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Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Wednesday, February 22. Today on final reading, SF 147 passed the House without amendments. SF 147 would allow the Wyoming Livestock Board to increase fees, including brand fees, up to 25 percent per year. Current law allows the WLB to increase fees by 20 percent per year. The Appropriations Committee proposed this bill to compensate for moving a portion of brand inspector expenditures from General Fund dollars to fee dollars collected by the Wyoming Livestock Board. Without this change in statute, the WLB might be unable to absorb the loss of General Fund dollars, and might have to lay off brand inspectors. The board does not have a history of abusing its current authority to raise fees, so I am confident that this producer-controlled board will manage fees and expenses in a conservative manner.

Related to the Livestock Board issue, the Supplemental Budget, if passed, proposes to eliminate four of five livestock investigators. The Appropriations Committee had to either agree to this personnel cut, or transfer all (rather than some) brand inspector costs away from General Fund dollars to fees collected by the Wyoming Livestock Board. The extra reliance on WLB fees would have required a fee increase of 50 percent to livestock producers, an increase I was unwilling to support. There are livestock producers in our county who have benefitted from these investigators, but with decreasing state revenues, cuts had to be made.

Today in Committee of the Whole, we killed two Senate Files: a bill that would have changed the taxation laws around lease-backs of equipment, and a bill that would have allowed depositions to occur by phone. Senate File 113, which makes a felon of someone driving recklessly while eluding a police officer, passed Committee of the Whole. In my opinion this bill goes too far. It could open the possibility for a scared youth, running from law enforcement, to be charged with a felony. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com

Good night for now.