

2/6/2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Sublette County, after the finish of our 8-day virtual segment of the 2021 General Session of the Wyoming Legislature. I was in Cheyenne during these 8 days, because as a member of House leadership it was important to be there for organizational purposes. The entire virtual session is available to view on the legislative website at <https://wyoleg.gov/>. On the Home page, click on “Watch Floor Sessions Live” on the left side of the webpage. This will take you to past legislative standing committee and floor session meetings:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZNA0zn1VU1ATv3XugYmFGw/videos>

Never has the public had this much access to the Wyoming Legislature.

During the past 8 days, we worked committee bills from the 10 standing committees of the Legislature, and a few bills from Select Committees. At the end of Friday, 19 House Bills and 14 Senate Files had passed both chambers and were headed to the Governor’s desk for his signature. The virtual session worked relatively well; perhaps there was more debate than normal, but the process was successful.

The Legislature will resume work the week of February 22, when standing committees will meet virtually to hear more bills. This process will allow bills to be ready for floor debate when we return for an in-person session starting March 1. During March, we will continue to debate a few committee bills, while individual bills will be considered before the Legislature at this time.

I have three bills numbered for consideration during March. They are [HB0039](#), Optometrist Practice Act Amendments, which provides more flexibility to optometrists to work in rural Wyoming; [HB0094](#), Solar Electricity Generation – Taxation, which would tax electric generation of commercial solar farms at the same rate as wind farms in an attempt to equalize the taxation between these two renewable energy sources; and [HB0101](#), Elk Feedground Closings – Requirements, which makes closing an elk feedground a decision of the Governor upon recommendations from both the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission and the Wyoming Livestock Board. The bill also provides a public meeting process. Elk feedgrounds in western Wyoming have helped maintain robust elk herds and have reduced conflict between elk and

cattle, but are also controversial because of diseases like Chronic Wasting Disease. I do not support closure of elk feedgrounds, and I want to ensure a robust conversation takes place if closures are considered.

Most of my duties in the Legislature now revolve around my position as House Majority Floor Leader. The Majority Floor Leader schedules the work that will occur during the floor sessions. I previously served on the Appropriation Committee, but my duties as Majority Floor Leader don't give me enough time to serve on Appropriations. I am back on the House Education Committee, which is where I started my legislative work. House Education will debate [HB0061](#), School finance recalibration, which will debate K12 education funding.

Recently, in a Wyoming Public Radio Open Spaces broadcast, Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow misstated the shortfall total in yearly K12 funding. Between the School Foundation Program and School Capital Construction, Wyoming has an approximately \$300 million annual shortfall in K12 funding.

Currently, K12 funding is backstopped by our "Rainy Day" savings account, the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account (LSRA). We are projected to have \$1.3 billion in the LSRA at the end of 2023, if the Legislature does not use some of it to shore up important child and senior programs in the Department of Health. How much of the LSRA do we spend before the Legislature solves this K12 funding shortfall? [HB0061](#) will be the start of this conversation. I could support \$100 million in cuts to K12, plus a penny sales tax for education, provided both are phased in over a period of three years. We will see if the Legislature can coalesce around a solution. I have my doubts, but the debate should help educate Legislators and the public. I do not support cutting the entire \$300 million per year shortfall from K12 education, because I believe it could devastate smaller districts like Big Piney. We have a constitutional duty to fund an adequate, equitable education for every child in Wyoming.

For details on these and all other 2021 bills, visit <https://www.wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2021>

I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) with questions or comments.

Thank you.