

6-3-2022

Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from interim work of the 66th Legislature. I have had a couple busy weeks of committee meetings. On May 23-24, I participated in the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce meeting in Casper. On May 31-June 1, I attended the Joint Education meeting in Casper.

The purpose of the Wyoming Wildlife Taskforce is to study top-priority wildlife policy issues facing the state related to the allocation of hunting opportunity, sportsperson access, and other issues. I continue to hear concern about the flood of out-of-staters during the opening days of horn hunting season. As a result of that concern, I had horn hunting added to the agenda of the May 23rd meeting. Other Taskforce members had concerns as well, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department will seek an Attorney General's opinion on whether Wyoming could delay the horn hunting season for non-residents by 5-10 days. This would be a simple solution to the flood of horn hunters from other states that comes across our borders for the May 1st opening of the season.

The biggest challenge before the Taskforce is how to increase resident hunter opportunity, manage the exploding elk herds in eastern Wyoming, and maintain robust outfitting opportunity. The Taskforce agreed that linking many of the ideas we have been discussing into a "Grand Compromise" might allow for broader solutions.

A subcommittee of the Taskforce will refine a "Grand Compromise" that has the following elements in it.

- 90 percent resident tag allocation for deer, elk and antelope units in hard-to-draw areas. The subcommittee will make a recommendation on what draw odds constitute "hard-to-draw"
- 50 percent of nonresident deer, elk and antelope tags would be made available to an outfitter-only draw

- Eliminate the current 7,250 cap on nonresident elk tags. I did not support eliminating this cap as a stand-alone proposal, but would consider it in a more comprehensive solution.
- Resident hunters who successfully draw in a “hard-to-draw” area would afterward have a three-year wait period.
- Resident hunters would get a head start in the application process for leftover tags

I believe this “Grand Compromise” is worth examining, and I am keenly interested in your thoughts.

The Joint Education Committee meeting was mostly informational, with little action by the committee. Recruitment and retention of K-12 personnel and Community College funding are the two biggest issues the committee has before it this interim.

Recruitment and retention of teachers is a national problem, and Wyoming is struggling as well. Wyoming teachers have not seen a meaningful pay increase in nearly a decade, and our neighboring states are starting to surpass our pay scale. While teacher pay is an important determinant in recruiting and retaining teachers, it is likely not the most important. Job stress, lack of appreciation, and days filled with more tasks than time has eroded the attractiveness of teaching. What keeps teachers going is love of students and education.

No Child Left Behind was a national effort to beat states, teachers and students into submission in hopes of raising America’s test scores on a worldwide stage, and in my opinion it was a failure. No Child Left Behind and its successor, Every Student Succeeds, helped initiate the heavily layered Common Core Standards and accountability systems we have in place today. These standards are certainly rigorous, but leave teachers and students with little time to enjoy school or be creative.

We heard testimony about a growing concern for the mental health of students and teachers due to increasing stress. We can have well educated students taught by high quality teachers without creating such complex education standards at the state level. I asked the Joint

Education Committee to review the statutes around standards, to see if Wyoming's laws are overly prescriptive.

Community Colleges play a key role in workforce development for the state, and they do not have adequate funding. The Joint Education Committee is examining the funding model for Community Colleges to determine if tweaks to the model are needed. We received an extensive review of the model during the meeting. The committee will take a hard look at distance education programs to see if they should be funded at the same rate as in-person courses.

I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or comments.