

# Winters explains non-discrimination act

by Cindy Glasson

In a deja vu repeat of the 2016 legislative session, Wyoming is once again in the spotlight nationally for House Bill 0135, the non-discrimination act.

The bill has been described as a stab at the LGBT community with those opposing the bill saying it removes the rights of the LGBT community in favor of religious preference, spreading real fear among the LGBT community and their supporters.

An attempt was made last year to present the bill on the house floor, however, there is a required 2/3 vote to bring it from committee to the floor. That would mean a count of 40

votes were needed and it missed that count by just a single vote, effectively killing it before full house discussion could be had.

Now, the bill has reared its head again, waiting to see if it will make those 40 votes this time around.

There are some misconceptions, mostly due to social media, regarding the intent of the bill.

“There are some terrible misrepresentations,” Representative Nathan Winters, one of the authors of the bill, said. “It does not change the definition of marriage. It does not prevent gay or lesbian couples from being granted a marriage license. It does not

affect benefits or services the LGBT community receives.”

Winters said the bill was very narrowly tailored so it has been difficult to keep it from creating confusion.

“We are looking for viewpoint neutrality with this,” Winters said. “It does not punish the LGBT community. It merely provides protection for people of faith, preventing any discrimination against them as well.”

Winters said he does not want to see the government weaponized against either side.

“We shouldn’t be pushing people out of business because of religious beliefs,” he

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photo by Cindy Glasson

## Early morning devastation

Thermopolis Volunteer Firemen were called to 2701 Hamilton Dome Road in the early hours of Monday morning. The occupants escaped the inferno without injuries along with their dogs, but the home was a total loss. Fire Chief Mark Collins said investigation into the cause of the fire has been turned over to the owner's insurance company, but he did not see anything with the fire that would have made it suspicious.

# IR wins for Photographic Excellence

The Thermopolis Independent Record staff brought home several awards from the annual Wyoming Press Association (WPA) Convention Jan. 20-21 in Cheyenne. The IR competes in the small weekly category along with 24 other Wyoming newspapers.

The IR won first place for Photographic Excellence and second place for Best Use of Photographs. With a total of 14 individual Pacemaker Awards, the IR also earned the WPA Foundation's Sweepstakes award.

Dennis Nierzwicki brought home seven Pacemaker Awards including first place in Sports Action with a picture of a girl goat tying at a Wyoming Junior Rodeo Association event and second place

in Feature photo with his picture of an exploding watermelon during a Lights On activity.

In advertising, Nierzwicki won first place in the Small Ad category with an ad for Owl Creek Excavation, first in Merchandise Ad for a chamber banquet ad, second place in House Ad with an IR Friday the 13th sale, second place in Use of Color for a Freedom Run ad and second place in Best Designed ad for a Demolition Derby ad.

Cindy Glasson won second place in the General News category with her story about the search and discovery of a missing hunter.

Lara Love won first place in Wildlife Photo with a picture of Canadian geese gathered on the terraces.

Previous IR employee Durward D. Jones won a second place in Scenic Photo with a picture from Wind River Canyon at night.

The IR staff also won first place in Open Page Design for their Shattered front page sports layout when the Bobcat boys relay team broke a 15-year-old state record. The staff won first and second in Plus Business Advertising Idea.

“I am very proud of the Independent Record staff for bringing home several awards for the second year in a row,” said IR editor/publisher Lara Love.

Advertising sales manager Amber Geis and assistant editor Mark Dykes attended the convention along with Nierzwicki, Glasson and Love.

## Agar heads to Corporations Committee

by Mark Dykes

Senate District 20 representative Wyatt Agar has his plate full during the 2017 Legislature, managing bills and learning the ropes as one of the many freshmen this session.

Tuesday morning, Agar shared he was headed to Corporations Committee meetings. He stated, “Last week we worked a group of bills pertaining to liquor statutes. We were able to make them more user friendly and remove regulations. This week we are going to look at a set of interim bills that center around special districts.”

He further noted this has been a rather contentious subject over the past couple years, and his hope is to return a piece of legislation that offers the public the transparency the public is asking for, with saddling the district with an extremely cumbersome process.

# School board considers four-day week

by Cindy Glasson

At their January 17 meeting the Hot Springs County School District Board of Trustees held a lengthy discussion on whether or not to move to a four-day school week for the upcoming 2017-18 school year.

Six years ago, when the board decided to move to the 4 1/2 day week, it wasn't a financial decision, but one based on student absenteeism and a better way to combat it, especially on the high school level. At the time, the majority of missed school days were on Fridays with students participating in sports and extracurricular activities. There was also an issue with teacher-coaches being absent in the classroom on Fridays as well.

Moving to the 4 1/2 day week has worked well at eliminating those absences by both students and staff despite ini-

tial push-back from parents.

The thought of moving to a four-day school week now is a financial one.

The Wyoming State Legislature is looking at deep cuts to education, somewhere in the \$350 to \$400 million range, leaving schools across the state scrambling to figure out how to deal with the shortfall.

Superintendent Dustin Hunt said in all his years in education this is the first time he has been really nervous about what could happen in the legislature.

“We’ve always been conservative in the district,” Hunt said. “We haven’t been extravagant with our spending habits.”

Nonetheless, Hunt said he has spent a lot of time drawing up at least 15 scenarios as to what may happen this time.

“At this time, not knowing what will happen, I want all our options ready to

go,” he said.

The district has until March 8 to submit their plan to the State Board of Education.

For discussion purposes, Hunt suggested the four-day week, providing figures on cost savings to the district.

The reduction in the need for substitute teachers with the four-day week would save the district about \$17,000 for the year. Add to that dropping food service for one day since school would not be in session on Fridays, and you see a savings of \$14,000.

Unfortunately, this doesn't completely cover the estimated \$54,000 shortfall. Hunt would like to have a bit of a cushion so he estimated the shortfall could be closer to \$60,000.

“This amounts to about 7 1/2 positions over the next few years,” he said.

“Now some of those positions will be lost through attrition, retirements or teachers leaving their positions to go elsewhere.”

Hunt reiterated to the board that the requirements do not change. In other words, the minutes of classroom time do not change. That would mean an earlier start time in August, somewhere in the neighborhood of a week early, and a later stay, sometime into June, than we have right now.

The savings will really come from the classified staff like secretaries not working on Fridays since school will be closed anyway. However, the board will still have to dip into the reserves to make up the difference.

“I don't want to just say ‘four-day week’ without knowing what is going to

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