

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on action that occurred on February 21, the eighth day of the 2024 Budget Session. The House worked bills and budget amendments late into the night all week, including Friday, and I couldn't get my updates out to you good folks. I believe it is important to talk about what happened on 3rd Reading of the Budget.

On support for mental health care, we passed three 3rd Reading amendments, and I supported all of them. [Amendment 26](#) funds a statewide survey from the Department of Education on the status of school district programs on suicide prevention, and a report is required to the Joint Education Committee this August. [Amendment 18](#) gives \$250,000 to the University of Wyoming family medical residency practice for counselors for prenatal care for pregnant mothers and veterans' mental health medication. This little bit helps after a bill that would have provided broader care to those two groups, HB5, died last week. I sponsored [Amendment 50](#), which appropriates \$18.5 million of excess K-12 funds for the purpose of mental health grants to local districts. This is an effort to provide more support for children in crisis, until the Legislature reexamines the appropriate number of counselors in the K-12 funding model. This should happen during a Recalibration of the model that will occur in 2025.

The House heard and passed division one of 3rd Reading [Amendment 57](#), which funds a study related to early childhood education. The study is to be completed by the Department of Education. Wyoming ranks at the bottom for providing resources and options to parents for early childhood education. I support additional funding opportunities for early childhood education, and I believe studying the topic is a good idea. I do not support compulsory universal early childhood education, as I believe that Pre-K education is a decision for parents to make, not the State of Wyoming to require.

3rd Reading [Amendment 30](#) passed. This amendment to the budget bill restored various capitol construction projects that were voted down last week. The projects included major facility maintenance at the Boys School, Riverton state office renovations, and facility work at Camp Guernsey for our National Guard. We had a great debate on whether state capital construction

is an ordinary expense of government. The Wyoming Constitution allows the budget bill to cover only the ordinary expense of government and public schools. I believe that routine replacement of state funded buildings is an ordinary expense of government, and I supported the amendment.

In my opinion, the Legislature is the first bulwark to defend the Wyoming and US Constitution, and I believe those debates are healthy.

[Amendment 46](#) would have reduced the money allocated for large energy project funds, but this amendment failed. The Governor's office uses these dollars as matching funds for large energy projects. I believe these projects are important to keep Wyoming an energy leader in the country, and I voted against the amendment, in order to keep the original budget amount.

The House heard 3rd Reading Amendments related to the Kelly Parcel, a piece of state-owned land within the boundaries of Grand Teton National Park. The draft budget includes the sale of the Kelly Parcel to the National Park Service for \$100 million. Currently, the state receives limited returns on the parcel, about \$2,800 a year.

There was important debate on the floor and two amendments passed placing conditions on the property sale. I sponsored [Amendment 86](#) , which passed, and requires that livestock grazing and hunting use be preserved in perpetuity on the parcel as a condition of the sale.

Another important condition we placed on the sale was through [Amendment 76](#), which links the sale of the Kelly Parcel to the US Bureau of Land Management's Rock Springs Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision. This amendment conditions the Kelly Parcel sale on the Bureau of Land Management not selecting Alternative B with respect to rights of way and fluid mineral leasing. Essentially, this amendment gives the Governor the authority to negotiate with the Federal government from a position of equal footing. Each party in the negotiation has something the other wants. The Kelly Parcel sale only happens if the Governor chooses to allow it. I spoke in favor of this amendment.

The Governor needs this arrow in his quiver while he is negotiating with the Department of Interior on the fate of the Rock Springs RMP. A favorable outcome on the Rock Springs RMP is

essential to the economy and culture of Southwest Wyoming. Protecting a billion dollars' worth of economic activity in that part of the state, preserving the traditional uses of grazing and hunting on the Kelly Parcel, preventing the encroachment of million dollar homes near Grand Teton National Park, and raising \$100 million for education would make this sale worthwhile.

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