

2-10-2020

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on the first day of the 2020 Budget Session. Wow, what a day! In the morning we heard Governor Gordon's State of the State message and Chief Justice Burke's State of the Judiciary, and in the afternoon we voted on bills for introduction.

Governor Gordon spoke strongly and eloquently about fighting to preserve Wyoming's traditional industries, and the challenges Wyoming faces as much of the nation moves away from carbon-based power generation. However, he also mentioned the need for Wyoming to develop new economic drivers. The Governor spoke in support of the tourism industry, and stated that he would support an increase to the lodging tax. During their State of the State speeches, governors always recognize ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Today was no different, as Governor Gordon recognized Captain Scott Koenig, who provided 24-hour medical evacuation in Afghanistan. The Governor also recognized Rob Piipo, the manager of the Kemmerer coal mine, whose community has seen hard times from the Coal Wars. Dan Weaver, a social studies teacher from Tensleep, was honored as Wyoming Teacher of the Year. It is really inspiring to hear the stories of these Wyoming heroes.

In the afternoon, we got down to the business of bill introduction. The Speaker of the House developed a consent list for committee bills, which helped the House work bills faster on introduction. Committee bills are developed during interim work, so these bills have had a lot of testimony and debate prior to the session. The Wyoming Constitution requires that during a budget session, a two thirds majority vote is necessary to introduce a bill into the process. Over 40 committee bills were voted on, passed introduction, and assigned to committee this afternoon. One of the bills that passed introduction was HB73, which would place a tax on vapes. I supported this bill because it is only fair that vapes are taxed similarly to other nicotine products. A lodging tax also passed introduction, but I did not support this bill, because the town of Pinedale and other entities in Sublette County opposed the tax. A Medicaid expansion bill failed. I voted against this bill, because I remain concerned about the cost to the state in a time when revenues are declining. I also voted against a bill that would have raised the

Governor's and other officials' salaries. This bill failed introduction. We will continue introduction of bills tomorrow. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com

Thank you