession and use failed and will not be passed.

good samaritan and naloxone policies.

With the rise of the opiate epidemic, an increasingly important healthcare and social policy is the Good Samaritan law. On the most basic level, a Good Samaritan law grants legal immunity to individuals who call emergency services for others who are experiencing life-threatening symptoms from an overdose. Most states have split the law into two pieces. The first is the authorized distribution of naloxone which is a pharmaceutical developed to be a fast acting counteractive to drug overdose symptoms. The other piece is the legal immunity granted for overdose reporting, as is the main piece of the colloquial Good Samaritan law (Davis et al., 2017). Wyoming has had a naloxone access policy since July 1, 2017. All fifty states and the District of Columbia have a basic naloxone access policy and each state has its own policies for restriction and access to the pharmaceutical. In Wyoming, the policy allows access for civil, criminal and disciplinary prescription and dispense. Civil and criminal lay administration is also allowed. Third-party prescription and standing prescription are also permitted by law (Davis et

al., 2017). In comparison with other states, in the first category of immunity for civil, criminal and disciplinary prescription and dispense: 41, 37, and 35 other states also have the same provision in their naloxone laws. In the second category of civil and criminal lay-administration, 44 and 39 states also have this provision. Lastly, in the category of third-party prescription and standing prescription, 49 and 46 other states have this policy. The second piece of many Good Samaritan laws is immunity for overdose reporting. Wyoming has no protection for overdose reporting while 41 other states do have this protection.

death penalty.

The death penalty is an issue which has evenly divided the country. Wyoming is one of the states that does have the death penalty. Wyoming has a provision for two methods of execution those methods being lethal gas and lethal injection. Yet Wyoming has not exercised the death penalty since 1992. The death penalty is legal in thirty different states with each state having their own regulations for the use of the death penalty. The other twenty states have no laws regarding the allowance of capital punishment (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018). During the 2019 Legislative Session, a bill was introduced which would have eliminated the usage of the death penalty from the Wyoming Constitution, but the bill died on the floor after making some headway during the debate.

Business Development

state income tax.

Of all fifty states, there are nine states who do not have a state income tax and Wyoming is one of them. In a report published by the National Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (2013), they argued that states who do not have income tax are financially just as well or better off than other states who do have an income tax. This could certainly be the case for Wyoming

as the state tax rate is not historically high in other areas as may be the case for other states who also do not have a state income tax.

Discussion

The discussion of these results will be based upon comparison of legislative opinion and background policy research. The statements of legislators will be compared with the current policies to see if the legislator's perception of the policy is one of accuracy or if the policy and the legislators disagree. After this section, a portion of the policies of the state of Wyoming will be compared with the rest of the United States to determine whether it is on par with the rest of the country. This section will be divided by topic area and related question within the survey.

Environmental Management

comparison with elected officials.

Environmental management is an obligatory knowledge base for elected officials in a state like Wyoming whose revenue stream relies heavily on the natural resource industry. The opinion of legislators in the area of carbon dioxide management aligns well with the research provided. Five of the seven legislators interviewed identified that they believed that Wyoming is ahead of the rest of the nation in carbon dioxide management while one believed the state is behind and the other believed the state is on par with the rest of the nation. For renewable energy, all legislators agreed that Wyoming is behind in some form, an opinion consistent with the background research provided. The kinds of energy and in what ways the state is behind is where legislators disagree. Some argued that the wind market of Wyoming is highly fruitful, and the state has yet to take advantage of that aspect. Others say that to take advantage of the wind market would be to encroach on valuable wildlife space and therefore using wind energy will harm other pieces of the environment. Another legislator believes that a solar farm could work

well for Wyoming due to the large undeveloped open spaces. One legislator made a point to say that Wyoming is too reliant on old technology, old technology being a dependence on coal production and that “our technology is too advanced to be burning rocks”. The surveyed legislators all also agreed that Wyoming is ahead in the field of air quality. In the research Wyoming is listed as having exceptional air quality and the opinions of legislators all identified the same stance. In the area of wildlife management all agree that the state does well in maintaining this area but only three agree that expansion of the states natural resource production would be a threat to the sanctity of wildlife in the state. The other four agree that expansion of these measures would not be a grave threat to wildlife in the state. In the area of public land use, almost all legislators had a different view. Two believed that the state does well with regulating public land usage especially with outdoor sports and tourism. Two others believed that the state does well with it now, but they are weary of natural resource extraction moving into those areas and causing damage to the environment. Two legislators did not feel comfortable speaking on the subject as they had no expertise in the area. The remaining individual neglected to mention this topic during their interview.

comparison with other states.

In the area of carbon dioxide management, Wyoming is very much ahead of other states in that Wyoming ranks 31st of 50 states in its harmful emission of carbon yet its production of fossil fuels is higher than most other states. Wyoming is behind in its generation of renewable energy sources. With Wyoming being the number one producer of coal in the United States and its energy output via coal-fired electricity nearly quadruple the energy output by hydroelectric and other renewable power sources, Wyoming falls behind in its renewable energy production. Wyoming ranks 16th in wind energy production and 31st in other areas of renewable production

like solar and hydroelectric. Wyoming is not on par in its renewable energy development. In the area of air quality permitting Wyoming is ahead of other states. Two cities in the state of Wyoming rank in the top three cleanest cities in the country for air quality and the air quality grades for six of the other major counties in the state are A's and B's. Comparatively, of the 64 Colorado counties, 15 received a C or below grade in air quality. Therefore, Wyoming can be considered ahead in this area.

Education

comparison with elected officials.

Education is very clearly a subject of pride and admiration for each of legislators interviewed. On all subject areas, K12 funding, teachers' salaries, classroom ratios and state provision on higher education, each legislator knew that Wyoming excels. All legislators seemed to agree that Wyoming has also begun to slip in its quality of education this last year and all individuals felt that it is imperative for Wyoming to continue to make education a priority piece of the state institution. In interviewing these individuals, it was very clear that they cared about how well Wyoming does in education. The research is consistent with the opinions of Wyoming's legislators.

comparison with other states.

In public and postsecondary education Wyoming is ahead of other states. Wyoming provides for over 50% of the public education budget in the state and just under 40% is supplied by the local level. Wyoming pays a teacher salary which is competitive with much larger states like New York. The student to teacher classroom ratio is far below many other states surpassing others by as many as ten students. The state of Wyoming provides a scholarship of varying sizes to any student who graduates from a Wyoming high school to attend either the University of

Wyoming or one of the many community colleges in the state. A policy which, to the knowledge of the researcher, no other state has. In the arena of education, Wyoming is ahead in each of these categories.

Healthcare

comparison with elected officials.

Medicaid expansion is divisive among Wyoming legislators. Five of the seven interviewed contested that Wyoming had made a grave error in refusing to adopt Medicaid expansion especially in the case of Wyoming's high healthcare cost and lack of easy access to healthcare. One legislator can be quoted in saying "[The state has] failed on the question of Medicaid". Those legislators argue that Medicaid expansion could have been a great answer to the problems Wyoming has with healthcare and access to it especially regarding disadvantaged populations like persons who are incarcerated and those below the poverty line. The two individuals who believed that refusing Medicaid was a positive move argue that the federal money that would be supplied could not be trusted to be paid out and that the money would not actually be there when the state needed it. One legislator contended that individuals would purposefully dump their private insurance to take advantage of Medicaid. In the area of Medicaid expansion, legislators are divided yet the state must still be considered behind as they chose not accept Medicaid expansion. In the case of affordable and accessible healthcare services, each legislator agreed that Wyoming is behind and that the services provided are not worth the price paid in insurance and out of pocket. Each also agreed that if something is not done about the problem Wyoming could face consequences like closer of rural hospitals and a population leakage to other neighboring states who can better provide for healthcare needs. The solutions proposed to these problems ranged from an increase in telemedicine to allowing healthcare

across state lines. Legislators do understand this problem in Wyoming, but the state is certainly behind in the healthcare field.

comparison with other states.

Wyoming suffers in its quality and distribution of healthcare services. The research conducted by this study found that Wyoming has an extremely high healthcare cost and struggles to provide affordable and accessible healthcare to its citizens. Wyoming has chosen not to adopt Medicaid expansion. Thirty-six other states have chosen to expand Medicaid meaning Wyoming does not fall into the appropriate margin that would require it to be considered on par with the rest of the country. In terms of affordable healthcare, Wyoming suffers as well. Wyoming ranks among the highest in annual healthcare cost, inpatient hospital stays, and accessibility of services for its citizens. Wyoming is not on par with the rest of the country in its healthcare policies.

Criminal Justice

Comparison with elected officials.

Criminal justice sentence reform has been stated by over half of the legislators interviewed as something “we are working on”. Wyoming is trying to pursue a more efficient form of justice including limiting sentences to reduce cost, move toward a treatment and recovery model rather than a detention model. Many legislators identified cost saving as the chief reason for instituting sentence reform. Of the seven legislators interviewed many found the medical use of cannabis to be a more relevant conversation than the conversation surrounding recreational use of cannabis. Three of the legislators identified that the state is behind in its ignorance of the potential benefits of medical cannabis. The individuals did not make clear their opinion regarding the legal status of cannabis in Wyoming, but they felt that the state is behind in neglecting to pursue research regarding the substance. The other legislators felt that either

cannabis will never be a discussion in Wyoming until it becomes federally legal or that Wyoming will pass medical use post the 2020 election season. These opinions seem to be on par with the policies of other states as many states have no policy for any type of use of cannabis. The effectiveness of the juvenile justice system varies widely between each legislator interviewed. Two of the legislators felt that a crucial issue in the Wyoming juvenile justice system is the state's lack of a juvenile specific justice system. Wyoming's current system integrates adult and juvenile justice into the same system which causes juveniles to be funneled into a system which does not best serve their needs. Other legislators felt that the juvenile system could be improved but they were unsure how to make those improvements. Good Samaritan laws and their implications are a gap in the knowledge of legislators interviewed. Five of the seven legislators interviewed identified that they did not have experience in Good Samaritan laws or did not feel comfortable speaking on the topic, the others made general statements regarding Good Samaritan laws. With the lack of information provided by legislators, the discussion must direct attention toward Wyoming's lack of Good Samaritan protections. Wyoming does not have a protection for reporting in the case of overdose while 40 other states do putting Wyoming behind in the case of Good Samaritan laws. Among those interviewed regarding the death penalty, all legislators agreed that the death penalty does not make financial sense. Too much is spent on using the death penalty and to house inmates on death row. However, not all legislators agreed that the death penalty should be removed from law based on that assertion. Some agree that the penalty should be kept in case it needs to be used, others say it is an antiquated and archaic punitive measure and that its abolition would save more money than it is worth. The abolition of the death penalty made recent progress in the legislature during the 2019 session, but the bill ultimately failed in the final vote. In the field of police relations each legislator agreed

that Wyoming is far ahead in this manner as the state does not experience the volume of incidences much of the rest of the country has in its relationship of its citizens and law enforcement. Most legislators interviewed identified this lack of incidence either stems from the state's small population or the respect that Wyoming citizens tend to have for military personnel as law enforcement officers are often seen as analogous to military personnel in the state.

Comparison with other states.

Parts of the data collected herein regarding criminal justice reform were focused on incarceration rates in the state of Wyoming. As to the best knowledge of the researcher, Wyoming has not recently enacted any major criminal justice sentencing reform. Therefore, the researcher deemed incarceration rates to be the best representative factor of the current state of Wyoming's criminal justice system. As for whether Wyoming is on par with other states in terms of incarceration rates and reform is hard to say. In the United States, incarceration rates are increasing and so too are Wyoming incarceration rates but the percentage of the Wyoming population that are incarcerated are not nearly to the extent of the whole country. Therefore, Wyoming is on par with the rest of the country. Cannabis possession and usage has become a pervasive topic in the United States since several states' recreational legalization in 2015. Due to the geographical closeness of Wyoming to one of these states, cannabis legalization is often a consideration during legislative sessions. While social movements may attest otherwise, many states do not have laws allowing the possession or consumption of any kind of cannabis, medical or recreational. As Wyoming does belong in the category of lacking a policy for the legal possession and consumption of cannabis, Wyoming is on par with the rest of the country in its policy for cannabis usage and possession. Another pervasive issue surrounding Wyoming is the opioid epidemic. While Wyoming has yet to suffer from the worst of the epidemic like many

northeastern states, its policies are lacking in its protections from this impending threat.

Naloxone is a narcotic that has been approved for the use of stopping an overdose in progress. Its properties are none addictive and safe for civilian use. Wyoming has a provision for the use of naloxone by medical professionals and civilians if the intention of the individual is to save the life of a person overdosing. All states have a naloxone use policy. Wyoming does not have the Good Samaritan piece of that law. An individual can still be arrested and tried for the use or possession of narcotics if they call emergency services for someone who is overdosing, including the individual who was overdosing. Therefore, Wyoming is not on par in its protections for reporting overdose events but is on par regarding allowance for distribution of naloxone to individuals experiencing an overdose. The usage of the death penalty is evenly divided amongst the country. Thirty states currently have laws which allow the death penalty. Wyoming is one of the states that allows the use of the death penalty and therefore is considered on par with other states.

Business Development

comparison with elected officials.

Business development was the topic that provided the most diverse answers. Each legislator seems to have a different opinion regarding income tax. Some legislators agree that we need some sort of tax to provide revenue to the state. Others think a corporate tax or income tax only for those whose annual income is above \$250,000 a year. One legislator was quoted in saying “no one can give me a reason not to raise taxes” there is a power struggle within the Wyoming legislature about how to raise revenue in the state and whether different tax plans is the right avenue to pursue. Some legislators wonder why income tax hasn’t been implemented already and some are eminently opposed saying “we will get state income tax when hell freezes

over”. The nature of state income tax is debated among economists as well, it is unclear whether lacking a state income tax is ahead or behind the curve in state tax policy and it is hard to say whether that puts Wyoming ahead or behind in lacking one. In business development, all but one legislator agrees that diversifying the Wyoming economy should be a priority of the state. In what ways to achieve that diversification is the point of disagreement. One legislator cited Wyoming’s recent venture into cryptocurrencies and blockchain as a growing business sector that could be profitable for Wyoming. Another cited the Governor’s ENDOW Council as a means for understanding the business needs of Wyoming as a state. Wyoming is an extremely fiscally friendly environment for business ventures. The state lacks a corporate income tax, no personal income tax, and yet businesses are not attracted to Wyoming. In the consensus of the legislators interviewed, that problem is due to Wyoming’s inability to provide a workforce for prospective businesses. Wyoming does not have the working population base to be able to support a new business venture of any size. All legislators interviewed see this as circumstance that puts Wyoming behind other states.

comparison with other states.

The lack of a state income tax is a facet of Wyoming policy that has contributed to its political uniqueness since the inception of the state. Wyoming is only one of nine states which does not have a state income tax and this leaves Wyoming not on par with the rest of the country in lacking a state income tax. The positive or negative ramifications of lacking a state income tax are still debated and are beyond the scope of this research to answer.

The Conservative Political Climate

The conservative nature of Wyoming is the most strongly opinionated question included in this research and its answers are subjective to that of the legislator. Each legislator thought

that Wyoming is a unique state and that its influence on the rest of the country ranges from monumental to very little, from ground breaking to pebbles. The overwhelming thought that came to the surface from each legislator was that Wyoming is a *fiscally* conservative state not a fundamental, or religiously, conservative state. Wyoming is smart about its finances. The state spends less than it saves, makes long term investments that have profit in the long run, refuses to borrow money and keeps as close to the status quo as possible. Wyoming is not a religious or neoconservative state that is popularizing national politics. Wyoming is a type of conservative that is ignorant of what it could do but not malicious in what it won't do. The way this conservative thought pattern has influenced Wyoming's national political standing is by creating an example of what responsible financial maintenance of the status quo looks like. Wyoming does not take chances and almost never breaks from the social policy mold. Wyoming will not make a move in the social sense unless it is lead through that movement by a trusted outside force. The federal government is not a trusted outside force and due to that deep-seeded mistrust that Wyoming has for the federal government, it has not been able to move forward in its social policies. Therefore, the state lacks the relevant social policies and excels in areas it knows well like minerals and carbon emission reduction because it doesn't need a leader in these areas. Wyoming is not exposed to diversity and doesn't understand the rest of the country in the way that it should, it feels it needs a leader and it doesn't have one. For Wyoming to join the rest of the country in social relevance and become a great example for the country it needs a leader. Wyoming could teach the country about what it is to be fiscally responsible it only needs the right leader to bring it to that conclusion.

Conclusions

Wyoming is a unique state which faces issues that are not often seen in other states. Wyoming faces problems with low population and a single origin revenue stream which contain challenges for the state in its future. Wyoming is ahead of the rest of the country in the areas of carbon dioxide management, air quality, wildlife management and responsible use of public land but behind in the area of renewable energy development. In comparison with elected officials, elected officials are very aware of the condition of Wyoming's environmental management and are considered on par with Wyoming's current policies. Wyoming is vastly ahead in education. Wyoming is ahead in K12 funding, teacher salaries, classroom ratios and state provision on higher education. Legislators are aware that Wyoming is ahead in these aspects and are on par with state policies. Healthcare is an area in which Wyoming is very much behind. Wyoming is behind in Medicaid expansion and access to affordable healthcare. Almost all other states have adopted Medicaid expansion or have options for better quality and access to healthcare. Therefore, in the national arena Wyoming is behind in healthcare. Fortunately, legislators are aware of this standing and are on par in these policy areas. Wyoming is on par in the area of criminal justice reform or incarceration rates. The rest of the country are also experiencing increasing incarceration rates and Wyoming is on par on this aspect. In cannabis legalization Wyoming is also on par as the state has not passed any policy that would allow for the use of cannabis in any capacity. Wyoming is behind in juvenile justice because the state has not been able to regulate the juvenile justice system to the same quality around the state and has yet to establish a separate juvenile justice system from the adult legal system. In Good Samaritan laws Wyoming is also behind as the state has yet to pass any protections for overdose reporting like almost all other states have done thus far. Wyoming is on par with the rest of the country in its continued allowance of the death penalty. Most other states do have the death penalty and use it

to varying consistency. In police relations Wyoming is ahead of the rest of the country as it has much less of a problem with incidences of excessive police violence or violence against police. Legislators are behind in their understanding of criminal justice topics in the state as many had little to say regarding the topics given and in the case of more elaborate comment from legislators, they could only speak in specifics to one subset of the topic area. The impact of Wyoming's stance on state income tax is ambiguous. The research produced in this paper cannot justify a case for whether lacking a state income tax puts Wyoming ahead or behind the rest of the nation as there is no social trend line for the state to follow nor is there definitive research which advocates for the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a state income tax. In business development and economic diversification, the state is behind. Wyoming lacks a robust population to be able to supply a work force that could sustain new business ventures. Wyoming's population is depleting, and businesses are not coming to the state regardless of its lack of taxes and business friendly environment. Legislators understand this reality and have many ideas about how to remedy this case for Wyoming and therefore they are considered on par in this area.

References

American Lung Association. (2019). How healthy is the air you breathe? Retrieved from

<https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/sota/city-rankings/states/colorado/>

These data were used to compare air quality statistics between Wyoming and other states.

American Hospital Association. (2018). AHA Annual Health Survey.

The researcher used the information gathered in this survey to determine the healthcare costs of the state of Wyoming and to then compare those costs to other states to determine Wyoming's standing in the healthcare arena.

Clark, C., & Clark, J. (1991). Wyoming Political Surprises In The Late 1980s: Deviating

Elections in a Conservative Republican State. *Great Plains Quarterly*, (609). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/609>

Information found from this study by Clark and Clark was used to elaborate on a Wyoming history of incumbency elections.

Davis, C., Chang, S., Carr, D., & Hernandez-Delgado, H. (2017). Legal Interventions To Reduce Overdose Mortality: Naloxone Access and Overdose Good Samaritan Laws. *The Network for Public Health Law*.

The researcher used the data from a study conducted by Chang et al. (2017) to identify the policies and permissions each state allows for the use of naloxone and its protections in the case of reporting a drug overdose.

Environmental Protection Agency. (2019, April 04). Air Quality Index Report. Retrieved from

<https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/air-quality-index-report>

The figures taken from this report illustrated the air quality of the nine major cities of the state of Wyoming.

Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018, November 26). Status of State Action on the Medicaid Expansion Decision.

The researcher used the information from the Kaiser Foundation, a foundation who gathers countrywide information and statistics regarding healthcare and its outcomes and costs, to create a comparison in health insurance coverage, healthcare cost and policy prevalence of healthcare related subjects.

National Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. (2013). States with “High Rate” Income Taxes are Still Outperforming No-Tax States. *ITEP*.

The researcher utilized this report for the analyzation of the effectiveness of state income tax to determine if the lack of a state income tax positively or negatively affects the state’s financial circumstances.

National Cannabis Industry Association. (2019, February 5). State By State Policies | National Cannabis Industry Association. Retrieved from

<https://thecannabisindustry.org/ncia-news-resources/state-by-state-policies>

The statistics from this report were utilized to determine which states had and had not established policies for the implementation of cannabis legalized or decriminalized.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Digest of Education Statistics, 2017. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_208.40.asp?current=yes

The data from this survey was used to establish figures including teacher salaries, classroom ratios and student population success to accurately illustrate Wyoming’s position on education as compared to other states.

National Conference of State Legislatures. (2018, June 6). States and Capital Punishment.

Retrieved from

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/death-penalty.aspx>

This brief was utilized to accurately understand the policies of all state legislatures regarding their stance on capital punishment and what trends to expect from states regarding capital punishment.

U.S. Energy Information Administration - EIA - Independent Statistics and Analysis. (2018,

December). Retrieved from <https://www.eia.gov/state/?sid=WY#tabs-3>

The facts and figures displayed in this report were used to create an analysis of Wyoming energy consumption and production, both renewable and non-renewable resources.

Vera Institute of Justice. (2015). Incarceration Trends. Retrieved from

<http://trends.vera.org/rates/Wyoming>

This source provided the researcher with an understanding of incarceration and recidivism statistics and what trends to expect from incarceration rates in the future.

Appendix

Qualitative Survey Questions

1. In your experience and opinion in what ways is Wyoming ahead or behind, compared to the rest of the country, in policies for things like carbon dioxide management and renewable energy development such as wind and solar, air quality permitting, wildlife management, and multiple uses of public lands?
2. In your experience and opinion in what ways is Wyoming ahead or behind, compared to the rest of the country, in policies for things like K12 funding, teachers' salaries, student/teacher classroom ratio, and state provision on higher education?

3. In your experience and opinion in what ways is Wyoming ahead or behind, compared to the rest of the country, in healthcare policies, like Medicaid expansion, access to affordable healthcare and other social service programs?
4. In your experience and opinion in what ways is Wyoming ahead or behind, compared to the rest of the country, in policies for criminal justice like sentence reform, marijuana legalization or decriminalization, juvenile justice, police relations, Good Samaritan laws, and the death penalty?
5. In your experience and opinion in what ways is Wyoming ahead or behind, compared to the rest of the country, in policies like state income tax, business development, economic diversification?
6. How do you feel the conservative nature of the Wyoming legislature has influenced the position of Wyoming in relation to the rest of the country?