

WBR ARTICLE

State budget discussed in Gillette

By Kim Phagan-Hansel

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GILLETTE — The upcoming legislative budget session, which begins Feb. 13, was the main topic of discussion at the annual Eggs and Issues breakfast sponsored by the Campbell County Chamber of Commerce today.

Campbell County legislators Rep. Thomas Lubnau II, Sen. Michael Von Flatern, Rep. Gregg Blikre, Rep. Norine Kasperik and Rep. Sue Wallis all gave short presentations about the committees on which they serve and the efforts the Legislature is making to ensure Wyoming stays strong.

"We're about energy; we're about mineral extraction," Kasperik said during the breakfast, which was hosted at the Clarion Inn and Convention Center. "We want to make sure we're protecting that industry as much as possible. And while we're doing a lot to protect our coal industries - we want to look at new conversion technologies, as well."

Because Wyoming's state budget is so dependent on the state's coal and mineral extraction industries, both Von Flatern and Wallis, who serve on the Joint Appropriations Committee (JAC), were quick to remind the more than 140 attendees about the large role Campbell County plays in supporting operations throughout the state.

"When we're looking at budgets, coal is better than constant," Wallis said. "The coal industry is the bedrock."

For the last several years, the state Legislature has leaned on money from coal leases to help fund billions of dollars in school construction throughout the state, including three new elementary schools in Campbell County.

"The coal industry might not be the biggest source of income for the state, but it pays for all of our new schools," Von Flatern said. "Right now, your state is in good shape financially."

With the JAC budget recommendations ready to be presented during the February budget session, all of the representatives said they were prepared for the work ahead and thankful for the opportunity to meet with several Campbell County residents during the annual breakfast.

"It's a wonderful event, and we get to talk to a lot of people each year," Blikre said. "We have a really good group of people who represent Campbell County."

With a lot of interest in the upcoming budgeting session, as well as it being an election year, Campbell County Chamber of Commerce Business Information Officer Felicia Messimer said attendance at this year's event saw a slight increase.

"It's an election year, and people want to speak with our legislative representatives," Messimer said. "We had a great turnout."

For more on the upcoming budget session, watch for the February issue of the Wyoming Business Report, coming out next week.