

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting after the end of the 2023 General Session of the 67th Legislature. This session was different than any I have previously been part of. We had more freshman House members, twenty-nine, than any time during my service in the Legislature. As Speaker of the House it was my job to ensure that the floor ran smoothly and everyone adhered to the Rules of the House. Due to the number of new members, more debate occurred on the floor than we would normally see. Debate is a good thing, but too much debate slows the process down. We are constitutionally limited to 60 days of session over a two-year period, and we had scheduled 37 days for this General Session. Despite these challenges, I believe we had a very productive session and moved Wyoming forward. Keep reading to see how.

The various appropriation (spending) bills that passed the Legislature will have a lasting positive impact on Wyoming. [HB1 - The Supplemental Budget bill](#), resulted in the Legislature saving nearly \$1.4 billion, the most ever put to savings in a single budget in the State's history. For every \$1 spent in HB1, roughly \$3.5 dollars were saved. Wyoming currently receives about 1/3 of its revenue from investment earnings, and measures taken during this legislative session will add to that. This will help generations of Wyomingites.

Specifically, the supplemental budget bill pays \$8 million for property tax refunds to residential homeowners, restores deep cuts made during the pandemic to health care for Wyoming's poorest citizens, fully funds K-12 education and brings pay for state employees up to their 2013 real wage levels.

[HB0195 - American rescue plan act appropriations-amendments](#) redistributed unspent dollars from the original amount Wyoming received from the federal government in the American Rescue Plan Act. HB195 put \$12 million toward grants for outdoor recreation and tourism, \$3 million toward hunger initiatives, \$20 million for local government support projects, \$30 million for water and sewer projects, and \$40 million for health facility capital construction. I successfully passed an amendment that pulls \$15 million of the health facility construction dollars into a separate fund to be used for inflationary pressure on already funded health facility

projects. This pot of money should allow the Sublette County hospital to be eligible to apply for an additional \$5 million in grant money for inflation of construction costs. These funds will help Wyoming communities improve or sustain their quality of life.

Other appropriation bills will make a difference in Wyoming. [SF0146 - State funded capital construction](#) provides dollars for construction at the University of Wyoming, community colleges, and at the Wyoming State Fair. [HB0093 - Omnibus water bill-construction](#) continues Wyoming's long tradition of investing in Wyoming's people through expenditures on water programs, most of which are funded by dedicated severance tax dollars. As a part of HB93, the Legislature put \$30 million of our excess revenue into the Water Account III, because an investment in future impoundment projects is essential for Wyoming.

I sponsored several bills this session that dealt with issues from my local communities. [HB0108 - Sale of THC vaping devices and edibles to minors-prohibited](#) was brought to me by our local prevention committee. This bill prohibits the sale to minors of dangerous products like Delta 8 THC. [HB0222 - Colorado river advisory committee](#) will give water users in the Green River Basin and Little Snake River Basin a voice at the table in the quickly evolving policies on the Colorado River. There is no question that issues surrounding the Colorado River will have consequential and perhaps catastrophic repercussions in the future for those of us in the Upper Green, if the hydrology of the Basin does not substantially improve. We must remain vigilant on this topic.

I passed a constitutional amendment [HJ0002 - Constitutional amendment-residential property class](#) by getting it amended into [SJ0003 - Property tax residential property class](#). Northwest Wyoming Senators and Representatives worked together to get this amendment available to the citizens in the next election. If the amendment passes, it will allow residential property tax to be separated from commercial and agricultural property tax, which will give future legislatures more options to provide residential property tax relief. [HB0098 - Property tax-homeowner's exemption](#) was converted into my [HB0054 - Homestead exemption](#) and passed the House, but inexplicably died in the Senate Revenue Committee. This bill would have exempted homeowners from paying taxes on the first \$50,000 worth of assessed value and

would have amounted to an average of \$300 savings for homeowners. The bill also would have backfilled lost revenue of local government by using state funds.

I also drafted bills that passed the session but were handed off to other legislators. These bills include [HB0188 - Wolf depredation compensation](#), which provides livestock producers with compensation for wolf damage in the predator designated area; [HB0123 - Collection of antler or horns by residents and nonresidents](#) is a bill that gives Wyoming residents a seven day head start over non-residents during horn hunting season; [HB0128 - Voyeurism within enclosed spaces](#) solves a hole in the law and was brought to me by the Sublette County Attorney's Office; and [HB0180 - Brucellosis testing-notification requirements](#) requires the Wyoming Livestock Board to create a communication plan with producers when non-negative brucellosis tests are found. It also requires the State Vet Lab to provide notice back to an affected herd owner within 3 days of discovery. This bill was in response to a non-negative case last fall in Sublette County, and the slow communications that followed.

The local issue of what to do about the increasing number of guided fishing boats on Wyoming's rivers, both domiciled in Wyoming and from outside Wyoming, will be the number one priority for the Travel, Recreation and Wildlife Committee this interim. I drafted two bills that prompted this interim topic: [HB0084-Regulation of commercially guided boats](#) and [HB0232-Outfitters and guides-amendments](#). I hope my local fishermen and fishing guides will engage in this statewide issue in upcoming months.

There has been much discussion during and after the legislative session about the three bills that I did not send to committee. Local Sublette County residents were bombarded by robo-texts from the National Freedom Caucus about those three bills.

Part of my leadership responsibility is choosing which standing committee a bill goes to or whether it is sent to a committee at all. I take this responsibility seriously; bad policy can create major consequences for Wyoming. Bills that are unconstitutional, not well vetted, poorly written, duplicate bills or debates, and bills that negate local control, restrict the rights of people, or risk costly litigation financed by the people of Wyoming are – and have traditionally been – less likely to be introduced.

Other leadership positions share the ability to hold bills back. House Majority Floor Leader Neiman, a Freedom Caucus member, held 57 bills back. A total of 30 bills died in my drawer and nearly 100 House bills and Senate Files died in House committees. The process for a bill to evolve from an idea into a law is arduous, as it should be.

Please see the following link for my explanation of the fate of those three bills:

<https://cowboystatedaily.com/2023/02/26/albert-sommers-im-focused-on-wyoming-solutions-not-out-of-state-influences/>

In a nutshell, a nearly exact duplicate of the school choice bill died in committee earlier in the session. I sent Chloe's Law out to committee but left the other transgender surgery bill in my desk because they were solving the same issue and conflicted with each other. The Parental Rights Act bill was unconstitutional and violates my ethos of local control. The reality is, the Wyoming Legislature met for only 37 days and there is not enough time to hear every bill. Time constraints are a major factor in determining what is debated.

I heard from many of you on the campaign trail about very specific issues that were important to you, and I made promises to address them. One of those topics was transgender athletes. I co-sponsored [SF133](#), which bans biological males from participating in all-female sports for grades 7-12. This bill passed and is now law. Another was eliminating cross-over voting. I voted in favor of bill [HB103, which](#) limits when a person can change their party affiliation, but this bill went too far in my opinion and will likely have to be fixed in subsequent sessions. I also brought tax relief bills and voted for others' tax relief bills this session, and I will bring back my Homestead Exemption bill next session.

Abortion was one of the hottest topics during my campaign, with passionate people on both sides of the issue. I ended up voting for [SF0109-Prohibiting chemical abortions](#) and the revised Senate version of [HB0152-Life is a Human Right Act](#). Both bills needed cleaning up, but I think both bills are a poor substitute for the trigger bill that was passed a year ago and is now in the court system. I do not think a pro-life stance should exclude being pro-mother and pro-child. [HB0001-General government appropriations](#) provided more money in the Supplemental Budget for the Developmentally Disabled Waiver program and DD preschools, helping populations of

children with great needs. I supported [HB0004-Medicaid twelve-month postpartum coverage](#), which extends Medicaid coverage for women and children up to twelve months postpartum. I believe HB4 is one of the most impactful bills to pass the Legislature this session. I also supported [SF0079-Plan of safe care-newborns](#), which requires care providers to develop plans of safe care when the newborn has been affected by substance abuse. And I supported [HB0111-Endangering children-fentanyl](#) and [SF0094-Federal Indian Child Welfare Act codification](#). Both of these bills were created to help children.

With the General Session now over, we move to interim work. Much more work will be accomplished in the next 10 months, before the next legislative session convenes in January 2024. I invite each of you to get engaged on the issues that matter to you. Follow the work and ask questions. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com with questions or comments.