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Q: In your mind, what are the next steps to diversifying the state's economy?

First and foremost, we must ensure our economy is robust enough so we are not as heavily dependent on our energy sector, and that we have the kind of jobs and opportunities future generations want to pursue right here at home. To achieve this, there are really three things I think we need to focus on in the near-term: keeping government minimal, accountable locally and living within its means; fostering innovation and encouraging strategic growth and development from the ground up; and providing exceptional educational opportunities for our kids and continuing education everyone needs to succeed and lead in the transforming workplace of the future.

Charter a new state bank after the model of North Dakota. Instead of using our large investment portfolio of around \$20 billion to bank companies on Wall Street, we should keep that money in Wyoming and use it for low interest business loans for start-ups and existing business expansion. A \$10 billion to \$20 billion infusion of capital into Wyoming will by itself diversify the economy. The main difference will be the state will back the loans instead of the feds. The lending criteria will be much more favorable and affordable. The entrepreneurs will then be in charge of the economy, instead of the government.

As governor, I will work with other governors and businesses around the nation to identify opportunities for Wyoming. I will help open markets to get top dollar for our resources, while working to bring businesses to Wyoming. I will work with the University of Wyoming to maintain the quality of education and research needed to create the best graduates while attracting businesses. As governor, I will use the latest research to make data-driven decisions to diversify our economy. I will develop a renewable portfolio standard (RPS) to grow the wind energy market in Wyoming. I will work to bring high-tech jobs and data centers to Wyoming.

To grow our economy, Wyoming must not just talk about change, but must have new leadership willing to make the investments and decisions necessary to build our economy of the future. Energy will remain the backbone for the foreseeable future, but we can be more than an energy state. We need to invest wisely in education and workforce training, support entrepreneurs and innovators and invest in our communities, including greater access to broadband internet. We need to promote tourism and outdoor recreation. We must develop more manufacturing and technology, support mineral and renewable development, create more opportunities for agriculture and stabilize state revenue.

Q: Can the state get on a more stable financial footing without changing how it generates revenue? If not, what changes need to be made?

Yes, and it starts with taking a hard look at spending while building out our economy for the long term. Ensuring we have a balanced budget and that the state is not spending more than we are taking in is absolutely essential. Our other challenge is diversifying our economy across sectors that are not all correlated to one another. I believe Wyoming has the kind of jobs and opportunities future generations will want to pursue right here at home, from the "knowledge-based" economy, to building out how America will power herself in the future, to taking advantage of all that our great outdoors has to offer. We only need to unlock our potential. I have been and will continue to be committed to building out those future opportunities.

Severance or production tax from our natural resources will still play a vital role in the Wyoming economy, and we must do all we can to support that sector. The major move will be away from Wall Street, which is risky anyway and back toward Wyoming with our investment money. It is a much safer investment for the public money and a better use of our money to stimulate our economy. We also need to take control over our public lands and the \$1 billion the feds withhold from us each year. Part of that money will be used to manage the land and part will be used to offset expenses for the cities and counties. I believe there will be enough money to reduce our property tax burden, which sits at eighth highest in the United States.

No, having already reached our peak production of natural resources, revenues from them will continue to decline. Via WyoFile, I evaluated Wyoming's tax revenue with other states and believe we do have some area for tax reform. Wyoming has the eighth-lowest property tax in the nations ranging around .61 percent, from county to county. South Dakota is 1.32 percent, Nebraska is 1.83 percent and North Dakota is 1.05 percent. It would greatly help Wyoming's fiscal situation to increase property tax statewide to 1 percent. Sixty percent of Wyoming's electricity is sold out of state (U.S. Energy Information Administration), without being taxed by Wyoming. A 1 percent shift in tax from electrical usage to production would significantly aid Wyoming's fiscal shortfalls.

The answer to the first question is "no," and anyone who suggests otherwise is not telling the voters the truth. Diversifying the economy without broadening the tax base will get us nowhere. For the past century, Wyoming has ridden the boom-and-bust roller-coaster of fluctuating energy prices. It is time to break the cycle. We must work together to strengthen our communities so that they can help diversify our economy. We must properly fund our public schools so that our kids are prepared for the future. The recent increases in oil prices help but do not change the fact that we need to develop a fair, equitable and competitive tax base for our economy of the future. However, I have not supported an income tax.

Q: If faced with the need for further cuts in the state budget, where would you look first? Is there any department you believe can't bear more cuts?

The hard truth is, the boom times over the last decade have resulted in advanced spending rates that Wyoming simply cannot keep up with. The biggest job of our next governor is going to be managing spending levels without growing government while still providing the essential services the people of Wyoming depend on. To address Wyoming's deficit, we have to prioritize needs versus wants, make reductions to ensure we are living within our means, and look at ways to improve efficiencies and cut costs. I think we need to take a hard look at the capital construction budget.

I would sign an executive order on Day 1 authorizing a complete audit of all departments and personnel down to the last penny. Once that has been done, appropriate reductions in spending can be made. Mind you, Wyoming has the largest government per population of any state in the union. Certainly this is not something to be proud of. We must right size our government without cutting into vital spending areas.

It is important that we continually perform cost-benefit analyses to identify areas of waste that can be cut. As governor I will have my team perform statewide analyses and identify areas where savings can be made, improving efficiency. As the state has already been cut significantly over the last four years, I will focus more on economic diversity and growth. I will also consider other ways to increase state revenue.

Many cuts have been "penny-wise and pound foolish," meaning they will cost the state more in the long run. Streamlining and targeted review are preferable to across-the-board cuts. I support the streamlining of government to eliminate obsolete programs and to avoid duplication. Criminal justice reform, over time, could reduce the costs of one of our more expensive agencies – the Department of Corrections. Accepting Medicaid expansion could help reduce health-care costs for everyone over time.

Q: What tangible steps would you take to help boost the state's coal industry? If the state is unable to ship coal overseas, is there any way you can help increase the value of coal?

With such a powerful, in-demand resource at our fingertips, Wyoming should lead the way on research innovation to ensure its responsible future use. As governor, I will work to position Wyoming as the leader in advanced energy technologies including carbon capture and storage and new carbon-to-product markets. I will pursue additional public-private partnerships. With continual roadblocks coming up with terminals on the West Coast of the United States, I'm committed to exploring alternative means of exporting Wyoming energy.

No. I take control over the land where coal exists. This will enable the state to deregulate the current regulatory scheme, which is burdensome to coal production. Second, continue to pursue overseas markets and shipping channels, and third, instead of shipping coal out of state, we should convert it to electricity and ship it either by a transmission grid or mega-batteries the size of a train car.

As governor of Wyoming, I understand we need to maximize our returns on all of our resources including coal, uranium, natural gas, oil, trona and lumber. Our coal is of high quality and sells itself. We have already worked to open passageways to overseas markets.

There is every reason to believe we can revitalize the industry if we are willing to innovate. I helped develop Wyoming's landmark carbon capture and sequestration legislation, and supported funding the integrated testing facility in Gillette. I was also part of a coalition of energy Democrats across the country who were part of Coal Blue that pushed back against the last administration's policies. As governor, I would push efforts to advance the development of value-added use of our minerals and work to locate a pilot carbon capture project in Wyoming.

Q: Would you continue to put off repair and replacement of things like school buses, or are such expenses a priority for you?

Ensuring the safety and well-being of Wyoming students is absolutely essential. That being said, there's no question we face serious challenges in meeting our education funding needs. Wyoming's most important resource is its next generation, and we must do everything in our power to ensure that our children are prepared for the jobs of today and opportunities of tomorrow. However, I do believe there are opportunities to improve efficiencies and streamline programs and cut costs.

Maintenance and repair of necessary assets saves money in the long run.

As a business manager, I would evaluate out-of-state of repair for all of our public service infrastructures and services, using best practices to see if vehicles need replaced or repaired. I would like to see more one-time funds going to grow the economy rather than new purchases that may not be needed or used.

I would not put off the replacement and repair of buses or similar equipment. More importantly, I will fulfill our constitutional requirement to fund education so that every child in Wyoming has access to a quality education. One of the many reasons I jumped into the governor's race was because the Wyoming Senate spent two years ignoring evidence and attacking public education, while at the same time passing a constitutional amendment that would have destroyed public education in Wyoming.

Q: Do you support passage of a nondiscrimination law at the state level? Why or why not?

I believe strongly that no one should be discriminated against in the workplace, and I think most people in Wyoming feel the same way. If discrimination is happening here, we need to look at that, but I do have concerns about creating a new protected class.

No. Our current constitution framework protects all classes of people.

I do support individuals' rights and freedoms. People should not be discriminated against because they are different.

Wyoming needs to send the message that it is open for business and welcoming to all. Younger workers are less attracted to Wyoming because of our lack of support for LGBTQ rights. In the Legislature, I voted for statewide nondiscrimination legislation, which passed the Wyoming Senate 26-4 but failed in the House. No American should be denied a job or a home simply because of their sexual orientation. Anti-discrimination doesn't give anyone special rights, it simply guarantees equality.

Q: Do you think Wyoming should move to all mail-in elections? Why or why not?

The Joint Corporations, Elections and Political Subdivisions Interim Committee recently passed a bill out of committee that would empower county clerks to move to all mail-in ballots, should they so choose. First and foremost, I think we need to ensure that the security and integrity of our elections can be upheld using mail-in ballots. As a lifelong conservative, I've long been a proponent of local control. Allowing county clerks to determine the best voting system for their individual communities could potentially serve local citizens well in casting their ballots.

No. People who cannot make the effort to vote at a polling place are people who are not informed about the people or issues on which to vote. Absentee voters excluded. We need more informed people, not less.

Our current election system is working well. I am not in favor of modifying our current election system.

Canvassing throughout the state, I meet many individuals who care deeply about the right to vote, and about the election process itself. For some, going to the polls is a deeply rooted tradition. It is something that many people look forward to and even get excited about. These traditions are part of our democracy. However, I think the convenience of the mail-in ballot would increase voter turnout, which is key to a functioning democracy.