

# Legislature dips into rainy day fund

by Cindy Glasson

After 37 days of very focused work, the Wyoming Legislature has finished the 2017 General Session. Since a General Session is when bills on general topics are brought, a wide range of issues have been addressed over the past two months.

Representative Nathan Winters said 204 pieces of legislation made it completely through the process, focusing on diversifying Wyoming's economy, balancing Wyoming's budget, addressing education funding shortfalls and passing measures aimed at improving the quality of life for Wyoming families, seniors

and young people.

The budget was the largest issue addressed this year.

Winters said a decline in energy prices coupled with heavy-handed energy regulations from the Federal government have resulted in a severe drop in state revenues, impacting both the General Operations Budget and education funding.

The supplementary budget passed, addressing the revenue shortfall for Wyoming's general operations and keeps Wyoming on a path of fiscal stability.

On average, he said, state operations have

seen a cut of 11.2 percent over the last several years and Education has seen a total cut of 3.7 percent.

"We dipped into the "Rainy Day" funds again this year about \$108 million to get us through this crisis," Winters said. "I am so thankful for the foresight of past legislatures to set that money apart."

Current funding for K-12 Education is about \$1.5 billion – almost as much as Wyoming's entire operating budget for the rest of state government combined.

To put that into perspective, Winters said

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## Major speaks on National Guard assistance

by Mark Dykes

Thursday during the meeting of the Hot Springs County Local Emergency Planning Committee, Wyoming National Guard Major Toby Alkire presented about what the Air and Army National Guard can provide to the community in case of emergency.

Alkire explained State Active Duty is where most of the response will happen for the military, with personnel placed after an emergency declaration signed by the governor. With that declaration, he noted, personnel would be placed on State Active Duty, meaning they are no longer on a federal status but on orders paid by the State of Wyoming, and they receive pay and benefits just like any other state employee.

Title 32 is the normal status for the Guard, Alkire further explained. His job, as joint director of military support, is to coordinate the Army and Air Force support assets that would come to a community. There are also Title 10 Active Duty members, which might also be called upon in disasters.

"The biggest thing to touch on," Alkire said, "is the military's not in charge. We may bring 100 people to the fight. However, we report to an incident commander, and that incident commander runs the show. We are in a support role, never in charge." He noted military personnel would take charge of and guide soldiers, but always under guidance from the incident commander.

Alkire also noted the Joint Operations Center, which is not manned all the time, but calls are answered through it 24/7. The center serves as the initial entry point for all Wyoming National Guard Air and Army, and National Guard civilian support operations. The center is very scalable depending on the operation and how many soldiers are needed, allowing for anywhere from two to 15 manning the center.

The National Guard helps quite a bit with search and rescue operations, Alkire said, utilizing civil air patrol as well as UH 60 helicopters. He noted the Air Guard is stepping up a ground search and rescue unit as well. Recently, troops were deployed to help with flooding

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photo by Dennis Nierzwicki

### Teaching them a lesson

Owen McCumber barely escapes a dodgeball thrown in a student vs. teacher tournament during the Thermopolis Middle School Lock Late Friday. Also featured at the Lock Late was basketball, dancing, fingernail painting and a technology room.

# Specific purpose tax takes effect April 1

Sales/Use Tax Rates By County

Effective April 1, 2017

|          |             |                             |
|----------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Albany   | Hot Springs | Sheridan                    |
| Big Horn | Johnson     | Sublette                    |
| Campbell | Laramie     | Sweetwater                  |
| Carbon   | Lincoln     | Teton                       |
| Converse | Natrona     | Uinta                       |
| Crook    | Niobrara    | Washakie                    |
| Fremont  | Park        | Weston                      |
| Goshen   | Platte      | \$ - 1% Total Sales/Use Tax |

Traffic delays through WRC

Traffic delays of up to 15 minutes have resumed on U.S. 20/Wyoming 789 through Wind River Canyon as scaling of rocks, cleaning culverts, reshaping ditches and other work continues.

The work is in response to the Memorial Day weekend flooding and mud slides of 2015.

Wilson Brothers Construction, Inc., of Cowley is the prime contractor on the \$840,000 project.

The work within Wind River Canyon is happening between mileposts 116.80 (near the tunnels) and 126.82 (about six miles south of Thermopolis). All work is dependent upon favorable weather and favorable road conditions.

"By contract, traffic stop delays will total 15 minutes throughout the project," according to Wyoming Department of Transportation project engineer Andy Freeman of Thermopolis. "Please plan accordingly if traveling through Wind River Canyon is part of your trip."

The Wyoming Transportation Commission awarded the project to Wilson Brothers Construction, Inc., at its September 2016 meeting. Contract completion date is May 31, 2017.