As I write this, Wyoming, like many states, is at the tail end of its 2023 legislative session. But as a lawyer in an independent attorney general office, my thoughts turn to what comes next.

The first is obvious: the regulatory changes that the newly enacted legislation requires. Agencies must plan rules for new programs and changes to existing ones based on legislative amendments. Wyoming’s laws are usually effective July 1 after the session, so rulemaking must begin far earlier. Even if no rules are required, new laws require interpretation and construction. After all, they are often drafted or amended—or both—in a hurry, and sometimes the full implications are not apparent until they are applied.

The second harbinger of spring I observe is the appointment of new state board members. Members of Wyoming’s State Board of Education are not elected, but rather appointed by the governor. Senate confirmation of the governor’s board and commission nominees is one of the last business items in the legislative session. So each spring, I help new board members adjust to their roles.

As state board readers are aware, members come from a variety of professional and service backgrounds. Some held public office in other contexts, such as being elected officials in their local communities. Many new board members whom I and my team represent, however, come from law, industry, or nongovernmental community leadership.

Long-time government workers may forget how difficult it can be for those new to government to navigate complexities we take for granted. A person who spent years building a successful private business may be frustrated with competitive bidding requirements or the inability to increase pay due to personnel rules set by a different state agency. To their credit, many new board members are concerned about inadvertently violating ethical rules with which they are unfamiliar.

A large part of the new board member training my office hosts each spring focuses not only on helping members understand the new rules to which they are subject but why they exist in the first place. Legislators and other policymakers set up systems to balance competing interests: efficient operations and protection of public funds. Some hoops to be jumped through, like competitive sealed bidding, are far less efficient than simply identifying a product that meets the agency’s business needs and buying it. But these processes prevent the possibility of mischief that could occur without these protections and are therefore necessary to protect public resources.

Likewise, open meetings and public records laws can be cumbersome, yet they provide essential public accountability. Put simply, these inconveniences are features, not bugs.

For either new or seasoned board members, these times of transition present an opportunity to reflect on how their work fits in with state government as a whole. While the restrictions may chafe at times, they also serve as a reminder that we are, above all, government actors wielding the power of the state and spending the people’s funds. When that is taken into account, these small restrictions seem much more reasonable.