

11-21-2019

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you on meetings I have attended during legislative interim work. On October 28, 29, and 30 in Riverton, I participated in meetings of the Select Committee on School Facilities and the Joint Appropriations Committee. The Select Committee on School Facilities receives recommendations from the School Facilities Commission, and then after deliberations and debate recommends to the Governor and the Joint Appropriations Committee which school facility projects and how much maintenance dollars should be appropriated to K12 school districts. The Select Committee on School Facilities is usually a mixture of members from the Joint Appropriations Committee and the Joint Education Committee, because it is useful to have experience on both Wyoming's budget and educational needs.

On October 28, the Select Committee on School Facilities debated the issue of suitability, as it relates to educational space. Currently, the School Facilities Commission examines which schools are over capacity and which schools are in the worst condition. Wyoming law states and the Wyoming Supreme Court has ruled that suitability of educational space must also be evaluated. Are the educational spaces **suitable** to provide the "basket of goods" (the necessary educational programming) needed for an adequate education? That is the question the Committee was contemplating. I brought an amendment to a bill that had been drafted to help resolve this issue. My amendment passed, but the bill then failed. My amendment would have put in statute the component funding process currently utilized by the commission, and would have allowed suitability projects to be brought before the Legislature in the form of component projects. Component projects are large maintenance items, such as a roof or boiler, and are often funded separately because they cost a substantial amount. The bill originally would have allowed major maintenance money to be used for suitability, but I was worried that buildings would have not received the maintenance dollars necessary for upkeep, as districts tried to fix suitable space issues. After the bill failed, the committee chose to set aside \$5 million for suitability projects in the school facilities funding bill. The Committee also started the process to fund re-construction of the Ten Sleep school, built in the 1920s. The structure has been well cared for, but does not have suitable space for today's educational needs. We are also

recommending a new elementary school in Laramie, an auditorium in Riverton, and a new teacher prep school in Laramie, based upon suitability needs in these existing facilities. Wyoming still lacks a structured process with which to evaluate suitability needs, and evaluate those needs in concert with capacity and condition of school facilities. The Select Committee on School Facilities passed a bill out of committee that would provide over \$276 million in appropriations for K12 school facilities, which includes \$153 million for major maintenance, nearly \$15 million for component level maintenance projects, \$10 million for safety and security projects, and the aforementioned \$5 million for suitability needs.

On October 29 and 30, the Joint Appropriations Committee met. The Department of Corrections updated us on repairs to the Wyoming State Prison. Repairs and soil mitigation at the prison are proceeding well, and the strategy we employed will save millions of dollars over more elaborate alternatives that were put forward two years ago.

Wyoming statute and past Supreme Court rulings require the Legislature to evaluate every year the need for an inflation adjustment to the K12 education funding model. This inflation adjustment is called an External Cost Adjustment (ECA). The Joint Appropriations Committee received a recommendation from the Joint Education Committee to provide an ECA of \$19 million to the K12 block grant, most of which was for inflation pressures seen in both professional and non-professional staff salaries. Our neighboring states are closing the gap on teacher pay, which is making it harder for districts to hire teachers. The Rock Springs school district started the school year with over twenty vacancies, as the Salt Lake area increased the salaries of their teachers. We hire consultants to evaluate the cost pressures caused by inflation and adjacent states policies. After considerable debate, the Joint Appropriations Committee recommended to the Governor and the Legislature that an ECA of \$19 million per annum be provided, as recommended by the Joint Education Committee.

The Joint Appropriations Committee also examined impact assistance payments provided by the Industrial Siting Council; leasing procedures of the Department of Administration and Information; Employee Group Health Insurance rates; and court automation system projected

expenses. No resolution was taken on any of those issues at this meeting, but we will continue to monitor the financial impact of these various issues.

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