

2-3-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Friday, Feb. 3. Wow, what a week, and what a day.

Today, on final reading we voted on the abortion/fetal tissue bills. HB 116, in its original form, would have changed the definition of fetus viability to mean that a fetus is viable when it could “feel pain.” This portion of the bill was amended out in second reading, and in the end the bill simply refined current statute on the sale of aborted fetuses to include tissue or cells from an aborted fetus. I supported this bill, because it clarified current statutes. HB 250 went into the health care statutes, and tightened up regulations around aborted fetuses, and the sale of tissues. Both of these bills passed the House, and I voted for them, because my concerns with HB 116 were resolved with the amendment eliminating the new definition of fetus viability.

HB 182 would require a physician to offer a pregnant woman an opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her fetus, prior to an abortion. The bill would further require the woman seeking the abortion to sign a document stating she had received the offer to view the ultrasound image of her fetus, prior to an abortion. There were several amendments on this bill that improved it, but an amendment to more clearly define the exemption for medical emergencies failed to pass. In the end the bill passed the House, but I voted against the bill. The issue of a woman’s constitutional right to an abortion was confirmed by the Supreme Court many years ago. This bill seems punitive in nature, and my primary objection was requiring a woman seeking an abortion to sign a waiver on an ultrasound she didn’t ask for.

I voted against HB197 on final reading. This bill would slightly decriminalize marijuana. The bill passed the House easily. I still worry about increasing the number of compromised drivers by decreasing the penalty for possession of the drug.

Yesterday in Committee of the Whole, HB 166 died. This bill would have increased the tax on alcohol. I voted against this bill.

Today, in Committee of the Whole, we debated HB 236, the school finance bill. This bill makes cuts to education, and institutes a half penny sales tax when our “Rainy Day” account dips

below \$500 million. The tax would not go into effect for a few years, because our “Rainy Day” account now stands at \$1.3 billion. Remember, however, that the school foundation program is projected to be \$1.8 billion in the hole by fiscal year 2022. The House Education Committee placed a higher tax in the bill, but eventually that was stripped out in Committee of the Whole, on a close vote. I expect several more amendments to HB 236. The bill would have cut over \$50 million from the School Foundation Program over a two-year period. I supported the new tax and the cuts in this bill. We will see how the bill gets changed in the next two readings. This is the most important issue facing this state, and we cannot stick our heads in the sand.

Goodnight for now.