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Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from budget hearings in Cheyenne. Each of the three branches of state government (Executive, Judicial, and Legislative) proposes its own budget prior to the Legislative Budget Session. It is the Legislature's duty to pull together the state budget and act upon it. On December 9, the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC) began interviewing various state agencies regarding their budget requests for the next biennium, which consists of fiscal years 2021 and 2022. I am a member of JAC, and it is JAC's responsibility to examine the Governor's and Judiciary's budget requests, and then submit a budget to the entire Legislature for its consideration. The Legislature will act on this budget during the upcoming session that starts in February. Governor Gordon submitted his budget to the citizens of Wyoming on November 18. At the December 9 meeting, the Governor came before the JAC to broadly present his budgetary goals and to answer the committee's questions. The standard budget for all state agencies, excluding the legislative and judicial branches, is in excess of \$8 billion. This includes the categories General Fund dollars, Federal Funds, and Other Funds. Other Funds includes, but is not limited to, revenues from fees or School Foundation dollars. Examples would be a driver's license fee or a brand inspection fee. Agencies submitted more than \$1 billion in exception requests from all three fund categories. Exception requests are requests over and above the standard budget totals. The Governor denied only \$276 million of the nearly \$1.1 billion in exception requests. All state capital construction and technology requests must be presented to the Legislature as exception requests. How do we, the State of Wyoming, pay for these requests? Should there be additional cuts, or are there further necessary requests for state dollars?

The Legislature must examine all funding requests and sources of money, but how we allocate Wyoming's precious tax dollars (the General Fund), is our greatest challenge. Exception requests from the General Fund totaled nearly \$635 million. The Governor approved roughly half of that for the 21/22 biennium, or about \$316 million. In addition, there are requests for local governments (\$105 million), state capital construction (\$95 million), school capital construction projects in excess of traditional revenues (\$47 million), and K-12 school model and

education agency requests of nearly \$300 million in excess of the traditional revenue streams for K-12. Due to expanded revenues and savings we generated during the 19/20 budget years, Wyoming has about \$258 million in excess dollars in our Budget Reserve Account. Wyoming will also have \$332 million in its Strategic Investments and Projects Account (SIPA), and the Legislature can continue to utilize 1 percent of its Severance Tax, which equates to about \$192 million. The School Foundation program has a projected \$131 million in cash on hand that can be used, plus another \$17 million in reserve accounts. In total, we have approximately \$930 million with which to plug our deficits and grant exception requests of all forms, before dipping into the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account (our Rainy-Day account). However, much of that \$930 million is one-time money, not recurring revenues.

In his budget, the Governor has proposed to spend \$266 million of the Rainy-Day account. He also proposes to spend all but about \$72 million in the SIPA. Long story short, we have the one-time dollars to make it through the next biennium without significant cuts to state and local governments, BUT the future does not look as rosy. By the 23/24 biennium, we are conservatively looking at a \$600 million shortfall, although we will have a Rainy-Day account exceeding \$1 billion and the 1 percent Severance Tax to bolster our budgets. I believe it is critically important that we slow the growth of state government where we can, as we move into uncertain times.

These are the issues that JAC and the Legislature face heading into this session. Our job in JAC is to listen to the needs of state agencies, and then recommend to the full Legislature our best solution for funding state government. On Monday the 9th, JAC listened to the individual budget proposals from the Governor's Office, Homeland Security, Governor's residence, Secretary of State, State Auditor, and the State Treasurer. On Tuesday, we heard from the Supreme Court, District Courts, Law Examiner's Board, Commission on Judicial Conduct and Ethics, District Attorneys from Casper and Cheyenne, and the Public Defender. On Wednesday, the Wyoming Retirement System, Enterprise Technology Services, Geologic Survey, Department of Administration and Information, and all other boards and commissions presented their budgets. On Thursday, the County and Prosecuting Attorneys, Attorney General, Office of Administrative Hearings, Board of Parole, and Department of Corrections explained the budget

requests to JAC. On Friday, the Military Department, Wyoming Tourism Board, and the Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust fund presented budgets. Following this the committee discussed possible legislation on raising the salary of the Governor, Secretary of State, State Auditor, State Treasurer, and Superintendent of Public Instruction, and we discussed a bill that would expand the lodging tax. Actual drafts of these bills will be debated next week. We will continue to examine the Governor's budget next week and for two more weeks in January.

Tuesday, December 10, was Women's Suffrage Day in Wyoming, celebrating the 150th anniversary of women's suffrage in Wyoming. JAC recessed its budgetary presentations while Governor Gordon, Superintendent Balow, and State Senator Affie Ellis spoke to the crowd at the capitol. That evening I attended the Wyoming PBS Premiere of *The State of Equality: Wyoming Women's Suffrage*. This documentary talked about Wyoming being the first territory and state in the nation to give women the right to vote, but also highlighted the challenges women in Wyoming face today. Wyoming has the most male-dominated legislature in the nation, and a wide wage gap.

I think back to my two grandmothers, and how strong they had to be to survive in this valley in the early days. In 1928, my grandmother Sommers became a widow, with four small children, on the brink of the Great Depression. I can't imagine the courage it must have taken to raise those children and maintain a ranch during that period. My grandmother Richie was a no-nonsense woman whose family was in Atlantic City, Wyoming, about 1868, when women's suffrage was first being brewed in neighboring South Pass. I owe a debt of gratitude to these two women, my wife, my sister, and my mother. I hope this anniversary of women's suffrage will encourage the citizens of Wyoming to live up to our nickname of the Equality State.