

First Day of Session

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne on February 12, the first day of the 2024 Budget Session. Today, a Joint Session of the 67th Legislature was convened to hear Governor Gordon's State of the State address and Chief Justice Fox's State of the Judiciary address.

Governor Gordon urged legislators to focus on the budget to meet the needs of the people of Wyoming, and solutions rather than individual bills and politics.

The Governor discussed the need to address rising property taxes many residents across the state have faced in the last several years. Last year, the Legislature added additional dollars to the state's property tax relief program, which provided an average refund of \$900 to the 9,000 homeowners who qualified. The Governor is requesting an additional \$20 million in the upcoming budget.

Governor Gordon noted that the Property Tax Relief program is administered by each County Treasurer's office. He also pointed out that property taxes remain local, funding city and county resources like senior centers, roads, and schools. The Governor noted how important it is to strike a balance, addressing concerns over rising assessed valuations yet not leaving communities without proper funding. There are many bills this Session aimed at providing property tax relief to homeowners.

The Governor highlighted the work of state employees, especially the road crews of the Wyoming Department of Transportation – like the efforts of Rick Ackerman, who worked tirelessly to coordinate the plowing of roads during the harsh winter of 2023.

In addition, the Governor mentioned the need to fund mental health services as outlined in the proposed budget to help Wyomingites who need these critical services. He highlighted mental health programs in the judicial branch, schools, law enforcement, and traditional healthcare. The Governor recognized our own Julie Mackey with the Jae Foundation, and the good work they do on suicide prevention.

Governor Gordon mentioned the importance of an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy and pushing back against federal government regulations that are trying to stifle our Wyoming energy industries. Several bills being proposed this Session continue to support our mineral industries.

Wyoming Supreme Court Chief Justice Kate Fox spoke about the need for an additional \$5.4 million to increase wages for court employees throughout the state, explaining that this money will be used to fill positions to serve Wyoming.

In the afternoon, the House convened into Session and began the bill introduction process. A consent list of multiple committee bills was presented to the body for an introduction vote. Any member of the House can pull a bill off the consent list. A bill pulled from the consent list must be debated and voted on separately for introduction. If a bill is successful during the introduction vote, then the Speaker assigns it to a standing committee.

A committee chairman then decides when or if the committee will debate the bill. If a bill is publicly noticed, the committee takes public testimony and acts on it.

Today, many bills did not meet the two-thirds vote needed for introduction.

Among the bills that survived the two-thirds majority vote were [HB0003](#) - Property tax exemption for long-term homeowners; [HB0004](#) - Property tax refund program; and [HB0018](#) - Property tax-inflation cap. All of these bills are designed to help address the high residential property tax issue. I voted in favor of all of them. There are more property tax relief bills that will be up for an introduction vote tomorrow.

I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) for questions or comments. The Legislative website can be accessed at <https://wyoleg.gov> and that website will show you all of the bills the Legislature is considering.