

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you prior to the 2023 General Session of the 67<sup>th</sup> Legislature. The 2023 General Session will officially begin at noon on January 10. However, there are events and trainings leading up to the session.

January 2 is the inauguration of the Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Auditor, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. New member training will occur on January 5 and 6. As a member of House leadership, I will be there to help conduct the trainings. The House has 29 new members, nearly half the body, so it is critical to help these new legislators understand the culture and the process.

On Monday January 9, there will be multiple trainings held for all legislators, and some are required. The Wyoming Supreme Court will conduct a training on the importance of civics, the Rule of Law, and interpreting statutes and the Constitution. This is new, and should be a fascinating training presented by the Supreme Court justices. Anti-discrimination and sexual harassment training is required for all legislators. The final training of the day will be “Making Ethical Decisions”, which includes Wyoming’s ethics and conflict of interest laws, value-based ethical decision making, tips for considering difficult issues, and the attorney/client privilege policy. These trainings are important reminders of legislators’ lawful and ethical obligations to our staff, each other, and the citizens of Wyoming.

On January 10 in the House, members will be sworn into office, Speaker and Speaker Pro Tem will be elected, leadership speeches will be given, and introduction of bills will begin. On the morning of January 11, a Joint Session of the House and Senate will convene to hear Governor Gordon’s State of the State address and Chief Justice Fox’s State of the Judiciary report. In the afternoon we will start the work of the Legislature in earnest.

Here is a reminder of how a bill passes the legislative process. A bill is developed and sponsored by an individual legislator or by a committee in the chamber of origin (House or Senate). Once approved by the sponsor, the bill is numbered for introduction. The presiding officer determines when and what bills are introduced to standing committees. A committee chairman then determines when and what bills are debated in their committee. If the committee passes a bill, then that bill is placed on General File and is ready for floor debate.

The Majority Floor Leader then decides when and what bills will be debated by the entire body in Committee of the Whole.

When a bill is brought forward in Committee of the Whole, there is unlimited debate on that bill, including any amendments brought forward. If a bill passes Committee of the Whole, it moves on to Second Reading, where the bill can be amended again. Generally, bills are moved to Third Reading from Second Reading without objection, once all amendments are debated and voted on. During Third Reading, bills can once again be amended. The final vote on a bill in the chamber of origin occurs in Third Reading. If a bill survives this Third Reading vote, then it heads to the other chamber, and the entire process is repeated again. When a bill is fortunate enough to pass both chambers of the Legislature, it is scrutinized by the Governor. If the Governor does not like the bill, then the bill is vetoed. A two-thirds majority vote of both chambers is required to override the Governor's veto.

A bill travels an arduous path to make it into law. It should not be easy to change laws, to alter the constitution or to create new laws. I have heard so far, there are over 700 bill draft requests to our legislative staff. It has become customary in the Legislature for more bills to be numbered than can be heard on the floor. We simply run out of time. The Wyoming Constitution allows the Legislature to meet in session for only 60 working days over a two-year period. This time constraint is designed to curtail frivolous bills being debated over a lengthy period. I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) with questions or comments.