

June 17, 2024

Hello Southwest Wyoming, this is Albert Sommers reporting on meetings and activities during interim work of the 67th Legislature. The Legislature is not in session during the summer and fall, but we remain busy as interim committees, select committees, and task forces study the topics that rose to the top of the list in March, after the 2024 Budget Session ended.

I am a member of the Select Water Committee, which I attended virtually on May 8-9. The committee reviewed several water projects and amendments to already approved water project proposals. We received an update on Colorado River issues. The federal government is paying water users in the Upper Basin to conserve water through a program called the System Conservation Pilot Program (SCPP). The primary piece of this program is paying agriculture in the Upper Basin (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico) to not irrigate parcels of land. In 2023, SCPP conserved 37,600 acre-ft of water in the Upper Basin. Wyoming water users received \$8.3 million from 21 projects. In 2024, SCPP will conserve 64,000 acre-ft of water in the Upper Basin, and Wyoming users will receive \$10 million from 32 projects. This may seem like a lot of water, but in 2022 federal officials were calling for water use reductions of 2-4 million acre-ft in the Colorado River Basin. In my opinion, paying agricultural producers to not grow crops is bad for the nation and bad for agricultural communities. However, as the Colorado River continues to dry, there will be a lot of pressure on agricultural water rights to either temporarily fallow land or sell land and water. Water will likely become the highest priced commodity on a farm or ranch in this river basin.

The Mental Health and Vulnerable Adult Task Force met on May 24 in Cheyenne and met again on June 13 in Kemmerer. The task force will continue to examine issues around vulnerable adults, judicial diversion programs and treatment courts, adolescents with high behavioral needs, and K-12 mental health services. As we move through the interim, we will hopefully develop some solutions to these challenges.

The week of June 3rd was busy. I was asked by the Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees to participate in a panel in Riverton on funding challenges for the community college system. As the Legislature looks at property tax relief for citizens, we have to remember the

entities funded by property taxes. Community Colleges are one of many local entities that receive funding through a portion of property taxes in their home county. Community Colleges also receive state funds for a portion of their capital construction and general operations.

After this Riverton panel, I returned to Pinedale to attend the opening reception for the Wyoming Association of Municipalities. Cities and towns are the lifeblood of Wyoming. We must keep these communities vibrant, if we want them to survive and continue to serve both town and rural residents. Small communities struggle to keep their streets repaired and their water and sewer infrastructure intact.

Then on Friday June 7, I attended the Wyoming Stock Growers Association convention in Douglas. I was asked to participate in a panel discussion on the importance of building working relationships with local federal employees, even when the agencies tend to be unresponsive to the concerns of local people.

Of course, I continue to campaign for my run at Senate District 14, making trips to Evanston, Bear River, and Kemmerer. On June 14 and 15, I attended Fossil Fest in Kemmerer. I had a good visit with several folks. I look forward to visiting with you along the campaign trail. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com or by phone at 307-360-7060 with questions or comments.