

2-28-2020

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on the fifteenth day of the 2020 Budget Session. Yesterday we wrapped up the third week of our five-week session (we are tentatively scheduled to gavel out on March 12).

As of today, there have been 121 bills passed out of the House that are now being considered in the Senate. The Senate has passed 98 bills that the House is now working through. A total of 159 bills are no longer moving forward this session: 122 in the House and 37 in the Senate.

A few of the key bills we worked on in the House in Third Reading included:

- *HB 197, Abortion – 48 hour waiting period.* This bill would require physicians to wait 48 hours before performing certain nonemergency abortion procedures. Amendments were passed that improved the bill. One amendment reduced the penalty from a felony to a misdemeanor for a doctor and staff who fails to comply with the 48-hour law. The felony provision in the bill was a more stringent felony than for rape. A second amendment I supported deleted the term “appropriate medical judgement.” Appropriate medical judgement is hard to define. I ultimately ended up supporting this bill, because of a long conversation I had this summer with a Sublette County woman whom I highly respect. Is 48 hours too long to wait? The bill was passed by the House today and will now be debated by the Senate.

Another abortion related vote I took this session was a Budget Amendment that says the University of Wyoming cannot use any funds under its control to expend on elective abortions for students utilizing their group health insurance. I voted against this amendment for two main reasons. The first is that I thought this was legislating through the budget bill, which is unconstitutional. Second, the University of Wyoming is not an agency of state government and should have autonomy in how it operates its insurance program.

- *HB 209, Change in party affiliation.* This bill creates the requirement that an individual who wishes to change their party affiliation from one major party to another major

party must do so 14 days prior to a primary election. I offered an amendment, which was adopted, that would allow individuals to change party affiliation when they request an absentee ballot during the primary. I supported this amended version of the bill because I believe it provides enough flexibility for individuals who want to change party affiliation to do so in a timely, reasonable manner, while reducing the workload for election judges at the polling places. The bill was passed by the House today and will now be debated by the Senate.

- *HB0225, Gaming governance.* This bill would have legalized online sports wagering. The bill failed on Third Reading in the House today. I voted against it, because HB 171, Wyoming Gaming Commission, requires the newly established gaming commission to evaluate online sports betting and provide recommendations to the Legislature before we decide to legalize, or not.
- *HB 249, Investment of State Funds.* This bill sets up a process for the State to consider the purchase of approximately one million surface acres and four million mineral acres of checkerboard lands, primarily in southwest Wyoming. This land was granted to the railroads by the federal government when the transcontinental railroad was first built. I offered an amendment to this bill to ensure the Legislature got to take a vote during a session to approve or deny the final purchase agreement, if one is reached. I supported another successful amendment that would require at least one public meeting to be held in the affected counties. I supported this bill to evaluate the land deal, because I worry what might happen to this wide swath of Wyoming when sold to a new entity. I do have many concerns about the state purchasing it, but I believe the checks and balances are now in place to make a thoughtful decision. The bill was passed by the House today.

The Senate passed *HB134, Wyoming tourism account funding* today. This is the statewide lodging tax. The House has already approved the bill, and only minor changes were made in the Senate, so it will be sent to the House for a concurrence vote. I voted against this bill, because the town of Pinedale did not support the statewide lodging tax.

On Thursday, HB0227 Per diem rates – 2 passed the House with over 40 votes. This bill would raise the current per diem rate for legislators and members of boards and commissions to the federal per diem rate. The rate would rise from \$109 per day to \$151 per day, except for legislators during a session, then it would remain at \$109. Per diem is reimbursement for hotels and meals, and the \$109 was not covering the costs. We do not want to create a legislature that is completely dominated by the wealthy, so we must better reimburse members for the costs associated with serving. This change would not go into effect until January 1, 2021, after a general election.

I can be reached with questions or concerns at albert@albertsommers.com.

Thank you,

Albert Sommers