



Bill to privatize Pioneer Home dies in Senate

by Cindy Glasson

A collective sigh of relief could be heard from Cheyenne all the way to Thermopolis last Friday as word came down that the Senate had killed SF112 and the House had approved funding through the biennium for the Wyoming Pioneer Home.

A great effort between Representative Nathan Winters, Senator Wyatt Agar and local residents as well as folks from across the state ensured the home would be safe from privatization and funded through the next two years.

The fight really began in the background a few years ago when a study group, none of which were Wyoming residents, determined

the state could save a lot of money if they were to allow a company to come in and privatize the Pioneer Home.

While it may have saved the state a little cash, the real issue was the costs of living in a privately run facility would have been double what the residents currently pay, a cost that could have left many of the residents with nowhere to go.

The push to privatize became more intense over time, putting the residents and the employees in a constant state of turmoil.

As things came to a head last week, the community began to push back, sharing the phone numbers to various legislators and even the governor's office encouraging people

to contact them. It was a topic of discussion at the grocery stores and even in church.

Phone calls from Thermopolis and the Big Horn Basin burned up the lines between here and Cheyenne and email boxes filled up as email after email headed that way, begging the legislators to stop and think about what they were considering.

The fight, however is far from over as the issue is bound to come up again in the future as belts need to be tightened even more and the legislature starts looking for ways to cut back.

The bill would have also allowed an outside company to take over the Wyoming Retirement Center in Basin.



photo by Mark Dykes

Balloon basket

Katie Despain pushes Ryan Arends during a round of Hungry Hungry Hippos last Friday at Thermopolis Middle School. Some TMS staff members were in Phoenix being recognized as being a DuFour award finalist but other staff members and students were enjoying the opportunity to have a little fun at home.

Middle school recognized as DeFour finalist

by Mark Dykes

Thermopolis Middle School was recently selected as one of three finalists for the prestigious DuFour Award, presented by Solution Tree during the Summit on Professional Learning Community At Work™ in Phoenix Feb. 20-22.

Though TMS was not selected as the recipient, 5-12 principal Breez Longwell Daniels noted the school's representatives, which included herself, Eric Kay, Cassie Hetzel and Jacob Strenger, were able to meet with representatives of the other nominated schools and discuss what they have in common, what they do differently and why they think they're getting good results.

Daniels said it was fun to hear the overlap of the things all the schools are doing, such as building in collaboration time for teachers and intervention time for students, "just the idea that our teachers learn from each other to get better, but that our students can't opt out of doing the work." Daniels further explained in the days of getting a "0" on an assignment, many students either became accustomed to those grades or weren't affected by it. There has been a shift, she said, to where students can't choose to simply not do the work.

There has also been, among the three nominated schools, a focus on learning. This includes teaching what's essential and limiting homework to the essentials. "Our teachers," Daniels said, "have done a really great job of zeroing in on what kids need to know and just really being really focused with time and effort so kids aren't wasting time and teachers aren't putting time into stuff that's not going to help kids get better."

Dr. Thomas Many had a private conference with the representatives from Thermopolis Middle School, and went over their strengths as a PLC, including weekly collaborative team meetings, the

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Webber submits name for Secretary of State

by Mark Dykes

On Saturday, the Wyoming Republican Party State Central Committee nominated three people to fill the vacant Secretary of State office. Among the names that were forwarded on to Governor Matt Mead are Ed Buchanan of Torrington, Darin Smith of Cheyenne and Richard George of Cody. The three will be vying to fill the spot left vacant by former Secretary of State Ed Murray who resigned after two women accused him of sexual misconduct.

There were initially eight applications for the position, including one from Nina Webber, the clerk for Hot Springs County.

Webber was appointed county clerk in March of 2014, and later elected to serve as county clerk in the election of the same year.

The Wyoming Republican Party State Central Committee, Webber said, was a room of about 60 people including representatives from each of Wyoming's 23 counties as well as plenty of public and media in attendance. Webber and others who applied were called in, individually, in the order in which they submitted their names.

While waiting to be interviewed, Webber said it was interesting to hear from other candidates about how much they care about the state and their political philosophies.

When asked if she informed the Hot Springs County Commissioners, she said she did not. When she put her application in, she said, it was about 15 minutes before 5 p.m. the day everything was due.

Applying and interviewing for the secretary of state position, Webber noted, was a good experience she wants to learn from. She saw it as "testing the waters" and an opportunity to learn more about politics beyond what happens in the county.

As for the three candidates who are moving on in the process Webber said any of the candidates would "serve Wyoming and make us proud."

Legislature looks at school funding

Long term funding plan needed for Department of Education

by Cindy Glasson

"This is huge," State Representative Nathan Winters said Tuesday morning. "This is the biggest thing Hot Springs County has faced."

Winters is referring to the privatization bill, SF112, that would have allowed an outside company to come in and take over the Wyoming Pioneer Home and the Wyoming Retirement Center in Basin.

According to Winters, there was no doubt in anyone's mind the bill was going to pass.

"It was going to go through," he said. "There was a lot of pressure to pass it. We are amazed it went down."

Winters and his Senate companion, Wyatt Agar, spent long hours not only trying to kill SF112 but getting continued funding for the home for the next two years. They actually got the funding before the bill passed.

"I got down on one knee beside every desk," Winters said, "and I talked with the legislators,

one on one. They needed help understanding what this really meant."

The pair managed to get another bill pulled from the budget that would have called for yet another study into the privatization issue.

"The effort is not over," Winters said.

The issues coming up during the next couple of weeks revolve a lot around school funding. Winters said most are originating in the Senate, but things need to be figured out for a long term plan for funding the Department of Education. Policy changes need to be made to make things whole again for the students in Wyoming.

"Cuts will have to be made," Winters said, "but there is a lot of push back about adding more to the common core curriculum. Right now it just isn't financially feasible to add more to our educator's plates."

He is hopeful, over the next two weeks, that the differences between the house and the senate over school funding can be worked out.



State Representative Nathan Winters during a 2018 Legislature session.

Senator Agar watching 'stand your ground' bill

by Mark Dykes

Senate District 20 representative Wyatt Agar commented on the recent defeat of the bill meant to privatize the Wyoming Pioneer Home and the Wyoming Retirement Center in Basin.

Agar noted legislators from the Big Horn Basin worked hard to not only kill SF 112, but also returned funding in the budget

bill and remove the study.

"I am proud of how well our delegation worked together," he said. "We as a community now need to come together and work on a path forward. This is not the last we will hear of this issue, so we must be prepared." Agar further stated having a plan in place will help the community take control of the Pioneer Home's desti-

ny, should it become privatized, rather than being at the mercy of the State Health Department.

Agar also spoke to school funding, pointing out that much is still up in the air but amendments have been made in SF117 for smaller cuts to the budgets of rural school districts.

Another hot topic, Agar said, is SF 71 which would establish

"stand your ground" statutes with regard to crimes and civil liability, as well as determining when defensive force can be used and immunity from liability for reasonable use of defensive force.

Agar noted the bill passed through the House almost intact, and changes coming from the Senate side will be taken up in conference committee.