

Thanks to the 61st



SHAWN TAYLOR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In March the 61st meeting of the Wyoming Legislature put a bow on what many veteran legislators and others who have been involved over the years thought was one of the more “interesting” sessions in recent history.

Many new faces and some seasoned vets made up the 61st, and I hope the newly elected folks gained a greater appreciation for what the job means and entails. I also hope the veterans helped the freshman navigate the various protocols and processes they surely encountered.

Many of the social issues the legislature dealt with generated a lot of talk. And there was just as much talk about the fact that they spent more time on other issues (jobs, economy and education to name the big three) than the ones covered in the media.

Regardless of your thoughts about what the legislators should or shouldn't have spent their time and effort on – or your party affiliation – one thing we should all do is thank these elected officials.

Being a citizen legislator means being asked to leave your family, your friends, your home and your job for months to travel to Cheyenne and do the job you were elected to do for very little pay. Furthermore, between your tours in Cheyenne, you're asked to travel across the state to various committee meetings, taking even more time away from family, friends, home and job.

I don't feel that I'm in a position to critique the session or the legislature, particularly because the legislature didn't deal with too many issues that would have impacted the co-ops. There are enough armchair legislators who are more than happy to offer their opinion!

Many other states have a citizen legislature, but I'll offer up two reasons why I think the Wyoming Legislature distinguishes itself from others: it's one of the most efficient legislatures (doing the most in the least amount of time), and it's one of the most accessible.

Sure, the state's mineral wealth helps the legislature be efficient. After all, the legislature can talk about spending and saving money rather than cutting budgets (although that happens too) or figuring out how to fill a huge budget hole. Nonetheless, the legislature proves to be a pretty efficient way to run the state.

And sure, our low population lends itself to being accessible because anybody (unless you're on some kind of watch list) can show up and talk to any legislator about anything and even testify in committee – sometimes without anything but an uneducated opinion on an issue. Not every state offers this opportunity.

But being accessible doesn't mean legislators should have to put up with vicious, and many times anonymous, personal attacks. I feel strongly that no legislator should be subject to the kind of attacks from groups or individuals that I heard about firsthand at the 61st.

Now, I know you might be thinking to yourself, “they knew what they were signing up for” and that is absolutely true. All the same, the next time you see a legislator, tell him or her thank you ... then tell them what you think.