

Gov Dave, what is going on inside the highway patrol?

Hardly a month has gone by recently when there wasn't another story involving illegal acts by a member of the Wyoming Highway Patrol.

Several instances of illegal behavior in the recent past. That doesn't include matters that were handled internally without public knowledge.

Readers will remember that it was not long ago that the WHP Superstar Ben Peech was first suspended, then forced out of the patrol, after he had interdicted over three million dollars in drug money but had not "adequately" included his superiors in the action arranged by the DEA. Apparently, the DEA did not want to involve Ben's supervisors or they would have coordinated the "bust" through them instead of directly with a state trooper known nationally for his uncanny ability to make drug and cash interdictions.

When Ben Peech was forced out, his superiors wanted the public to believe it was for his "insubordination" and the governor stood by with his hands clasped firmly behind his back and allowed the best "drug bust" trooper in the region to be sent packing. The truth of the matter is that Ben's superiors wanted him gone because he was leading an effort to form a union. The patrol brass used Ben's "accommodation" with DEA to get rid of him. Normally, he would have been recognized at a governor-arranged reception and praised to high heaven. But, that union organizing thing was too risky. Ben had to go and his superiors, with the governor's blessing, used how he had accomplished the cash interdiction as justification to throw him over the side.

It's interesting to note now that the same superiors - Dave Freudenthal, John Cox and Sam Powell - have tried to build an obedient highway patrol but not are all of good and strong moral fiber.

One guy, Peech, was disrespected because of his zeal. A recent five committed crimes. Has the Wyoming Highway Patrol lowered standards to attract troopers who will be obedient rather than honorable? Who would "toe the line" rather than rein in crime on our highways?

One guy planned a kidnapping and murder of a truck driver, for crying out loud. That's the kind of extreme criminal behavior many, if not most, in Rawlins wouldn't dream of attempting.

Two others pled guilty to possession of a controlled substance - anabolic steroids. A third trooper was involved in those charges but he was the same one who planned the kidnapping and murder. Another was found guilty by a jury of a sex crime and now still another did not respond to a call to rescue a person in need along the freeway and that person then froze to death. How is that not involuntary manslaughter? If an ambulance service told a dispatcher they would not go out until a second distress call came in, would they walk away with a suspension or would they face more serious consequences?

A cynic might wonder why the Natrona County District Attorney, who normally will do anything to gain a conviction (suborn perjury?), allowed two troopers, who are sworn to uphold the law, to plead to a charge that will not involve incarceration. A cynic might wonder if the troopers had some damaging information on former convictions in Natrona County that might be embarrassing to the DA. A cynic might wonder if the silence of the troopers was bought with a plea agreement and probation-only sentence.

Most prosecutors would have made an example of these two who were charged with enforcing the law but knowingly violated it themselves. Granted, steroids are not the equivalent of heroin or cocaine but they are against the law. That's why the third trooper, the one who concocted the abduction and murder of a Walmart truck driver and one of the two granted probation for the crime went to Mexico to purchase the steroids. They knew possession was illegal and deliberately circumvented the law they were sworn to uphold in order to bulk up.

It is likely that the punishment for the trooper who just did not want to be bothered to go back out on the interstate (I-90) in inclement weather to rescue a man who could not flag down passing motorists will suffer his own private hell, regardless of what his punishment is from the WHP. In his case, if he has an otherwise exemplary record, he made a serious mistake in judgment but not a deliberate criminal act as have the others.

Two years ago, a large and belligerent state trooper was ordered by a federal judge to pay a smaller man he'd stopped on suspicion of drunken driving \$15,000 for use of excessive force. Later the same trooper was charged with two felonies and two misdemeanors "after a physical altercation with a restrained female at the Platte County jail." The WHP defended him by saying that charges were later dismissed. But those charges, along with many others, were dismissed by a county attorney who was subsequently driven from office for her wholesale dismissal of charges. Dave Freudenthal presented this particular WHP trooper with a 2008 DUI Enforcement Award. And, in both instances of allegations of use of excessive force, the head of WHP, Sam Powell, supported the trooper's use of force.

Most recently, a 23 year veteran of WHP was found guilty in a jury trial in Gillette of third degree sexual abuse of a minor and faces a sentence of up to 15 years.

Dave, there's a problem in the highway patrol and you bear responsibility. Leadership by fear isn't working very well, do you think, Gov? Step in and fumigate the cesspool you've allowed to germinate.

Your decision to back those yokels and get rid of Ben Peech doesn't look so good now, does it? It's bit you on the keister.

Friends don't let friends screw up our Wyoming Highway Patrol, Gov. Take action to clean up the mess and do it now.

She has wheels again. No thanks to WARM.

Readers were surprised to read the story in the last issue that disclosed a City police officer, while on duty and driving a city-issued police vehicle, broadsided a Cheyenne resident's SUV at the intersection of 20th St. and Logan Avenue. The officer ran a dead red light. He was not responding to a call and was not using lights or siren.

Readers were surprised because they never read any coverage in the daily newspaper and never heard any report on any broadcast media outlet in town.

It seems that an incident where a police officer ran a red light and broadsided a motorist would be newsworthy. But, to the other media in Cheyenne, it wasn't.

Another interesting aspect of this collision, for which the officer immediately accepted fault, was that, in spite of numerous first responders coming to the scene - police, sheriff's deputies and ambulance - no fire truck responded.

Odd. Obviously, because of the impact on the driver's side, there could have been injuries sustained. Her SUV was totalled by her insurance company. It was drivable but not repairable in the adjuster's opinion. Fire and Rescue respond to every 911 call that the ambulance service does. They have trained paramedics on the trucks now. But, the victim told the Herald that no fire engine was on scene.

It didn't matter. It's just odd.

After this non-covered collision, the victim found that she would face obstacles in pursuing her claims against the negligent city employee. The City's risk management employee passed the buck to their pool "insurance carrier," Wyoming

Association of Risk Management. Unlike private insurance carriers, WARM does not seem to be bound by the same settlement provisions private companies face. WARM deliberately stalls, delays, obfuscates and blocks claims with impunity, claiming to be a quasi-governmental agency. All money coming their way is taxpayer money but they answer to no one.

Resolution of an automobile accident insurance claim could legitimately take some time if there were a question of fault. The police officer was clearly at fault. He admitted that he was at fault. And there were witnesses to state he ran a red light. However, WARM has a history of trying to wear down claimants. After this story ran, the Herald heard from an insurance agent who confirmed she was handling a claim against a WARM insured and was told it could be "months" before a settlement offer was made.

Another caller related how his wife's vehicle had been damaged by a negligent city employee and how he did not give WARM or the City an opportunity to stonewall him. He knew his way around and called the City and told them his wife needed a rental vehicle, she was going to get her one, and "you're going to pay for it." He did and they did. Not everyone knows to do that or has the confidence to prosecute a claim in that manner.

The victim of the 20th and Logan crash has not received any consideration from WARM. Her insurance company wrote her a check when the vehicle was totalled, she had arranged with her bank to buy a new vehicle and she did. By Thursday, she owned a different vehicle large enough to accommodate her family and her out-of-town Christmas trip was back on. No thanks to the City or WARM.

Cheyenne Capitals Hockey Home Games



Saturday, January 9 - 8:00 pm vs. Gillette Wild
Saturday, January 10 - 10:00 am vs. Gillette Wild

Saturday, February 6 - 8:00 pm vs. Rock Springs Miners
Sunday, February 7 - 10:45 am vs Rock Springs Miners
Saturday, February 20 - 8:00 pm vs Pinedale Glaciers
Sunday, February 21 - 10:45 am vs. Pinedale Glaciers

The Cheyenne Capitals High School Hockey team are defending 2008-2009 Wyoming State High School "B" Champions. All home games are played at Taco John's Ice & Events Center and admission is **FREE!** For further information, such as the away games schedule, refer to www.CheyenneCapitalsHockey.com or call 630-6726.

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