

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you on February 3, the 18th day of the General Session of the 67th Legislature. The House spent most of the day working through 3rd Reading budget amendments on [HBOO1](#). The budget passed the House. The Senate also passed its version of the budget bill.

This supplemental budget focuses on saving, investing, and meeting the needs of Wyoming people. Due to improved revenues from oil and gas production, smart investments, and federal stimulus money, we saw an unexpected one-time surplus in money. Much of the House floor debate focused on allocating these funds.

A few key takeaways from the budget bill that passed the House are:

- An adjustment to the Medicaid reimbursement rate for our Wyoming dentists who provide critical dental health services to 40,000 children and senior citizens in the state;
- The House restored funding that was cut in 2021 to critical service providers in our communities who care for Wyoming citizens who have developmental, intellectual disabilities or acquired brain injuries;
- Appropriated \$5 million to fund the property tax refund program fully;
- Created an ombudsman position in the Department of Environmental Quality to enhance the ability and timeliness for industrial permitting processes. This will help Wyoming remain competitive with surrounding states with new and growing industry projects;
- The House added funding to assist with retaining and recruiting state agency employees. We heard testimony that WYDOT has a 28 percent vacancy rate in the highway patrol

due to uncompetitive salaries. Half of CNA and nursing positions are vacant at the State hospital in Evanston. Current provisions in the budget increase state employee compensation to their 2013 levels (considering adjustments for inflation);

- The House continued to focus on funding trust funds as a savings mechanism and utilizing the interest income to make our communities more livable, develop Wyoming's workforce, and enhance the state's wildlife.
- The House put \$300 million into permanent, inviolate savings while putting to work another \$521 million into reserve account savings.

The supplemental budget bill is good fiscal policy that sets the stage for a more prosperous future while protecting the state against Wyoming's rocky revenue streams. It is important to note that the work today is a proposal that addresses the realities and challenges Wyoming people are facing. *Although it would be easier to bury our heads in the sand*, this measure represents a courageous effort to face reality head-on. The House is delivering for both today's Wyoming citizens and future generations.

Next week, designated members from the House and Senate will meet in a Joint Conference Committee to hash out differences on the budget bill.

Monday will be the last day for bills in Committee of the Whole in the house of origin.

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