

1-21-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Saturday, January 21. In the Appropriations Committee on Friday, we finished motions to complete the Supplemental Budget bill. There is actually no supplement in this bill; it is a deficit reduction bill. The State of Wyoming has about a \$100 million shortfall between revenue and expenditures in its biennial budget, and we have spent the last week cutting agencies to reduce that deficit. Our "Rainy Day" account will be utilized, but in the end we need to continue to work on the large structural deficit.

As I've noted in previous updates, much of our solution for this deficit is to move agencies that were once entirely funded from their own revenue sources, but are now partially funded from the General Fund, back to their own revenue sources. During the good years, we could support more services from our General Fund revenues, but times have changed. In the proposed budget, agencies like the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, the Wyoming Livestock Board, the Wyoming Department of Transportation, and the State Engineer's Office will move back to more traditional funding sources, which will help take the pressure off our General Fund deficits.

Last summer, the Governor asked to cut these agencies' budgets by 8 percent, and this budget will confirm those cuts. Further cuts to agency personnel will occur. The Appropriations Committee will examine legislation to allow the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to raise fees by 11.5 percent, the Wyoming Livestock Board to raise fees by 25 percent, and the Wyoming Department of Transportation to also raise fees, in order to maintain some current programs without utilizing General Fund dollars. Everyone in Sublette County will be affected by these potential fee increases and the reduction of services the agencies provide. There will be no easy decisions, because the easy cuts to state agencies have been made.

The 2017/2018 budget and the Supplemental budget have eliminated hundreds of jobs in state government, including community colleges and the University of Wyoming. This week alone, we cut 49 positions, and will offer a proposal to cut 75 more positions from state government

through the next fiscal year. We would reach the proposed quota by first enacting a hard freeze on hiring, and then, for every two positions that are open, eliminating one. Left to their own devices, agencies seem to cut services to citizens before they will cut personnel from their agencies. We made an effort to cut positions before services.

Serving on the Appropriations Committee during the largest decline in revenues in Wyoming's history has been one of the hardest challenges of my life. It is difficult to cut people from their jobs, cut services to the developmentally disabled, cut theft investigators serving my own industry, while also raising fees. However, these are difficult times, and as I have said, the easy targets have already been hit.

We heard HB32, the Ski Safety Act, in Committee of the Whole on Friday. This bill would provide skiers and lift operators more responsibility in statute for best ski safety practices, while decreasing the liability that lift owners could incur. I supported this bill because it was supported by our local ski area. However, HB32 barely passed in Committee of the Whole, because the lawyers in our body were split over this change in law. Concerns were raised that this legislation could damage other forms of recreational liability, because it exempts one sport from the current recreation statutes. Would a judge view rodeo differently in the future because skiers are held to a higher standard? I will continue to support this legislation, but recognize it could open a can of worms. Still, one of our jobs as legislators is to put the worms back in the can, so I am willing to cross that bridge when we come to it. I look forward to your comments at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com)

Thank you