

2-6-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Monday, February 6. Today in Second Reading we heard a great debate on HB 236, the omnibus education funding bill.

This bill, with a few cuts put in today and including cuts made last session, would result in \$91 million in reductions to K12 education by the end of fiscal year 2019. Starting the day, HB 236 included a half-penny sales tax for education funding, to be initiated when our Rainy Day account dropped to \$500 million. The bill directs the use of the Rainy Day account to balance the needs of education when other revenue sources fail. It would partially utilize General Fund dollars, meaning further cuts to other agencies. Language in the bill would require a recalibration of the funding model, to fulfill our constitutional mandate for education funding. I remain very concerned about maintaining good educational services to our communities, and finding the funding to do it.

We are projected to be \$1.8 billion in the hole by 2022, which would eat up our entire Rainy Day account. I like a half-penny sales tax for education funding that triggers when our Rainy Day fund drops to a certain point, then drops out when traditional revenues come back. I proposed an amendment to HB 236 that put two of these cushions in place, totaling a 1% sales tax: one half-penny when the Rainy Day account dropped to \$700 million, and a second half-penny when it dropped to \$500 million. My amendment passed, but was immediately stripped out by another amendment.

Subsequent amendments were brought yesterday to cut education funding more than the \$91 million, but they all failed. Tomorrow in Third Reading, an amendment will be brought to return the half-penny sales tax when the Rainy Day account drops to \$500 million. I will vote for this tax. I believe we must have a combination of cuts, taxes, savings expenditures, and money shifts to solve our education funding crisis. This is no joke. This is one of the greatest challenges the state has faced. Will we face it head on, or will we stick our heads in the sand?

Goodnight for now.