

3-3-2017

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Friday, March 3. Today was the last day of the General Session of the 64th Legislature, and it will be good to get back to Sublette County. We ended the session at 10:30 pm, another long day. The Governor line-item vetoed some of the cuts we incorporated in the Supplemental Budget. The House and Senate overrode the Governor's veto of the Legislature's 90-employee cut to state General Fund agencies. We also overrode his veto of our cuts to the Department of Corrections. We did not override his veto of cuts to the Wyoming Business Council and Wyoming Water Development Commission. Those cuts were not substantial. We should still be able to solve our structural deficit for General Fund agencies going into the next budget cycle, which is next year.

We did not pass a comprehensive solution to the funding crisis for K12 education this session, because the Senate amended HB 236 away from the five-part plan we created in the House. The bill passed both bodies in an amended form, requiring cuts to education totaling \$34 million in fiscal year 2018. I did not vote for this amended version of HB 236, because it does not come close to solving the crisis we face. HB 236 will supersede the budget bill, which required a \$25 million cut to K12 education in fiscal year 2018. HB 236 does establish a thoughtful funding recalibration committee and a process to find a solution to the education funding crisis. This process involves both a review of efficiencies and revenue enhancements.

Recalibration of the school funding model re-evaluates the "basket of goods" we provide school districts to educate children. I hope we have the will power and conviction to solve this funding crisis without ruining education in Wyoming. We have a constitutional mandate, affirmed by four Wyoming Supreme Court decisions, to provide an equitable and adequate education for every child in Wyoming.

The K12 school capital construction bill, HB 58, was on life support for a time today, as the House rejected the Senate's amendment to eliminate funding for Carey Junior High School in Cheyenne. These projects are vetted by two different committees, and it seemed unfair for the Senate to reject a major construction project for the fastest growing city in Wyoming. In the end, the House and Senate agreed to a compromise, which set aside \$21 million for major

maintenance and components, like roofs and HVACs, but also set aside \$21 million for capital construction projects to address capacity and condition issues. This will allow money to accumulate toward Cheyenne's needs, but not enough this year to fund a new Carey Junior High. The compromise also saved all the other projects that were funded in the bill, including a new school in Jackson, the community with the greatest shortage of classroom space in the state.

The Legislature did nothing to address the fact that we no longer have a revenue source for school roofs, HVACs, and new construction. We lost all of the federal Coal Lease Bonus money that had built our schools for over a decade, but we did not have the political will to replace that lost revenue. Yet when it comes to worn out roofs, HVACs, and boilers, there are no other options.

I was pleased that my Appropriations Committee was able to find common ground with our Senate partners, and make great strides in solving this state's structural deficit in our General Fund agencies. This will come at a cost, as services will either be reduced or cost more. We approved higher fees for many services the state provides to its citizens, but we should pay for what we get. For too long we have been subsidized by the minerals industry of this state. As the minerals industry has retracted due to market pressures, the state must retract its expenditures and the citizens should pay at least an inflationary increase in fees for the services the state provides.

Thanks for letting me serve you. I look forward to seeing you all soon, back in Sublette County.