

Albert Sommers Legislative Update

11/28/2022

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from the interim of the 66th Legislature and the beginning of the 67th Legislature. Starting on November 15, I had a full week of meetings in Cheyenne and Casper.

On November 15-16, I attended the Joint Education Committee (JEC) in Cheyenne. Most of our meeting time was spent reviewing and debating draft bills. When a bill is voted on and approved in committee during the interim, that bill will be introduced into the session in January. On November 15, we discussed bills to address community college funding. The funding model for community colleges had not been updated in years, so the committee during the interim studied the existing funding model for improvements. The JEC approved a bill, with my support, that would give distance education classes the same funding as in-person classes in the community college funding model. The committee heard testimony on how distance education classes require the same level of staff and a higher level of technology than in-person classes. The JEC also approved a bill that would require the Community College Commission to submit an inflationary analysis when it submits its biennial budget. Currently, there is no formal way to review the inflationary pressures on community colleges.

Last Session, we passed a bill that created the Wyoming's Tomorrow Scholarship, an adult education scholarship, and we set aside \$10 million for the endowment of this scholarship program. There is a real need for workforce development in Wyoming, and the Ellbogen Foundation funded a successful pilot scholarship program that highlighted the need. At the JEC meeting we approved a bill to add \$100 million into the endowment account for this scholarship program. Based upon revenue projections for the State of Wyoming, we will have nearly \$1 billion more in revenue than anticipated. Putting money into endowments is a good way to save money for the future, while spending the income from those endowments on worthy projects. I believe the Wyoming's Tomorrow Scholarship is a game changer for workforce development, and could have a generational effect upon its participants.

The JEC approved several bills for introduction, including three bills that I brought to the committee. These three bills address mental health services for children, regional cost

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adjustment for high housing cost districts, and a bill to provide more Career Technical Education funding to districts that value these courses.

On November 17, I attended a new legislator training. As a member of legislative leadership, I help train new legislators. During this training our legislative staff helped new legislators understand what support they have available, how to put in a bill request, and how to operate their new computers. Legislative leadership was there to provide tips to new legislators to help them deal with their role as legislators. We will have two more days of training in January.

On November 18, I participated in the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce meeting that was originally scheduled for Casper, but was changed to a remote platform when the weather got bad. I went to Casper anyway, because I had a meeting there on the 19th. The Taskforce continued to discuss emerging technology regulation, as it relates to fair chase. The Taskforce approved a motion to request that the Legislature provide the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission more authority to address emerging hunting technologies. The Taskforce also recommended that non-resident license fees for the Big Five (Bighorns, moose, mountain goats, bison, and grizzly bears) be increased. We heard testimony that they are under market value.

On November 19, the Republican legislative caucus for the 67th Legislature was held in Casper. A caucus is a closed meeting of party members within a legislative body to decide on questions of policy or leadership. The Senate and the House broke off into separate caucuses to determine their leadership slate. The Majority Floor Leaders and the House Majority Whip are determined by the caucus vote. The Speaker of the House, Speaker Pro Tem, Senate President, and Vice-President of the Senate are chosen by their respective chambers on the first day of session. The caucuses choose nominations for these positions, however with a Republican super majority in the both the House and Senate it is assumed these nominees will be elected to their respective positions. I was selected as the Republican nominee for Speaker of the House, and I am very humbled by the confidence placed in me by my peers.

The General Session of the 67th Legislature will begin on January 10. If you have questions or comments, please contact me at albert@albertsommers.com.