

## Reorganize or scrap the Wyoming Business Council

As the governor and legislature deal with declining revenues, one of the cutbacks they should seriously consider is the future of the Wyoming Business Council.

The question they should ask themselves is this one: Which businesses have come to Wyoming or expanded here that would not have done so without the Business Council? The answer would be: Few, if any. Most likely, none at all.

Since the formation of the Business Council, the best, highest-paying jobs they've created have been their own. An empire has been built and the Business Council has been used for jobs for friends.

There may some productive economic development groups in Wyoming but they're not the Business Council or the group in Laramie County, LEADS. All either has accomplished is the distribution of press releases when a company like Lowe's decided to open a regional distribution center in Cheyenne. Same with the Walmart distribution center.

Sadly, the same economic development groups did not even know Owens-Illinois was planning a glass manufacturing plant in this region until they read it in a Denver newspaper. When a state's economic development arm has to read about a major employer's interest in their area, they are not doing their job.

Since January of 2001, Cheyenne has seen little new growth - new employers with significant jobs to offer. Lowe's has never become what was expected or promised. The wages (starting at \$13 - \$18 / hour) never materialized and the number of full-time, permanent employees has not grow. Other than the two distribution centers, what large employers have expanded into Cheyenne? Offsetting the gain of Lowe's and Walmart distribution centers, other companies who had made the east industrial park their home are now gone. Quietly gone.

Funding of ~\$25 million per biennium has to result in more than two new employers in Cheyenne in eight years. Are there new employers in other Wyoming cities? Which ones and where?

When former Wyoming Business Council CEO Tucker Fagan was asked to provide a "list of accomplishments," he would not do so. Begging the question by saying he didn't want to take credit for the work of others, he couldn't provide any names. But, when Lowe's were ready to announce that they had chosen Cheyenne for a new regional distribution center, all local press releases had to be coordinated through the Business Council so they could take credit for the "growth."

It is more likely that high paid executives like military retiree Fagan, who had no experience in economic development, do not want to provide any details about which companies they had played a role in convincing to relocate or expand into Wyoming because such a list would be embarrassing short.

Mineral revenues have slowed and will likely get much worse before they get better. The State now must do with less. An office with two employees within the Governor's office and housed in the State Capitol could accomplish as much as the Wyoming Business Council has.

Tourism should have always been handled as a distinct effort. To put it under the control of the Wyoming Business Council was foolish and unproductive.

If the Business Council would be in line for, say, \$25 million for the coming biennium in the next State budget, that figure could be reduced to under \$10 million with a reorganization of the Council. As the governor and legislators struggle over where to make significant cuts in spending to balance the next budget, this is an easy place to pick up \$15 million.

The officers and staff of the Business Council have turned over far too often. Money has been spent on creating jobs within the Business Council and that expense has not seen a corresponding increase of jobs in the private sector. More public jobs is a very easy accomplishment. Ask the City of Cheyenne. For the past several years, money to pay for new positions, higher wages and salaries, higher health insurance premiums and Christmas gifts to all City employees has been easy to come by. That gravy train is now stalled on the tracks. It will take ingenuity, courage and decisiveness to make the budgeting decisions necessary for the near future.

Large groups of highly paid people who spend their days meeting will not solve our economic development and diversification problems. Wyoming should be easy to sell. We have no state personal or corporate income tax. We have low property taxes. We have a good education system. A productive workforce. We have safe streets and clean air.

Yes, we do have inadequate major retailing in some product categories and no major sports franchises or cultural attractions but what city of 55,000 does? How can we lose businesses to cities like Pueblo, Colorado? Much of the problem stems from not having economic development salesmen making the presentation for Wyoming or individual locales of our state. Colorado's former governor Bill Owens actively undermined our chances to get the Owens-Illinois plant while our people hand out lapel pins and coffee mugs with the state seal on the side.

If the state continues to fund the largely unproductive Wyoming Business Council, at least hire someone to head it that has some economic development experience. Hiring unemployed friends will not get the job done. They haven't in the past and they won't in the future. Perhaps we're just running a scam on the Wyoming people. Perhaps those responsible want to keep Wyoming undeveloped and the population sparse. That quaintness may be worth preserving but it isn't worth spending \$25 million biannually to do.

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## New Mexico Bowl

It didn't make much sense that Fresno State was made a clear betting favorite over UW in a bowl game I thought never should have been played. That's in terms of such a bowl game adding anything to the football season except an additional game for seniors, which is of great value.

However you slice it, the University of Wyoming football team did Wyoming proud. The game was entertaining and the freshman quarterback from California was every bit the equal of the highly touted running back for Fresno State.

Best of all, perhaps, was the win in 2 OT's that got the unrecruited, nonscholarship kicker who had won three games for UW during the regular season and got them into OT in this one, off the hook.

This game was, in truth, the only meaningful victory of the long season for UW. Beating CSU to become bowl eligible was significant but it wasn't a meaningful victory. Wyoming was supposed to win that game. They weren't supposed to win this bowl game.

For those of us who doubted Austin Carta-Samuels, here's an ample portion of crow. This writer being among those who thought he ran around the backfield before he had to and that prevented his receivers from running the route they were assigned. But, his scrambling in the New Mexico Bowl was not only productive but was often necessary. Time after time after time, he found a way to make the necessary yardage for a first down. He will get a lot of attention next season - assuming he returns to Wyoming and doesn't transfer to a better football school.

And, while David Leonard has become the "go to" receiver for UW, national viewers finally got to see a more talented wide

receiver who could not escape UW Coach Dave Christensen's doghouse all year. For those of us who have watched Greg Bolling play for the past three years, it was always obvious he was a guy who could rank up there, careerwise, with Marcus Harris, Ryan Yarborough and Jovan Bouknight. His attitude and academic problems have kept him from becoming the great receiver he could have been. In this bowl game, though, he was included in the game plan and delivered.

With all of Carta-Samuel's heroics, it was the UW defense that brought this victory to bowl-starved UW football fans. Stuffing the statistically-best running back in NCAA D-1 football three times and the QB once in an OT goal line stand was nothing short of brilliant. First and goal from the one and Fresno State could not get into the end zone. The play calling by Fresno State was unimaginative and predictable. Wyoming proved to have more workable "trick" plays (with the exception of a kick-receiving "huddle" that fooled no one, including the four UW players that congregated long enough to exchange the football and then got stuffed).

The young running back with two "AI" names, Alvester Alexander, will be a good one. Again, assuming he remains. Receivers will come to Wyoming in spite of it being a deadend career path for them. And, how many QBs are on scholarship?

It was a glorious day for UW football. It has been awhile and may be awhile again. The Big 3 will remain powerful and Air Force will always be disciplined and successful. Wyoming's challenge will be to remain above CSU, UNLV, San Diego State and New Mexico. At least one of them is bound to improve. So, UW's future is to be determined. It could be very, very bright. On this day, it was.