

4-5-2017

Hello Sublette County, the Legislature has begun the interim work, which occurs between legislative sessions. Prior to the 2017 legislative session's actions, it was projected that by 2022 we would have an annual \$400 million dollar deficit in education funding, just to deliver the educational program. Likewise, we have lost nearly all of our revenue for school facilities, including major maintenance, which would conservatively require \$80 million per year. Unlike the General Fund budget which can be cut at the Legislature's will, we have a constitutional mandate to provide an equitable and adequate education to every child in Wyoming. By the end of fiscal year 2018, we will run through nearly all of the savings we had accumulated for K12 education, if we do not find a comprehensive solution to this funding crisis. Last session, the House brought forth House Bill 236, a comprehensive solution that included cuts, revenue diversions, use of savings, and new taxes. The Senate rejected the taxes and revenue diversions, which left just cuts and the use of our "Rainy Day" account. In the end, the two bodies agreed to \$34 million in cuts and creation of a Select Committee on School Finance to recommend solutions to the education funding deficit. I was selected to serve as co-chairman of this committee from the House side.

On April 3, the Select Committee on School Finance held an organizational meeting. House Bill 236 not only created this committee, but also mandated several tasks we must complete prior to the end of January 2017.

Our first agenda item was to review House Bill 236, and discuss the best route to complete the tasks we were assigned. The bill mandates that the committee review Wyoming's educational program under Wyoming Statute 21-9-101, often referred to as the "basket of goods." This includes the subject matter the state requires local districts to provide to its students; examples are math, language arts, and music. The more subjects the state requires to be provided to children, the higher the cost of education. The committee is also required to "recalibrate" the existing funding model or develop a new model that assesses the cost of providing the basket

of goods. Past Supreme Court cases have mandated the use of a professional consultant to ensure that Wyoming's funding model provides an adequate and equal education. House Bill 236 requires the committee "shall also study and recommend solutions to the projected budget shortfall for funding related to public education in the state of Wyoming," and it further requires that we look for unencumbered revenue sources, diversion of current revenue sources, new revenue sources (taxes), and further efficiencies in providing our educational program. Both the Joint Education Committee and the Joint Revenue Committee will work on various aspects outlined in the bill.

The other item on our agenda was to finalize a Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire the next consultant or consultants to provide us with a recalibration of our current funding model or to create a whole new model. There are several different approaches to creating a funding model for educational services: for example, Professional Judgement Panel, Successful Schools, and Evidenced Based approach. The Select Committee chose to accept proposals for all funding model approaches, and we specifically requested that school districts bring forth a proposal to create a Wyoming educator-based funding model. Too often we have received input on funding education based upon studies in urban areas of the United States, with little practicality for Wyoming. When the request deadline has ended, the Select Committee will likely interview the consultants who apply, and then Management Council will make the final decision on the contract or contracts. Management Council is a committee composed of members of the House and Senate in leadership positions. They make all the final decisions on contracts the Legislature enters into.

Will a new funding model save the state money, or cost us more money? Can this committee develop a comprehensive solution to solve our education funding crisis, or will districts have to file lawsuits to protect the interests of Wyoming's children? I am hopeful that the Senate and the House can come together, roll up our sleeves, and solve this challenge we face. We cannot solely cut our way out of this problem and maintain an adequate educational system, nor can we solely tax our way out. It will require a multifaceted approach, a comprehensive solution. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com.

Thank you.