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## **WY Legislature Approves ENDOW Bills to Diversify State's Economy**

**Cheyenne, Wyoming** - The Wyoming House of Representatives gave its final approval to a series of legislation in support of ENDOW (Economically Needed Diversity Options for Wyoming), a 20-year initiative to make lasting and meaningful gains in diversifying and growing Wyoming's economy.

"It's our job as legislators to look ahead to the future and take action on behalf of this and future generations of Wyoming citizens," said House Majority Whip Albert Sommers. "Diversifying Wyoming's energy dependent economy is no easy task, but it's one we need to tackle head on. By taking steps to remove barriers to economic growth, including limited air service and inconsistent access to broadband, we can begin setting the stage for new and growing industries to take root right here in Wyoming."

Last year, Governor Matt Mead worked with the legislature to pass a bill authorizing ENDOW. The ENDOW Executive Council recently released ten preliminary recommendations to address barriers to, and opportunities for, economic diversification. Members of the legislature worked together to craft and pass legislation, reflective of these recommendations, to address air service, broadband connectivity, workforce training, blockchain technology, computer science education, entrepreneurial opportunities and international marketing of Wyoming products.

Among the measures passed was legislation to help grow and expand air service across Wyoming while driving down costs to taxpayers. *Senate File 40, Commercial air service improvement*, would support the Wyoming Department of Transportation's (WYDOT) 10-year Commercial Air Service Plan (CASP) to create a reliable and affordable option for air service in Wyoming.

WYDOT already operates the Air Service Enhancement Program (ASEP), which has been in place since 2004 to help Wyoming communities improve or retain air service. The CASP proposal would augment ASEP and enable the WYDOT Aeronautics Division to contract with one airline

to provide commercial air service to a major hub airport, such as Denver or Salt Lake City. Local communities and the state would be able to determine the fares, flight times and potentially share in the profits.

According to WYDOT's budget projections, SF 40 will cost the department less money than is currently spent in supporting air service in Wyoming. Over the past ten years, the state has invested nearly \$23 million in air service support, with local communities contributing over \$11 million. Under SF 40, WYDOT projects over the next ten years the state will invest \$12.2 million and local communities a little over \$8.1 million while establishing a predictable, reliable and affordable option for air service in Wyoming.

In addition to SF 40, Sommers advocated for a bill to improve access to broadband and technology. *Senate File 100, Economic diversification-broadband services*, would establish a broadband coordinator position, a broadband advisory council and a Wyoming broadband grant fund to help ensure every community in Wyoming has the opportunity to connect with the world through reliable high-speed internet. The coordinator and council will provide the Governor and the legislature with recommendations and policy guidance to improve broadband coverage, speed and accessibility. The end goal is to bring high-speed broadband to more areas of the state and improve speed and reliability in others.

Sommers also worked to advance *Senate File 108, Economic diversification and development*, which would expand the state's agriculture marketing program and provide for an international trade representative to promote and sell Wyoming products.

Other ENDOW measures approved by the legislature include:

- *Senate File 119, Workforce development-priority economic sector program*, will provide a sustainable source of workforce training funds to target long-term economic diversification successes.
- *Senate File 118, Kickstart Wyoming-economic diversification*, will build out Wyoming's entrepreneurial network by establishing a dedicated organization to provide capital access funds for startups.
- *Senate File 29, Education-computer science and computational thinking*, will add computer science to the state educational program - making Wyoming the first state in the country to require its schools to offer computer science education.

The legislature also approved a series of bills that will help drive new industries here in Wyoming - virtual currencies and blockchain technology. *House Bill 70, Open Blockchain Tokens Exemptions*, *House Bill 101, Electronic Corporate Records*, *House Bill 126, Limited Liability Companies-Series*, and *House Bill 19, Wyoming Money Transmitter Act-virtual currency exemption* and *Senate File 111, Property taxation-digital currencies* will all help empower blockchain entrepreneurs and innovators, positioning Wyoming to be a national cryptocurrency leader.

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