

Closed meetings continue

Well, well, well.

The more things change, the more they remain the same.

Because it was an inconsequential meeting, the comical by-products of an illegal meeting outweigh the importance.

The city council recently held what they call a "straw poll" meeting and I call their "Council Christmas Dinner at Public Expense." The meals for council members are paid for with public funds. Their dates, spouses or significant others meal cost is paid by the council member. The mayor usually attends these dinners even though the purpose is to vote in advance for who will become president of the council for the upcoming year and the mayor has no vote. President of the City Council is usually not a sought after position and seems to go to the person who was in the bathroom when the vote was taken.

Seldom is there a contest but this year seems to be an exception. Mark Rinne must miss having the gavel in his hand - oh, that's right, there are no Committee of the Whole meetings anymore so he wouldn't even get to hold a gavel unless the mayor was absent - and Georgia Broyles probably feels the position should be hers. Like Republicans nationally, she may believe "it's my turn" because she's been the most recent vice president.

Not to say that the city council is sexist but let us take a trip down memory lane.

Who has served as president of the City Council over the past, oh, let's say, dozen years? How many women council members have been president? Defenders of sexism might argue that the women members have not been as capable as the males. Give me a break. I won't name some of the guys who were elected president but suffice it to say they were not leaders or intellectuals. Not in Mensa.

What's interesting now is that there are three women on city council. Amber Ash is new so it can't be expected that the males would elect her president just yet. Judy Case has twisted too many tails to have a chance at president. So, that leaves Georgia. Is she capable of being president? Come on, I just told you about the number of middle age men who have been president over the past dozen years.

A council president gets to name committee members and sit next to the mayor. Other than that, they may schedule meetings. Nothing hard. Nothing profound. So any member with an interest and a bit of ambition could be president.

By the way, the last woman to be elected council president was Maggie Carter and that was not due to her efforts but Jack Spiker's. Maggie's end with Cheyenne

city government was inglorious as Cheyenne Herald readers are aware.

Back to the subject at hand. The recent meeting was to hold a "straw poll." The WTE called is an "illegal" meeting because it was not announced. Well, duh! I knew about it. I knew when it would be held, where it would be held and how meals would be paid for. I hope the WTE doesn't expect me to send them a memo on meetings like this one. What was particularly funny about their not knowing about the meeting was that one of their own, Scott Smith, was supposed to let them know. Scott considers himself "a journalist" and only works for the City as a favor to him - and probably the WTE.

He has so little to do, except stand at Henderson and Pershing in an orange safety jacket, that he "forgot" to post the meeting. "Forgot" because he didn't remember or "forgot" because it would be less complicated if media did not attend? In past years, Jack Spiker and his minions actually *invited* the WTE reporter to the dinner. Personally. Individually. No other media representative, just her.

Anyone who really believes that elected officials want transparency in government is delusional. They would prefer to do everything - **EVERYTHING!** - out of sight of the public, without public input and certainly without public criticism or scrutiny. The Council and Smith knew exactly what they were doing the other night and they did not publish notice on purpose.

It was only a couple days earlier that the WTE criticized the mayor for holding a limited council member meeting to discuss the budget. The mayor and council president knew exactly what would constitute a quorum and would require both public notice and openness. So it wasn't as though they were unaware that the Christmas Dinner was a quorum and required notice and openness. Just like the past mayor, this administration has started down the path of secrecy trumping transparency and compliance with the law.

Once again, having the city attorney who just isn't up to the task miss the point about the dinner being an official meeting of the Cheyenne governing body will come back to bite the group in the ample fannies. Except, few really care.

In the meeting earlier in the week to discuss upcoming budget horrors, those invited was interesting. The mayor. Of course. That's one. The council president. Of course. That's two.

Who else? Surely members of the Finance Committee would dominate. Right? Wrong. And the two members who were vying to become president of the city council in about three weeks would be there. Right? Wrong.

Jimmy Valdez, chair of the Finance Committee was not there. Was he invited? The only member of the Finance Committee in attendance was Jack Spiker. And, he had to leave when Judy Case showed up, uninvited, or the meeting would have had a quorum and become illegal at that point. It was a planned and deliberate move to have a critical meeting about the city's escalating financial problems and to hold that meeting without media or the public there.

One could argue that maybe the chair of the second committee, Public Services, should have been in attendance but it seems more logical and responsible to have more members of the Finance Committee, not Public Services, at a meeting that involved finances. Just old-fashioned thinking on my part? Jim Brown, chair of the Public Services Committee, was there. As was Don Pierson, a member of the PS committee. When Judy Case crashed the party, there were three members of the Public Services Committee and none (because Spiker had to leave to avoid a quorum) from the Finance Committee. Also, neither candidate for upcoming president were in attendance.

Not only do they blatantly violate the law, they're not very smart in doing it.

Christmas Greetings from



Cheyenne Public Scales

What is the Cheyenne Herald? It is a bi-weekly publication that I hesitate to refer to as a "newspaper" but calling it only an "Opinion/Commentary" publication does not adequately describe it either. While much of what appears on these pages is opinion, commentary, and/or essay, much of it is breaking news. When we disclosed that former Cheyenne Police Chief Bob Fecht had purchased, with public money, a master's degree in criminal justice from an unaccredited diploma mill in Mississippi that was never authorized to issue degrees, that was not opinion. That was not commentary. That was fact. That was news. On the other side of the coin, when I opine that the latest city attorney isn't up to the job yet, that is my opinion. Because I write virtually everything presented on these pages, bylines are not used. They're not necessary. An article written by someone else will have a byline. The Herald is not a member of the Wyoming Press Association. What is presented here is original. Space is not filled with wire service fodder, comics or crossword puzzles. The Cheyenne Herald is Wyoming's only investigative publication and that distinction is taken seriously.

Dave Featherly

Homeless Memorial Day

Since 1990, on or near the longest night of the year, a Homeless Memorial Day has been used to bring attention to the tragedy of homelessness and to remember our homeless friends. The Wyoming Coalition for the Homeless was one of the original 30 cities that joined the National Coalition in holding such a gathering. This year, 100+ cities will participate.

The 2009 event will take place at noon on December 21st in front of the State Capitol Building. Speakers will include Pastor Bill Jividen of Beacon Hill Baptist Church, Rick Veit of St. Marks Episcopal Church and Cheyenne Interfaith Hospitality Network and Earl Janack, former homeless street musician. Call Virginia at 634-8499 for more.

