

1/13/2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting from Cheyenne on January 13, 2021.

On Friday January 8, I was sworn into office for my fifth term in the Wyoming House of Representatives. The pandemic this past year has created enormous challenges for workers, families, businesses, and government at all levels. We worked on some of these challenges in a virtual Special Session in May 2020, giving the executive branch of government authority to create programs and expend federal relief dollars to help mitigate the impacts created by COVID-19.

The Legislature convened virtually on Tuesday, January 12 to elect officers, pass temporary rules, and introduce bills. Eric Barlow, a rancher/veterinarian from the Gillette area, was elected Speaker, and Mike Greear, a manager of a sugar company from Worland, was elected Speaker Pro Tempore. These offices are constitutional offices and are voted on by the entire House of Representatives. In November, I was elected by the Republican Majority Caucus as the 66th Legislature's House Majority Floor Leader, which by rank is the number two position in the House. Jared Olsen, an attorney from Cheyenne, was elected by the Republican Majority Caucus as House Majority Whip.

After a couple of weeks of discussion, the presiding officers, in consultation with the rest of the Majority Leadership, determined the schedule for the 2021 General Session. The schedule consists of the January 12 opening day, followed by an eight-day virtual segment starting on January 27 and ending on February 5. The session will continue on March 1 and end by April 2, and it is leadership's hope that this will be an in-person session. Some legislators and members of the public wanted the Legislature to meet in-person starting January 12, but that option was not feasible. During sessions, we hire session staff, and these staff members are older retired individuals who work for the Legislature because they enjoy the process. We cannot subject our staff, both session staff and permanent staff, to this higher risk of infection. We have been told that few session staff would return for an in-person session. In the end, leadership created a schedule that gets the Legislature working quickly, and the session will finish up only a few

weeks later than normal. We will get our work done, while doing our best to protect our staff, the public, and legislators.

The bills introduced by the presiding officers on January 12 will be worked in standing committees during the week of January 18. Committees will report these bills out to the House and the Senate, and when we reconvene January 27, we will consider the easiest of them. These committee bills have been vetted by joint committees during the interim, and have already had substantial public input. This eight-day session will have a crossover day, where bills will swap between the House and the Senate. The likely result of this eight-day virtual session is bills getting sent for the Governor's signature by early February.

During the week of February 22, standing committees will meet and debate more bills, and the budget bill will be available to the public and legislators for review no later than February 22. The budget bill and many other important bills will be debated during the March segment of the 2021 Regular Session. I am working on a handful of personal bills, including HB39. House Bill 39 amends the practice act for optometrists, and would give optometrists more tools in their tool box to treat patients. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or comments.