

Mead says Wyoming in position of strength

State of the State given to legislature

by Cindy Glasson

Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead presented his State of the State address to the 61st Wyoming Legislature on Monday morning, touting Wyoming as the best run state in the Union.

Mead began his address with examples why Wyoming deserves the title. For instance, we have the strongest employment in the country, rank number one in trona exports, provide 70 percent of the bentonite in the country and rank number one in coal and uranium development.

The governor said minerals brought in \$15.5 billion in revenue for the state, up 23 percent since 2009.

Livestock prices gave a great boost to the state's economy, small businesses in Wyoming had fewer failures than in the rest of the country, and the state's credit rating has increased – one of the few states that can claim the honor.

With \$14 billion in assets, Mead said Wyoming is showing itself as fiscally responsible compared to many other states. In addition, Wyoming has the fourth lowest crime rate in the nation and ranks sixth lowest in unemployment.

Education is key

Mead emphasized the need for quality education for Wyoming's young people as the key to our continued success.

"Funding for our communities and our infrastructure must be a priority," Mead said. "This is an investment in our future. I worry about setting the bar too low."

Mead called for accountability not just with schools, but with parents as well when it comes to Wyoming's children's education.

According to Mead, the educational opportunities for Wyoming's young people does not mean just public schools, but encompasses home schooling and private schools.

College is not for everyone, and Mead embraced career and technical schools as alternatives, saying it's time for Wyoming to step up and refuse to be left behind.

"We have to push for Wyoming standards, not just federal standards," the governor said. "Education is needed to lead Wyoming in economic devel-

opment. Wyoming should strive for a K-12 system second to none."

Agriculture, wolf plan

Wyoming has 11,000 ranches within its borders, according to Mead, all found to be the largest in average size of anywhere in the U.S.

Mead showed concern over the future of agriculture with grazing lease issues and the threat of endangered species listings nipping at the heels of family ranches.

The governor is asking for backing on his wolf plan, saying there needs to be a scientifically balanced approach to the issue.

He realizes there are some who disagree with his plan who would rather spend another 30 years in the court system rather than take his proactive approach.

Mead said if his plan can be approved on the state level, he would then seek congressional approval on the federal level.

Budget proposals

With a \$113 million drop in revenue, Mead had to find \$64 million in budget revisions.

He is not recommending across-the-board cuts, but rather a slowing in growth – through targeted cuts.

"We will produce a balanced budget not produced in Washington (D.C.) for a very long time," Mead said. "I want to make sure Wyoming doesn't just have the title of best-run state, but that we follow through to help families and residents."

To that end, Mead is calling for \$100 million for Wyoming's highways and \$15 million for the solid waste account. In addition, he would like more discussion on the Wyoming Department of Health and pay raises for judges, janitors and the like.

Mead is also making several budget recommendations for tourism in Wyoming, the second largest industry in the state.

"Wyoming is THE energy state," Mead said. "We are the largest exporters of BTUs (British Thermal Units) in the country and our minerals constitute 80 percent of the state's revenue dollars."

Mead is asking for \$6 million in funding for enhanced oil recovery, \$20.4 million for the University of Wyoming School of Energy and an additional \$2 million for a CO2 pipeline network.

"We must develop a sound energy policy," he said. "We need balanced development of our energy resources."



Steve Nally watches Jake Korte fill the 3,000th barrel at Wyoming Whiskey during a small milestone ceremony Feb. 9 in Kirby. —J.D. Stetson photo

Wyoming Whiskey fills 3,000th barrel; starts in-state sales Dec. 1

by J.D. Stetson

Wyoming Whiskey has reached a new milestone after filling its 3,000th barrel of bourbon whiskey on Feb. 9.

The distillery has filled about 30 barrels a week since filling the first one in July 2009, Master Distiller Steve Nally said.

The business currently has two warehouses to age the barrels with about 1,300 capacity in each.

Since beginning the distillation process, the facility has been in continuous operation under Nally's guidance.

Wyoming Whiskey CEO Brad

Mead announced Monday it will start selling its small batch bourbon Dec. 1 exclusively in Wyoming.

About 200 barrels are expected to be released in December due to the aging process of the whiskey.

"I wish we could offer more, but Steve has set a high standard for our product," Mead said.

The business plans to focus on its home market at first and expects to enter into the national market by fall 2013.

"We're obviously excited," Mead said. "Making great bourbon takes time, but it will be

worth the wait. We've got the best bourbon distiller in the world, perfect water, local grains and we haven't cut any corners."

Nally mentioned a recent bill in the Wyoming Legislature sponsored by state Sen. Gerald Geis (R-Worland) for the purpose of allowing distilleries to have a satellite license to sell distilled spirits from the manufacturing facility and provide samples to people who visit.

Geis said in a recent story the bill has the support of the Wyoming Liquor Commission and it would clarify distilleries under Wyoming law.

Thermop man killed in vehicle crash

Wyoming Highway Patrol troopers released details of a fatal wreck that took place at 8:46 a.m. Friday three miles north of Shoshoni.

Troopers identified the sole occupant, Henry P. Gomendi, 42, of Thermopolis as the driver of the 1997 Ford Explorer who

died of trauma during the crash.

Gomendi was heading south on Highway 789 when his vehicle went off to the right side of the road and struck a delineator post. He steered the vehicle back toward the road when it entered into a roll and rolled several times. When it came to

a rest, the vehicle blocked the roadway.

Troopers indicated Gomendi was wearing his seat belt.

The crash closed both lanes of the highway for about an hour-and-a-half.

Gomendi's obituary appears on page 5.

Young readers impress



First grader Tanner Jensen reads to Thermop Rehab and Care Center resident Bernice Splittgerber on Valentine's Day. Students from Ralph Witters Elementary read to the residents then shared a variety of treats with them. — Cindy Glasson photo

Chamber changes public forum date

by J.D. Stetson

The Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce has rescheduled its upcoming public forum on chamber events.

The forum will now take place at 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 6 at the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center.

The chamber's board of directors decided to change the date because the previous date conflicted with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church's annual pancake feed. The pancake feed will take place from 4:30 and 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at the church.

The upcoming forum is intended to provide chamber members with information and gauge support for various chamber functions throughout the year.

The event will be an open forum allowing the members to pose questions on the various proposed events and direction the chamber is heading. There will be no distinct agenda for the meeting, and the members in attendance will drive the discussion.

The chamber also has invited several agencies to be present to answer questions with regard to events in which they have proposed collaborating with the chamber.

The Greater Learning Foundation (GLF) has approached the chamber to provide manpower during a folk festival next fall. Another is the Thermopolis-Hot Springs County Economic Development Co. (EDC), which seeks chamber assistance in preparing for a fly-fishing tournament.

Fly-fishing Tournament

During the board's Feb. 9 meeting, EDC board member Harry Hughes and executive director Kendi Heinze elaborated changes made in the format of the tournament to the chamber board.

Heinze explained that her research had indicated most tournaments of this kind are used

as fundraisers to benefit the rivers used for the tournaments.

EDC has decided to change the format to eight teams of two people with an entry fee of \$1,200 per team. The event would not be invite-only, and entries would instead be on a "first-come, first-served" basis.

The entry fee would cover the participants' meals, lodging and guides. There would not be any monetary prizes for the tournament. Winners would receive special awards unique to Thermopolis and produced locally, Hughes said.

All the net proceeds of the tournament would go toward a Big Horn River development fund, which is an existing fund the agency oversees. Currently, there are no specific projects identified for use of the proceeds, Hughes said.

Hughes stated the agency intends the tournament to allow Hot Springs County a connection to individuals who are networked among others in the business world in order to promote Thermopolis' potential for development.

He stated the agency does not wish to discourage local participation, but does wish to "tap" into its potential networking opportunities.

The chamber board pressed for more specifics on what the chamber's role would be for the tournament. Hughes said the agency sought the chamber's help in assisting with a banquet for participants and volunteers to help with the activity.

Board President Donna Nally stressed the chamber would need more information on the specific details regarding the banquet and event, such as catering and reservations, in order to provide the assistance.

The chamber board did not vote or make any decision with regard to the fly-fishing tournament during the meeting. Hughes stated he would discuss the event further with the EDC board in order to iron out more details.