

Water, I-80, carbon on legislative agenda

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It's a no-brainer that the single biggest issue in Cheyenne starting Feb. 8 will be the state's two-year budget as it is poked and prodded by lawmakers.

But there are a few other issues that are just as important to people in Campbell County that also will be brought to the attention of the state Legislature during its budget session.

Some of the issues include Gillette's \$226 million regional water project, Interstate 80 tolling and carbon sequestration.

Campbell County's legislators met with various members of the business community and local government Tuesday morning during the Eggs and Issues breakfast hosted by the Campbell County Chamber of Commerce.

Here are the highlights:

- Gillette water project: State Sen. John Hines' bill would amend a 2009 bill to authorize \$24 million in state funding for the Gillette water project, which would bring the total amount of funding for the project to about \$40 million.

The amount includes an \$8 million loan from the state's Permanent Mineral Trust Fund that would be the local share of the project while \$16 million would come from an account controlled by the Wyoming Water Development Commission.

Hines expects some opposition to the bill because money in the commission's account is highly sought after.

The new bill will allow the City of Gillette and its partners in the regional system to start phase two of a second Madison pipeline across 42 miles from a location north of Moorcroft.

- I-80 tolling: State Sen. Michael Von Flatern discussed the effect that tolling I-80 could have on highway construction in Campbell County.

The bill won't authorize tolling, but it will allow the Wyoming Department of Transportation to come up with a master plan to bring back to the Legislature later, which then would decide whether to make the road a toll road.

One of the major items on the master plan agenda will be to get federal approval for tolling, which Von Flatern suggested could be difficult because the interstate was built with federal highway money.

The advantage to Campbell County if I-80 becomes a toll road is that it would free up to \$100 million in state highway funding for other projects.

"Highway 59 could become a four-lane highway," Von Flatern said.

- Carbon sequestration: Only one major piece of legislation is left to finish the framework for Wyoming's carbon capture and sequestration laws, said Rep. Tom Lubnau.

The bill would create incentives for "value-added power production," which will help in transmission of power from Wyoming to other states.

Lubnau also fielded a question about who would pay for carbon sequestration. He answered that the consensus at the Legislature is that it would be paid by the people who use the power.

"It will be the users, not the citizens of Wyoming," Lubnau said.

- **Medical malpractice:** State Rep. Timothy Hallinan discussed a bill that would require the loser of any court case that stems from a malpractice review panel to pay for the panel itself.

Now, there are no ramifications for either party if they do not comply with the ruling of the panels and proceed to court.

"It will give it (the panel) some teeth," he said.

- **Tax increment financing:** The bill will allow the city and local governments to use tax increment financing to build infrastructure using private money and pay for it later with tax revenues, said Rep. Gregg Blikre, R-Campbell County.

"It's a tool for a municipality to attract new industry," he said.

- **Health Freedom and Choice Act:** The bill will create an amendment for the Wyoming State Constitution that will give the state and its people a choice in regard to federal health care legislation, Hines said.

The bill would not affect existing services or state worker's compensation law, Hines said.

If the bill passes, it would need to go before the people for a vote.

- **Parental permission to drop out:** Two bills will go before the Legislature having to do with changing laws related to high school dropouts.

Von Flatern clarified that his bill would make it necessary for parents to sign off on whether their child, who is older than 16, can drop out of school.

It is not to be confused with another bill that plans to change the minimum dropout age from 16 to 18, Von Flatern said.