

2-8-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Wednesday, Feb. 8. Today, we heard Second Reading amendments to the budget bill. This is when individual or groups of legislators bring constituency concerns about the proposed budget to the members. As an Appropriations Committee member, it is my duty to defend the budget bill that we developed during those long days.

The greatest discussion occurred around our movement of half the Board of Control (water regulators) budget from the State Engineer's Office to Water Development accounts. For many years prior to 2005, the State Engineer's Office was funded from accounts in Water Development, which has its own funding source. When the state had lots of revenue, after 2005, the State Engineer's Office was moved out of the water accounts into the General Fund, which allowed more money to remain in the Water Development accounts for water projects. A shortage of revenue has now led us to put part of the State Engineer's Office back into the water accounts, which will slow funding to municipal and irrigation water projects. This strategy should have little effect on large dam projects, because these are paid from a different water account. Several attempts were made to change my committee's proposal, but in the end only one amendment passed, which reduced the budget of the State Engineer's Office. That amendment will likely be repealed in Third Reading.

Funding for mental health centers, the developmentally disabled, and addiction prevention services was also hotly debated, because all of these programs saw cuts. In one amendment, some tobacco settlement dollars were used to help support the developmentally disabled. In the Senate, a budget amendment passed that would cut school districts \$91.5 million. This cut seems draconian, especially since it is not a comprehensive solution, just a cut.

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Thank you.