

\$11.6 million in state funds brings questions, debate

By DAVID MARTIN Staff Writer

After nearly two and a half hours of discussion and debate, the cities of Green River and Rock Springs, along with the Sweetwater County Commissioners decided how to split the \$11.6 million in grant funding allocated to the county by the state legislature.

The split will allow Rock Springs to apply for 33 percent of the grant funds, roughly \$3.8 million.

The county and Green River will each apply for 27 percent of the grant funds, about \$3.13 million while the smaller towns and political entities get the remaining 13 percent, \$1.5 million.

The three entities had to come to a consensus because they comprised more than 70 percent of the county's total population.

Rock Springs received a majority of the funding after the city's mayor, Tim Kaumo, refused to split the grant money evenly on the basis that Rock Springs is the most populous city in the county and sees most of the impacts from the mineral industry.

Kaumo had initially proposed Rock Springs take 37 percent of the funding, while a suggestion made by County Commissioner Wally Johnson to split the funds so each entity would receive 30 percent while the smaller towns and entities would get 10 percent.

Kaumo's stance throughout the meeting drew ire from County Commissioner Joe Oldfield.

"I think you're being a little selfish," Oldfield told Kaumo.

Kaumo shot back, saying the distributions from the state have always been based on population. He said the city of Rock Springs was facing budget problems and would need to cut the city's public works budget by about \$12 million this year.

After presentations from the towns of Granger, Superior and Wamsutter, the groups decided to caucus to work out funding proposals.

Each town has needs, including Superior, which needs to replace its water filtration tanks, which were described as "going to hell in a hand basket" by the town's mayor, Richelle Johnson.

When the meeting resumed, both the county and Green River decided to go for a 28 percent split for the three major entities while holding 16 percent of the funding for the smaller municipalities.

"I don't think we would mind lowering our percentage to help out the other communities," Green River Mayor Hank Castillon said.

Rock Springs countered with a proposal of splitting the money 37 percent for Rock Springs, 26.5 percent for Green River and the county while the other get 10 percent.

A second caucus brought an offer from the county of 32 percent for Rock Springs, with 28 percent to both Green River and the county and 12 percent to smaller communities.

Kaumo countered with an offer of 33.56 percent for his city, 25.77 percent to both Green River and the county and 14.5 percent to smaller communities.

When both Johnson and Kaumo refused to move from their offers, Johnson called for a third caucus to reevaluate the offers.

When the meeting resumed a fourth time, Kaumo offered 33 percent to Rock Springs, 27 percent to the county and Green River and 13 percent to smaller communities.

The county and Green River agreed to the Rock Springs proposal.