

9/19/2022

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from the interim of the 66th Legislature. On September 6-7, I participated in the Joint Education Committee (JEC) meeting in Cheyenne. On September 8, along with a delegation of folks from Sublette County, we met with members and staff of the State Land and Investment Board (SLIB) to discuss state grant funding for Sublette County's new hospital project.

On September 6, the JEC discussed community college funding. The community colleges are struggling to provide the programming needed for workforce development in Wyoming, and their percentage of state funding to total funding continues to shrink. One reason for this is that the community colleges' state funding model fails to address inflationary pressures. The JEC decided to draft a bill that creates a process to examine inflationary pressures every two years during the budget process. This process will allow the Legislature to make an informed decision on community college inflationary pressures. The committee moved to craft a bill that would appropriate \$20 million into the Wyoming Tomorrow adult education scholarship created last session. The \$20 million in state dollars would require a one-to-one match from a non-state source. Private non-profits and industry have expressed an interest in helping fund the Wyoming Tomorrow scholarship program.

The Joint Education Committee also debated whether school personnel records should remain exempt from the Public Records Act. Currently, government personnel files are exempt from inspection, except for a few specific reasons. There was considerable debate whether school personnel should be treated differently from other government workers, such as police. In the end a motion passed to draft a bill that states, "Investigations or disciplinary proceedings resulting in substantiated allegations of professional misconduct by Wyoming school district employees related to the treatment of or interactions with students are not considered part of a personnel file." I voted against this motion, primarily because I believe school personnel should not be treated differently from other government personnel. The other reason I did not support the motion was the nebulous meaning of "substantiated allegations." Allegations should not be released in a personnel file until they are proven beyond a shadow of doubt.

There is a need to protect both students and school personnel. We will debate this bill further at our next meeting.

The Legislature passed a bill in 2021 that allows three private charter schools to be authorized, provided they meet multiple standards. The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) brought a series of amendments to clean up unworkable language. The committee asked WDE to continue working with our staff to find better solutions to the problems.

One of the more interesting discussions on September 7 was about K12 school choice, and whether a voucher system could be created to satisfy Wyoming's unique constitutional constraints and supreme court rulings. A voucher system would allow the parent to use state education dollars to educate their children in the school setting of their choice. This could include private schools, charter schools, religious schools, or public schools. The Legislative legal staff wrote an informative memo on the constitutional constraints relating to a Wyoming voucher program. This memo can be found online at [Memorandum: Constitutional Considerations and Relevant Case Law – School Choice](#). I worry that a voucher system could pull students and funding away from the quality public schools we have in Wyoming today, but I would welcome constituents' thoughts on this topic. It will continue to be examined and debated.

On September 8, a contingent from Sublette County that included county commissioners, Sublette County Hospital Board members and staff, Senator Dan Dockstader, and myself visited the offices of the Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, and State Auditor. These four state officials plus the Superintendent of Public Instruction make up the State Land and Investment Board (SLIB). Last session, the Legislature created a grant program for the construction of medical facilities, and appropriated \$85 million to this program from more than \$1 billion Wyoming received from the federal American Rescue Plan Act. The Sublette County Hospital Board applied for a \$10 million grant from the new program, and so the Sublette County contingent met individually with SLIB members to explain the project and answer questions. We were unable to connect with the Superintendent of Public Instruction on this trip. I felt the hospital project was well received by the officials we met. The SLIB will meet in October to

allocate the \$85 million to selected projects around the state. I actively supported the creation of this grant program during the last session.

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