



Governor Mark Gordon's
State of the State Address
To the 66th Wyoming Legislature
March 2, 2021
State Capitol

President Dockstader, Speaker Barlow, Members of the 66th Legislature, fellow Executive Officers, First Lady Jennie, friends, and you, the people of Wyoming; good morning. It is an honor to address you from the fully restored Historic Supreme Court Chamber in our State Capitol.

It seems appropriate somehow that I deliver my 2021 State of the State address to you from this room where so much of our history has happened. It was here where our groundbreaking Constitution was ratified.

That document begins in the first article by asserting that "All power is inherent in the people and all free governments are founded on their authority and instituted for their peace, safety, and happiness..." Section 2 reads: "In their inherent right to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness, all members of the human race are equal;" a clear echo of the Declaration of Independence. Then, Section 3 contains the text that put this very room on the National Register of Historic Places, "Since equality in the enjoyment of natural and civil rights is only made sure through political equality, the laws of this state affecting the political rights and privileges of its citizens shall be without distinction of race, color, sex, or any circumstance or condition whatsoever other than individual incompetency, or unworthiness duly ascertained by a court of competent jurisdiction." With these words, Wyoming became the first government to permanently recognize the inherent right of women to vote one hundred thirty one years ago. How fitting is it that this is the 2nd day of Women's History Month. That monumental document, our Constitution, was signed in this room when it served as the Territorial House. This room later served as the Wyoming Supreme Court Chamber.

Although Chief Justice Davis is not with us here today, I want to recognize him as well as Justices Kautz, Fox, Boomgaarden, and Gray, and the balance of the judiciary; the 3rd branch of government enumerated in our Constitution. And I thank them for their continued commitment to administering the laws of our state. Even in a time when so much of the court's business had to take place virtually, their important legal work continued unabated. I look forward to hearing from Chief Justice Davis on the State of the Judiciary later.

I also wish to acknowledge the hard work of the four other statewide elected executive branch officers: Secretary of State Ed Buchanan, Auditor Kristi Racines, Treasurer Curt Meier, and Superintendent Jillian Balow. Their leadership over this past year has been exemplary.

A special thank you to the 65th Legislature for their dedication this past year. To you, the new and returning members of the 66th Legislature of the State of Wyoming, I say congratulations. And thank you for your willingness to step forward during this unprecedented time.

I know you will join me in thanking our Wyoming National Guard under the able command of Adjutant General Porter. The Guard has been an extraordinary asset for Wyoming this year, thank you.

Tribes

I want to recognize our friends, citizens, and sovereign neighbors: the Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes. Throughout this pandemic and economic crisis, we have stood shoulder to shoulder. I extend my most sincere gratitude to both tribes and their business councils for their diligent efforts to protect the residents of the Wind River Reservation.

Last year, we passed two bills to support federal efforts and state agency cooperation to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons. We have now released a statewide report to shine a light on these important issues. This report, the first in the nation, provides local data and perspectives directly from indigenous families impacted by violence. It provides evidence of what Tribal leadership has known, that Native American Wyomingites are subjected to higher rates of violence, and they face obstacles when reporting that violence.

I am proud that Wyoming has stepped up to this challenge, and thank the Legislature for their leadership in confronting this issue. I look forward to working with Chairman Dresser and Chairman St. Clair, as well as legislative leaders and our delegation, on the recommendations contained in this report.

Pandemic and Vaccination

I do not need to remind you of the challenges of the past year. Certainly, early on, no other part of our state was more impacted than Fremont County. I want to further congratulate Chairman Dresser and Chairman St. Clair, as well as Rick Brannan and David Meyers, for their ongoing leadership in vaccinating Wind River Reservation residents. From the start, the Tribes have served as a model in effectively administering the vaccine.

Here in Wyoming, we were faced with the obligation of saving lives and sustaining livelihoods. On top of that, we had an ongoing budget crisis brought on by a collapse of commodity prices.

Still, we have worked together over this past year to address a number of issues as citizens. And I am heartened that we are making progress statewide. While the pandemic is not over yet, the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter by the day. And it is clear that the path we charted and followed has proven to be among the best in the nation.

Our unemployment rate remains below the national average. Fewer Wyoming citizens have suffered from COVID-19, and fewer still, have passed than in other states.

But that is only half the story. Because one year later, more than 97% of Wyoming's businesses are still operating; far better than elsewhere. Through our efforts, we delivered proportionally more CARES Act dollars to small businesses than any other state. And our small businesses are hanging-in.

And now, when most other states are only beginning to talk about reopening schools, we know Wyoming students have been attending in-person since August. That is thanks to the extraordinary efforts of teachers, parents, and students.

I made a promise when I became your Governor to ride for the brand, and I have kept it.

We cannot be a state with one of the lowest infection and mortality rates, one of the lowest unemployment rates, and highest business viability rates, unless we are making good decisions, and trying to do the right things the right way. We have achieved that balance this past year, in large part, through the steadfast guidance of our State Health Officer and Attorney General.

I want to thank Dr. Harrist and her team for adhering to the scientific approach they have taken over this past year when, believe me, it would have been much easier to follow politics. She embodied the belief that some things are simply not for sale.

I want to acknowledge the principled insights of Attorney General Hill. She knew where to draw the line to protect our citizen's rights that are enshrined in the Constitutions of the United States and Wyoming.

Better days lie ahead, but we must never forget those who have passed. More than 670 of our friends, neighbors, parents, and grandparents succumbed to this unpredictable disease.

I am sad that Wyoming does not do as well nationally when it comes to deaths per capita. I ask myself each night as I pray, what more could have been done to save these souls who were taken from us by this hideous virus.

Some have lost decades of love and happiness with their friends and family. I am sure, by now, each of us can put a face to this tragedy. I know I have lost more than one friend. It is, therefore, fitting that we pause here for a moment to remember them.

Fortunately, though, vaccines are now available. I am pleased to say that Wyoming's vaccination efforts are proceeding smoothly. In fact, Wyoming's vaccine administration of health care workers and the most vulnerable is one of the most efficient in the nation. I want to thank health care professionals and providers across Wyoming for their dedication and work to administer these life-saving vaccines. We know that new vaccines are coming, and that supplies are rapidly increasing. It is our best and fastest way to eliminate and eradicate this virus, and safely get back to our regular ways.

Wyoming is Strong

Spring is nigh, and that is always a time of renewal and rejuvenation. With each passing day, Wyoming is looking forward to getting back outdoors to calves and lambs on the ground, crops in the field, and maybe even scouting for a fall hunt or drowning a fly.

It will feel good to begin our recovery and rebound from the pandemic, but it will not just happen. We are not quite out of the woods yet. Success will require action from individuals, businesses, and our state government. That is what, I believe, this session is all about.

I am sure there will be temptations to get sidetracked with politically oriented legislation, but this year, we have to keep our eye on the ball. Because we are only going to have one chance to turn this welcomed spring into a thriving summer and a bountiful future.

You are off to a good start. The short session in January saw important legislation passed and signed into law. This legislation expanded banking in Wyoming, extended the Energy Authority's ability to bring more tax-paying business to our state, and improved ways to address invasive species that cause so much economic harm. More than that, your efforts prove what our founders knew so well. That citizen legislators perform better than professional politicians every time when it comes to the needs of the people. My hat is off to you.

We also owe a special thank you to our state employees, for this past year revealed their commitment to public service. Even as their agency budgets were cut, and hundreds of positions eliminated, state employees continued to be more resourceful and work harder than ever before.

I particularly want to thank our school teachers, administrators, and school district staff for their efforts to keep schools open. I am grateful for your service. I am especially those food service workers who continued to deliver food to those suffering from hunger all across this great state.

I am also grateful for our healthcare workers, first responders, and essential workers. Their dedication, courage, and commitment to the people of Wyoming has been so visible this past year. They did their jobs, and did them well. Above all, I am proud of our Wyoming people.

We all found a way to live each day with courage. We took pride in the work we each did moving Wyoming forward under difficult circumstances. Holding graduations, opening our signature National Parks earlier than our neighbors, hosting record numbers of visitors to our state, and responding to the needs of our citizens with testing supplies and medicines. We even manufactured key supplies ourselves when necessary.

In the years ahead, future generations will look back and ask, “What made Wyoming different from other states during the pandemic?” They will always arrive at the same answer. Our people, and because we adhered to our state code.

Today I can say, with pride and confidence, that the state of our state is strong. Not because our economy is as robust as it was a year ago, for that's certainly not the case. Not because we are free of this dreadful virus, because it is still a pain. Not because we have solved all of our budget problems, for we have yet to face that piper. And certainly not because somehow the federal government is here to help us, for most assuredly they are heading in a different direction. It is because we are the people we are: weathered, tested, and resilient. We are a stubborn people, unwilling to concede during tough times. Our parents and grandparents experienced them before and prevailed. It is in our DNA.

It is that resolute spirit that is our greatest asset. The knowledge that we will stand by our neighbors, and they by us, regardless of our differences. That, I believe, will see us through these times. It is that spirit that makes Wyoming strong.

The State's Financial Health

Our fiscal health is also an issue. That, like the pandemic, cannot be ignored.

Conditions in 2020 required that we make significant cuts to the budget that the 65th Legislature passed a year ago. These cuts were the largest in our state's history, prompted by the largest loss of income in our state's history. Many of these cuts devastated state government services and programs, including ones that serve some of our most vulnerable populations. None of this was easy. Moreover, as I have stated before, we may not be done yet.

I believe Wyoming citizens should be able to easily understand how public funds are spent and better comprehend the state's true financial condition. They deserve no less, because it is their money, not ours.

The good news is that the Legislature and the Executive branches have worked together well this year to address the budgetary issues our state has faced during the pandemic. The irony of working to deploy copious CARES dollars effectively, while simultaneously cutting a half billion dollars from the general budget, should be lost on no one. Nevertheless, I look forward to our continuing partnership in the months ahead. We have more work to do.

My cabinet stepped up through the two rounds of cuts. I am proud of how they managed to, carefully, but strategically, balance the budget before you for your consideration, and money in the rainy day fund. That has all been accomplished with fiscal transparency.

Auditor Racines' WyOpen website and my own Wyoming Sense website are available online for anyone to track where the money went. With transparency in mind. I will continue to argue for a simpler budget. One like families are used to; with one checkbook, and one savings account. On this point, I thank the Senate Appropriations Committee for moving us towards that goal last week by passing Senate File 71.

Undeniably, we are entering more frugal times and we will have to continue to temper wants and emphasize needs. It is now your turn to consider how best to meet the needs of our people without burdening the generations to come. That is the tradition of Wyoming people: to build for the future, and not just take for today.

I look forward to hearing your dialogue and seeing the fruits of your labors. After all, the budget is the single most important responsibility of this Legislature. I am confident it will be addressed seriously and thoughtfully.

Energy & Minerals

When it comes to energy, we have and have had great champions in Washington, D.C., and we certainly need them now. I want to thank Senator Enzi for his distinguished career. And I thank Senators Barrasso and Lummis, and Congresswoman Cheney for their fantastic service. This is a delegation, which punches far above its weight. I am glad they have our back.

Let me take a moment to say how much I appreciate the letter the Northern Arapaho Tribe wrote in support of the State's position by asking the Biden Administration to rescind the federal oil and gas leasing moratorium. It was an important recognition of our partnership, even though I recognize the Tribe's support for Representative Haaland's nomination to be the next Secretary of the Interior.

Although exempted from the moratorium, our Northern Arapaho neighbors demonstrated that we are all one Wyoming family by sending a letter to the Acting Secretary of Interior. In the letter,

they noted that the moratorium affecting oil and gas operations on Federal Lands harmed all Wyoming citizens, including Tribal members. Thank you Chairman Dresser, and Members of the Northern Arapaho Business Council, for your courage.

Wyoming has long recognized the need for a broad energy portfolio that is reliable in reality, and not just on paper. This past year has reconfirmed the value of that proposition, as we have seen both summer and winter conditions test regional electric supply.

The energy and environmental policies of Washington, D.C. have changed; radically changed. In just a few weeks, through a series of executive orders, cabinet appointments, and policy announcements, we are facing a clear and present threat to our long-term core industries.

All decisions from D.C. must now pass a superficial, climate litmus test that ignores jobs, cost, reliability, and in many cases, real climate solutions. In D.C., they claim to follow the science, but they adopt policies that resemble science fiction.

This crazed pursuit of 100% “green” energy ignores the urgency of finding better ways to capture, use, and sequester carbon. It fantasizes that crippling our own nation is somehow good for our world. Nothing could be more off the mark.

In Wyoming, we know “green” can mean greenhorn; defined as an untested and potentially unreliable newcomer that is not capable of doing what is demanded. But Wyoming is embracing solar and wind development. Both are emerging and important parts of Wyoming’s total energy portfolio. But, we are not fooled by false promises either. We want to see what can be done.

Our long history of working with coal, oil and natural gas, and regulating its related impacts to protect and enhance other natural resources, such as wildlife, is well established. Wind and solar development must be held to the same standards.

I am committed to continue working with the Legislature to provide a consistent and clear policy for future wind and solar development, as well as, to secure an appropriate economic benefit to the people of Wyoming.

I would ask wind and solar companies to increase their commitment to Wyoming just as our fossil fuel industry has done, by bringing their long-term jobs such as manufacturing of turbines and panels here.

Still, we must recognize the solution to CO2 in the atmosphere is not found in a single technology that has singular limits. It is found in our agricultural practices, and in healthy

forests. It is also found in innovative and breakthrough technologies like those being developed in Gillette at the ITC, and, at our own University.

But, and I say this with both confidence and conviction, to achieve meaningful climate goals, and provide a resilient affordable energy supply, fossil fuels, coupled with a commitment to improving the ways we utilize them, must remain a substantial supply option. As Governor, my position remains clear and firm. I will continue to fight for our state's future, and defend the right to responsibly develop all of our resources.

With the principles of our State Code in mind, on January 29th, I issued an Executive Order requiring state agencies to evaluate the impact that the Biden oil and gas orders would have on their operations. That information is being compiled.

Meanwhile, I have sent letters to the President, the Acting Secretary of the Interior, and the Acting State BLM Director, identifying the devastating consequences of a needless review of approvals for day-to-day, well-regulated activities. I have had phone calls with Biden's top climate officials explaining our position and demanding relief. I have led 16 other Republican Governors in a combined effort to reverse the President's wrong-headed orders. And I have led a bipartisan effort, along with Governor Lujan-Grisham of New Mexico and others across the aisle, to seek better communications and a more informed understanding of the vital role oil and gas plays in our states.

Again, let me be clear. I will not waiver in my efforts to protect our industries; particularly, our coal industry. The use of coal is under assault from all directions. We have stood firm in our support of it throughout, for good reason. Paradoxically, it is the very industry, which offers the best chance, and most efficient way, to remove CO2 from our atmosphere.

That is why I ask this Legislature to pick up where we left off last year with HB200, and the establishment of the Wyoming Energy Authority. So we can provide the means necessary to make CO2 capture a reality in Wyoming and preserve one of our most important industries. Many states talk about the importance of net zero carbon emissions. But, today, I challenge you to join me in making Wyoming net negative in CO2 emissions.

We have to take the lead, and not look back. That is the best, and maybe only, way to meet the threats we face. With our commitment, our fossil fuel industry, and broader economy, can achieve this ambitious goal of net negative CO2 emissions without falling behind economically.

Promising new technologies such as hydrogen, which can be produced through the use of carbon capture and our abundant supply of fossil fuels, can help us meet the demands of transportation in ways electrification alone cannot. Moreover, a hydrogen economy would be a game changer.

It is not here yet, but it is much closer to a reality than a theory. Wyoming can and must be a leader in this and other emerging technologies, even as we pursue the development of resources such as wind and solar.

I ask for your support. As we actively and thoughtfully collaborate with industry environmental groups, entrepreneurs, local communities, and others to produce our way to net negative carbon emissions, literally. Not by regulating away our past, but by innovating our way to the future. That is what the Wyoming Energy Authority and School of Energy Resources are working to deliver.

We must develop responsibly, while continuing our efforts to protect our wildlife and cherished places. We have proven that we can do it well, as in the case of the greater sage-grouse, and now migration corridor conservation.

Our work is seminal, and we need to be recognized for it. It is time that federal wildlife and land conservation policies follow the lessons of success in the field, and not the theories from desk-bound policy makers in Washington.

Tourism

Energy is not the only driver of Wyoming's Economy.

This past year, despite a global pandemic that saw steep drops in air travel, Wyoming saw a surge in tourism. It is our second-largest industry and our largest employer.

With our beautiful mountains, excellent hunting and fishing, climbing, camping, horseback adventures, and unparalleled western hospitality, we truly have the potential for a bonanza. And that is true even with the stiff competition we face from neighboring states, all of which contribute more to their industry than Wyoming does. Think about what our tourism industry accomplished last year.

Our state parks saw incredible visitation. Folks came to Wyoming in droves when other states were shut down. People came from every corner of the nation to visit a place that was safe, open for business, and welcoming. We were the first to provide access to Yellowstone National Park. Almost every part of Wyoming saw increased numbers of campers, fishermen, horn hunters, boaters, and more.

This year, as people return to more normal travel patterns, and international travel reopens, we can look forward to seeing what the pent-up demand for what Wyoming has to offer, and brings

to our state. It has been reported that nearly \$1.6 trillion of tourist's savings dollars are raring to go vacationing. Let's make sure we keep a bit of that in Wyoming.

Wyoming must be ready to take advantage of this opportunity, and grow this critical industry carefully, so that the Wyoming that we know and love will continue to be the home we all know. Tourism is an opportunity to fuel our economy that we simply cannot ignore.

Agriculture

Agriculture will play an ever more significant role in our economic revival. The experience of this past year has laid bare the food insecurity that plagues our entire country. Wyoming is not immune to those issues. That is why I am so proud of the work done by the First Lady's Wyoming Hunger Initiative. Food from the Field, Food from the Farm and Ranch, and others around the state, have moved us forward during these times.

As with many things in Wyoming, folks are stepping up to help neighbors. It is important work and there is a lot more to be done. But it is work that will benefit our broader economy by bolstering domestic meat processing, feeding our school kids with Wyoming-raised produce, and generally integrating our own production into local economies. These efforts fit with other farm-to-table programs that make it easier to get food from producers to consumers, improve ways to brand Wyoming products, and expand our export markets.

All of these programs are hallmarks of what my administration will continue to emphasize in the coming years.

While it is unclear what the future holds for agriculture under a Biden administration, we should recognize opportunities that may emerge to build new sources of income for our farmers and ranchers.

Following the efforts, which began on a trip through the Thunder Basin with former Secretary Purdue, I have asked researchers at the University of Wyoming to help find ways that the good practices of our farmers and ranchers can lead to more compensation for their care of the land and other resources. I want you to know that I will always be a champion of any way in which we can keep our producers profitable, sustain the industry, and bring in new producers.

In the coming weeks, I will convene a strike force of industry leaders to outline opportunities and initiatives that can bolster our agricultural economies. One thing that became apparent with the demise of the Mountain States Lamb Co-op, is to give Wyoming what it needs to fight the antitrust practices of some of our industrial giants. Senate File 124 will equip the Attorney General with the latitude to investigate and seek appropriate relief from anticompetitive conduct

that harms Wyoming businesses. This civil enforcement authority will also help us to defend all of our citizens when caught in the crossfire of multinational corporations. It is important legislation.

There is a lot more that we must do to advance agriculture. My administration is committed to building our capacities over the next several years. But, I wanted to thank you for the legislation you delivered last session that implements some of the recommendations from my task force on invasive species.

One special note of thanks to the folks at the State Fair. This past summer, the Board, and particularly, Executive Director Cortney Konkle and her staff, pulled off what only three other states were able to do; hold a full-on state fair and rodeo. You made Wyoming remember what summers are for.

Economic Development

The traditional legs of our economic stool are energy, tourism, and agriculture. But, that list is by no means finite.

We continue to see success as a leader in digital asset banking.

In September, we approved the first Special Purpose Depository Institution (SPDI) bank charter. It was Wyoming's first state bank charter in more than 14 years. We should continue our efforts to make the state the digital asset epicenter of the U.S. Our delegation and I remain committed to aggressively pushing for the necessary federal actions to assure Wyoming benefits from this important innovation that Wyoming pioneered.

The reformatted Wyoming Business Council had a busy year. With their work, Wyoming injected over \$500 million directly into the state's economy. Here are three examples: The Energy Rebound Program that supported over 5,000 oil and gas jobs; The Connect Wyoming program brought broadband to over 12,000 Wyomingites; and, the Business Relief Programs, which provided hundreds of millions directly to Wyoming's main streets and small businesses.

I want to thank Senator Wasserburger for bringing forward Senate File 113, and Senator Ellis for bringing forward Senate File 116. These two pieces of legislation will continue the effort to modernize Wyoming economic development programs. They will also keep Wyoming competitive with other states that are attracting new industry and maximize efficiency of state government.

I want to thank Wyoming banks who stepped up during these difficult times to help valuable clients stay afloat.

Healthcare and Human Services

Even with a warming picture on the economic front, Wyoming, unfortunately, continues to see far too many individuals struggling with mental health issues resulting in high suicide rates. There is no doubt that the stresses of this past year have compounded this critical issue.

Wyoming has stepped up our efforts to support individuals in crisis. We opened the first in-state suicide prevention hotline this summer, and it has taken more than 660 calls to date. Additionally, I have offered suicide prevention education to all the state employees and more than 5,000 of them have participated. But this is hardly enough.

I am especially concerned about an ongoing epidemic of suicide that has plagued our armed forces and our veterans.

Over the next few months, we will be partnering with other states in the Governor's Challenge to address veteran suicide. Work we began last year to address this issue in active duty service must also continue. Those who step forward for our country, to protect all that it is and represents, deserve nothing less. It is imperative that we have adequate mental health support to assist individuals who are in crisis, struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.

We are dedicated to continuing to seek better ways to address ongoing crises. But these services are not cheap, and we have already cut deeply, not by choice, but by necessity.

That is why state agencies are coordinating with local stakeholders to ensure that we can manage high-risk youth, allowing them to stay closer to their support systems at home, among other efforts to address these concerns.

The Health Care Task Force that emerged from our pandemic response continues to investigate ways to reduce costs and improve access to care for our state's residents. Already, Wyoming has expanded the capacity of telehealth to reach isolated and high-risk individuals. This diverse group of stakeholders will continue to work towards solutions that ensure Wyoming residents will have access to affordable healthcare.

Education

I want to leave you with perhaps the most pressing issue for this Legislature, which affects our most precious resource: our children.

The biggest elephant in the Capitol this year, is the future of Wyoming's K-12 education system. We must ensure that the next generation of Wyoming students will graduate with the tools necessary to succeed in the modern economy. This is a moral obligation.

How we get there, and how we afford it, is a question that is now before us. We have relied, for years, on a funding model that is no longer sustainable. The handwriting is on the wall. The can we kick down the road every year is broken. We have to deal with this issue.

While the Legislature is charged with fixing the funding shortfall for which we are facing, I urge you to consider this challenge broadly.

It is not clear that more money necessarily equals better education, or that less does either. And money lies at the root of the Campbell County decisions that currently guide our state's response to education. But here is the bottom line; we cannot simply wait until we are out of money before taking action. This is far more than a budget issue, and I want our stakeholders and our communities to be involved in establishing a plan and vision.

Who are the stakeholders? You, the public, the parents and students, the employers, and those who will benefit from the innovation and hard work of future generations are the stakeholders. This is important work and we must seek innovative solutions.

There is also important work to be done for our earliest learners and the current early childhood structure as well. We have studied this for over a decade. It is hard to hear the fact that Wyoming ranks 49th among states in the efficiency of its early childhood governance.

Though there have been many recommendations over time to address this looming concern we have made little or no change to our governance structure. There is a reason for that. Change is difficult, especially when practices becomes ingrained.

Currently, components of early childhood learning reside in four separate state agencies. And over the years, programs here in Wyoming have grown in communities under a structure, which is unwieldy, but familiar. The resulting confusion benefits some and confounds others. Some may see any change as a threat to autonomy, and to the independence of their program. But there is absolutely no reason why Wyoming should suffer an incoherent structure that does not leverage, and quite possibly may imperil, the resources we receive.

Last year, in search of a solution, I convened a task force with broad stakeholder representation to discuss early childhood governance. That task force brought forth thoughtful

recommendations to reorganize state level programs and to provide much-needed leadership and coherence. The changes in HB63 will be a significant step forward for Wyoming.

You may remember, that from the very beginning of my administration, I have emphasized the importance of higher education in our state's economic health. Now is the time to focus some of their efforts, unleash their potential for closer collaboration, and greater economic growth.

Weeks ago, I, along with our community colleges and the University of Wyoming, announced an initiative: The Wyoming Innovation Network – WIN. It is an ambitious effort to supercharge Wyoming's post-secondary work by combining the best ideas of our remarkable community colleges with our cornerstone land grant university. WIN is in its infancy and currently developing its first priorities and outcomes by which it will prove its value to the state, but there is enormous promise.

This partnership among higher education will develop education initiatives necessary to strengthen the states workforce, promote entrepreneurship, and actively support economic growth and diversification. Moreover, it is a natural outgrowth of several efforts this state has undertaken over the past few years from Wyoming Works, and internships, to the Attainment Council and ENDOW.

It is the *do* of the “what” and the “why” that we have studied for so long.

Education is changing. Work is changing. People want, and need, more opportunities and approaches. Wyoming needs to respond. We know our financial challenges will likely necessitate it.

Closing

We have covered a lot. Thank you for your attention. In closing, Wyoming is growing.

Many counties in Wyoming have seen record real estate sales this past year as people look for better places to live and find those communities in our state.

The new residents love our mountains, our people, our way of life, and the fact that we are a conservative state dedicated to living within our means.

We are fortunate, in that respect, for the wisdom of our forbearers who saw fit to set aside a portion of our finite mineral wealth for the benefit of succeeding generations.

Money does not fall from the sky, even if these days it seems the Federal Government wishes it so.

Such largess comes at the expense of our children and grandchildren. Here in Wyoming, we have a tradition anchored in the belief of building a better future. I do not know one successful rancher who is not a steward of resources.

We are faced with that challenge today.

Will we steward our resources, savings and all, so that our children can have a chance? Or, will we be so self-centered that we spend ourselves into oblivion and leave them with the bill?

We must address the issues I have spoken about here without delay. And we must keep our eye on the future. Remember, Wyoming is the place other states could have been if they had taken the time to do it right.

There are choices to be made. We can no longer stick our heads in the sand. What we do today can mean that the Wyoming we love, that many of us grew up in, and that all of us admire, remains. Or, it can become a husk of itself, if we take without putting back.

These next few years will be pivotal for Wyoming, and I intend to do my best to make sure our citizens are confident in their future, in their children's future, in the economic opportunities that abound, and in that special something that makes this truly the greatest state in the nation.

Let us seek to do the right thing, do it the right way, and do it right away.

May you have a productive session, and one future generations will look back upon with pride.

God Bless Wyoming. God Bless America and keep her free. And God Bless you, the people of Wyoming.