

Hello Sublette County and LaBarge, this is Albert Sommers reporting to you from Cheyenne, just before the start of the 2024 Budget Session. In an earlier press release, I talked about the priorities of the joint interim committees, but now I will talk about my priorities and the bills that I am working on.

This is a budget session, so my number one priority is to fulfill my constitutional obligation of delivering a balanced budget to the people of Wyoming. We are very fortunate in Wyoming that our Constitution requires the Legislature to create a balanced budget. Governments at all levels should be held to that standard.

Thoughtful measured property tax relief and reform is another priority for me during this upcoming session. I realize the hardship it has placed on older folks with fixed incomes, and on residents in general. During the 2023 General Session, the Legislature passed [HB0099](#) - Property tax refund program, which broadened the income threshold and allowed more low-income residential property owners to qualify for the property tax refund program. HB99 is already providing relief, with nearly three times the number of homeowners qualifying for this program than the previous year and almost 10,000 homeowners receiving substantial relief.

However, more work needs to be done. I have drafted [HB0052](#) - Property tax-homestead exemption, which will provide residential property tax relief to every homeowner. This bill will provide more tax relief for older homeowners, by exempting or eliminating a portion of the assessed value of a home from taxation in certain age brackets. My bill also provides state money to backfill what local government would lose from my exemption. Remember, property taxes in Wyoming do not fund state government, but go directly to our towns, counties, and schools to fund such things as snow plow drivers, teachers, and law enforcement. Not all counties have the mineral wealth that Sublette County does, and we must be careful when we craft property tax relief bills to ensure local government can continue to provide needed services. There are other good residential property tax relief and reform bills numbered for the upcoming session, so stay tuned.

I attended the Governor's Mental Health Forum in Pinedale late last year, and it was standing room only. Based upon the testimony from our local citizens, it was clear to me that more state

help was needed, particularly in our schools. I have drafted [HB0119](#) – Mental health grants, to help address the rising need for more mental health resources in our schools. The number of suicide interventions in our schools has been rising. My bill will provide some time limited grants to all school districts in Wyoming to help bolster the mental health services schools are providing. I believe social media has played a large role in the decline of mental health in our young people, as bullying can continue 24-7. A colleague of mine is bringing a bill to try to address this issue: check out [HB0085](#) - Social media-parental consent for minors required and let me know what you think of it. I will also support money in the budget for the 988 Suicide Hotline.

I have also worked on other bills that other legislators are bringing, including [HB0087](#) - Brucellosis testing amendments. This bill will ensure that producers get timely information about any non-negative test result when their cattle are tested. Further, it will give local veterinarians and brand inspectors more information sooner on non-negative test results. Perhaps the legislation won't be needed, if the Wyoming Livestock Board were to enact testing notifications in advance.

I also helped draft [HJ0003](#) - Support for local input in federal rulemaking. This resolution is directed toward the federal government and states, "... the members of the Wyoming Legislature support meaningful state and local government involvement in drafting and developing proposed federal rules, resource management plans and environmental impact statements." The Rock Springs RMP is a clear example of federal government not allowing meaningful local government input into the decision-making process.

I will continue to support education, particularly public education, but education by any means is a public benefit. Education is the key to a productive society and the only way to maintain our democracy. Funding education is a constitutional mandate that has been upheld by several Wyoming Supreme Court decisions, and has been declared by those courts to be "a fundamental right" in our state.

I hope to continue daily press releases during the upcoming session. I am interested in your thoughts on issues. I can be reached at [albert@albertsommers.com](mailto:albert@albertsommers.com) with questions or comments.