

2-11-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Saturday, February 11. On Friday, we started Third Reading of the budget bill – 50 amendments to the budget were numbered for presentation. We made it through only about half of these amendments before we left for the day.

Amendments passed that reinstated about \$400,000 to both the Youth Challenge Program and adolescent health. Most amendments that come in the budget process try to restore cuts to programs, as Legislators try to respond to constituent concerns. The job of Appropriation Committee members is to create a budget that corrects the structural deficit in state government. Then we defend that budget from additions brought on the floor of the House. We should finish Third Reading of the budget on Monday. There will certainly be debates on cuts to UW, Community Colleges, and the shift to using more water development dollars for water administration.

The Senate finished Third Reading of the budget on Friday. Its version of the budget has a \$91.5 million dollar cut to K12 education, plus a significant pay cut for state employees. These issues were not debated during the joint meetings between the House and Senate Appropriations Committee. Thus, the House will hotly debate the Senate's \$100+ million dollar cuts in the next few weeks. I do not believe that the budget bill is the proper place to write policy for the future of K12 education. The House passed HB 236, a multi-faceted (and I believe better) approach to Wyoming's education funding crisis.

The Senate also passed Senate Joint Resolution 9, which proposes to amend the Wyoming Constitution to specify that the Legislature determines the adequacy of public school funding. It prohibits the courts from interpreting what "adequate funding" for education means. The resolution would accomplish this by changing the provision currently in our Constitution that makes education a primary function of our state government, with a financial priority over other, nonconstitutional functions. The Wyoming Constitution currently states, "The Legislature

shall make such further provision by taxation or otherwise, as with the income arising from the general school fund will create and maintain a thorough and efficient system of public schools, adequate to the proper instruction of all youth of the state.” Based on this, the Wyoming Supreme Court previously ruled that “supporting an opportunity for a complete, proper, quality education is the Legislature’s paramount priority.”

Do we really want to amend the Wyoming Constitution to eliminate the constitutional priority our state’s founders established for education? Is education not a basic right of every child in Wyoming?

I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com)

These updates can be found in our Sublette County newspapers, at [www.pinedaleonline.com](http://www.pinedaleonline.com), and on my website and facebook page. You can listen to my audio updates online, or at KPIN 101.1 FM.

Thank you.