

3/24/2021

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on Wednesday morning March 24, 2021. I missed filing my daily reports to you folks for two days in row, because we went late on Monday and Tuesday nights.

Monday was the last day for Committee of the Whole in the house of origin, so we worked until nearly 8 pm that night. We debated 23 bills Monday, including the following bills that I supported.

[HB0051](#), Meat processing programs, provides stipends, utilizing federal dollars, to eligible businesses to address COVID-19 related problems by planning, constructing, expanding and maintaining mobile and modular meat processing units or facilities. Wyoming has a shortage of meat processing facilities, and perhaps this program will improve our livestock producers' ability to direct-market.

[HB0127](#), Public health amendments, gives the Governor the authority to appoint the state health officer, instead of the Director of the Department of Health making that decision. Any health order issued by a county, municipal or district health officer that restricts individuals' movements, that applies to individuals not under an isolation or quarantine order and that is designed to prevent or limit the transmission of a contagious disease would be effective for a period of not more than ten days. Subsequent orders, including order extensions, for the same purpose can only be issued by locally elected bodies, like a county commission. I like this bill, because it puts locally elected bodies in charge. Other similar bills would bring the decision to extend health orders back to the Legislature, a 90-member unwieldy body not designed for rapid decisions.

I also supported three pro-life bills, including a Medicaid Expansion bill. I had never heard of Medicaid Expansion being considered a pro-life bill, until the Catholic Diocese in Cheyenne referred to it in that manner. I have never voted for Medicaid Expansion, but I am considering that option today.

On Tuesday in 3rd Reading, we debated [HB0173](#), School finance funding - 2, the comprehensive solution for education funding. Debate on this bill lasted the entire afternoon and into the night. We laid this bill back for several days, which was fortuitous. Congress recently passed a federal relief bill, the American Recovery Plan (ARP), which provides \$303 million to K12 education in Wyoming.

This news steered the discussions on HB173 in a new direction. HB173 provides a three-legged stool to solve our \$300 million annual shortfall in education funding. It uses funding reductions, revenue diversions, and the “insurance policy” of a one cent sales tax if the State’s “Rainy Day” fund drops to \$650 million. The federal ARP money can be used as a local resource, thus reducing the amount the State will need to spend on education for the next three years.

However, federal conditions stipulate that states can reduce K12 education funding only slightly over the next three years to qualify for this federal aid.

In 3rd Reading, HB173 was altered to include the American Recovery Plan dollars, creating a four-legged stool for education funding. Between funding reductions and federal dollars, the School Foundation Program will save about \$320 million over a three-year period, depending upon the final federal guidance for the ARP dollars.

Due to the addition of this fourth leg, the House reduced the one cent sales tax for education to a half-cent sales tax, which will still serve as an “insurance policy” if our revenue streams don’t stabilize.

By a 41-19 vote, the House sent the Senate this comprehensive solution to our K12 education shortfall. I supported this solution.

More information about these bills and many more can be found at

<https://wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2021>

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