

02/21/22

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on February 21. Today, we heard bills on 2nd Reading and had the final vote on bills in 3rd Reading. We also started debating the budget bill in Committee of the Whole.

Of the bills voted on for third reading, [HB0029](#) - Hathaway scholarship amendments, passed and has been moved to the Senate for introduction. I voted in favor of this bill. It increases awards to scholarship recipients by about 5.7 percent. The bill also modernizes the income account for the Hathaway Scholarship, which cleans up a timing issue. The bill changes the Hathaway Scholarship requirements to allow a student to take fewer than 6 hours per semester and still be eligible for the scholarship, which will help working students.

I voted in favor of [HB0030](#) - school finance - increasing cash revenues, which also passed on its 3rd reading. HB30 allows districts to increase their cash reserves from the current 15 percent to 30 percent, for the next four years. This bill will allow districts to save money from the federal infusion of grant dollars, and then utilize it judiciously through June 30, 2026, rather than have to spend it all immediately. This bill also helps recapture districts, like Sublette #1 and #9, deal with the fallout from the passage last year of the yearly Ad Valorem bill, which forced district business managers to become revenue forecasters. A larger reserve allows districts more flexibility if their forecasts are inaccurate.

Finally, [HB0080](#) - campaign reports - amendments, also passed the House on its third reading today. I voted in favor of this bill. It requires any political action committee from another state that contributes to a Wyoming political action committee or to a candidate's campaign committee to file an itemized statement of contributions and expenditures in a timely manner. The fine for such entities missing the filing deadline is increased to \$500 per day until the report is filed. This is an attempt to have more transparency with regard to dark money trying to influence our elections.

A large portion of our day was devoted to breaking down [HB0001](#) - government appropriations - 2. Chairman Nicholas presented a “big picture” overview of the state budget bill. The total budget for the state of Wyoming is 8.8 billion, including federal dollars.

We have 581 fewer state employees now than we had in 2010. However, we are still currently funding over seven thousand state employees. One of the Governor's requests is to increase state employee salary expenditures by over 6 percent, but individual salary percentage increases will vary depending upon an evaluation of the various positions. Wyoming needs to do this if we intend to retain our hard-working state employees.

This budget saves money in permanent inviolate accounts, like the Permanent Mineral Trust Fund, as well as in liquid accounts, like the Legislative Stabilization Reserve Account (Wyoming's Rainy-Day fund). The budget also partially restores cuts to critical programs in the Department of Health and our post-secondary education institutions. We will hear the remaining explanation of the budget tomorrow, then we will begin to debate amendments to the budget on Wednesday.

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