

10/21/2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you on Thursday, October 21, prior to a Legislative Special Session. Yes, as I said might happen in my September 13 press release, the Legislature voted early this week to hold a very narrow topic special session. It will debate how Wyoming should react to COVID-19 vaccine mandates from the federal government, public entities, and businesses. The special session will begin on Tuesday, October 26 at 10 am.

President Biden's September 9 order requires all employers with more than 100 workers to demand their employees either get vaccinated or be tested for COVID-19 once a week. Further, it requires all health facility workers be vaccinated in order for that facility to be eligible to receive federal Medicare and Medicaid payments. Most Wyoming nursing homes, hospitals, and clinics are heavily dependent upon these federal funds, as they serve populations eligible for Medicare and Medicaid.

Republican leadership of the Wyoming Legislature released a press release the day after Biden's order: "We stand in strong support of Governor Gordon's stance against a federal vaccine mandate. Our republican form of government leaves decisions of this gravity to the states. We believe the Biden Administration's federal vaccine requirement is arbitrary and likely unconstitutional. The Governor and the Attorney General are provided the tools through Wyoming Statute 9-14-102 to take legal action to prevent the enforcement of overreaching Federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations such as the proposed vaccine mandate. We are confident they will use that authority to good effect to protect the rights of Wyoming citizens."

As Majority Floor Leader of the Wyoming House of Representatives, I am a member of legislative leadership. We polled the whole legislature to find out if members felt now was the time to convene a special session to address vaccine mandates. The majority of both the House and the Senate voted to support the convening of a short special session to address this topic. I voted in support, because I do not support vaccine mandates for COVID. That decision is best left to the individual.

However, I also struggle with government telling a private business that it cannot require employees to follow health care guidelines, to have a healthy work environment. Legislative leadership has worked on bills for this special session that hopefully help Wyoming thread the needle by protecting the rights of workers, consumers, and private businesses. These will be great debates, because there are no easy answers.

My one concern is that our speed will allow little time for the public to review bills and provide comment. Today at 3 pm, an informal meeting of the Legislature's Joint Rules Committee will convene to discuss the rules for the special session. No public comment will be taken, but it may answer some of your questions about how the session will run. The meeting will be recorded.

Details about today's Rules Committee meeting are at

<https://wyoleg.gov/Calendar/20211001/Meeting>

Scroll down the list to October 21, where the meeting is listed. Click on the Details link at far right. Information posted here may change throughout the day and should soon include a Video/Audio link.

At the Wyoming Legislature's YouTube channel, you can watch this and many other recorded meetings whenever you wish: <https://www.youtube.com/c/WyomingLegislature>

By late Thursday, the legislative website, <https://wyoleg.gov/>, will have bills posted for the special session.

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