

Economist: Wyo needs to put brakes on spending

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CHEYENNE -- Well-known economist Barry Poulson will share his take on Wyoming's shaky revenue picture today with members of the Legislature's Joint Interim Revenue Committee.

Poulson is the author of several books and articles on economic development and economic history including studies for Americans for Prosperity Foundation and Colorado's TABOR tax limitation amendment, according to internet reports.

Poulson has been an economics professor with the University of Colorado. He now is a spokesman for the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and has worked with several states on their budget problems, Rep. Rodney "Pete" Anderson, R-Pine Bluffs, chairman of the House Revenue Committee, said Monday.

The economist, Anderson added, has written a white paper that addresses Wyoming's problems. Anderson said Poulson, in essence, believes the state must look at no additional spending "ever" unless it is related to population and inflation.

"We hope to get some ideas on how to face the deficits we have. We can't sustain the spending we have. We have to look at the whole thing and come up with some answers," Anderson said. "We have to look at how to balance the budget."

The key to Wyoming's budget is the price of natural gas.

Every dollar decrease in natural gas prices costs the state \$270 million, Anderson said.

The committee's interim assignment is to examine the state's overall revenue picture including taxation rates and exemptions.

Although the efforts of previous Legislatures to eliminate tax exemptions have failed, Anderson said the committee is compelled to look at the tax breaks given the amount of money involved.

A previous study said if all the state's sales and severance tax exemptions were eliminated, it would add \$700 million to the state's coffers, Anderson said.

The Revenue Committee meeting will begin at 8:30 a.m. in Room 302 in the Capitol Building with a general discussion on revenues and tax exemptions with the Wyoming Department of Revenue.

Poulson will speak at 1:30 p.m. A public comment period will follow at 3 p.m.

The committee will meet again Wednesday morning until noon for an educational session on the computer-assisted mass appraisal system (CAMA) followed by further discussion of tax policy.

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