

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Penny

Is it possible that, for the first time since I moved to Cheyenne in 1986, Laramie County will not have an Optional One Cent Sales Tax (referred to as "the 5th penny")?

Incredibly, if the Optional One Cent Sales Tax extension is denied by voters in November, the 6th penny will become the 5th penny. Say what?

As a prelude to the election, the City continues to make every imaginable bad and/or questionable decision they can along the way. Now, it's about knocking down mature trees in Lions Park to accommodate an airline with no long term commitment to Cheyenne - an airline that is on the auction block. And one, that if successful, is almost certain to eliminate Great Lakes from not only Cheyenne but the state of Wyoming - after millions of public dollars were put behind their losing business.

The mayor is running scared. Beneficiaries of the 5th penny are being told not to budget any amount for next year - which tells us that the insiders don't expect the 5th penny to pass. Or at least have serious doubts as to whether it will.

At a time when government has tried to make citizens more reliant and more dependent on public money - who can forget the "Cash for Clunkers" and the \$8,000 and \$6,500 donations toward new homes the federal government put into the economy to "stimulate" it and failed? Wouldn't it be ironic if, for the first time in recent memory, the residents of Laramie County said "thanks for the handouts but you're not getting ours anymore?" A handout results in a punch to the nose?

In a halfhearted effort to gain voter approval for four more years of collection of this additional one penny of sales tax, both the city and county government have produced propaganda pieces about the "good" done with the 5th penny. I've reviewed and re-reviewed the pieces and I can't see any mention of anything less than sterling about the collection and use of what has been an obscene amount of money by the city alone. In the 90's, the City's pace was \$6 million a year, now they forecast it to be \$10 million a year and that is down from where it had been.

Let's say the average collection has been \$7.5 million a year and the period has been 32 years. Do the Wyoming public school graduates want some health with the math? That would be \$240 million collected for benefit of the City of Cheyenne alone. Not counting the other three incorporated municipalities or Laramie County government.

\$240 million is awfully close to a quarter of a billion dollars.

With all that money, the City produced a trifold that illustrates "use" of the money that includes the Deming Drive Reconstruction Project that was delayed for years because of an animus toward a council member from the ward in which Deming Drive is found. He had to do everything short of a lawsuit to move the project forward. And now they tout that

project as one of their great accomplishments with the 5th penny? The money for Deming was collected several years ago, not in the most recent cycle. It's hardly a shining example of use.

The trifold also claims Yellowstone Rd. as a crowning achievement. At most, that is a *shared* project with the State, not just the City's. They have no projects that were totally funded by the 5th penny?

And they showed a picture of the downtown fire of December 2004. The buildings on fire burned down, fellows. That is not a ringing endorsement for the "state of the art" equipment bought with fifth penny proceeds. And don't they know the fire "flared" after thought extinguished and the greatest damage occurred then?

The playground shown could be any of a handful of small equipment areas the quarter billion dollars funded. If it is the Southside Park, that playground was probably funded with the 6th penny, not the 5th penny.

The picture of the Walmart Regional Distribution Center is inappropriate, too. That distribution center is in Laramie County - beyond the city limits. Running infrastructure out there at public expense when county pockets cannot gain the same public water and sewer at public expense is shameful. Embarrassing.

And, does anyone think Walmart would not have chosen Cheyenne for their food distribution center if the City and County had not made financial concessions to them? Does anyone seriously think the \$415 billion annual revenue largest retailer in the world couldn't have paid to extend their own infrastructure out there?

*Psst ... ask the mayor how much of a cost overrun there was on the Ridge Rd. project north of College - another project partnered with the State.*

Who chose the projects to picture in the publicly-funded trifold? A very, very poor choice of projects. None are selling points for continuing the tax.

And, those green campaign signs? If they are not illegal, they are improper. Public money is not allowed to be spent to promote or oppose such a sales tax proposition. To place campaign signs that are exactly like candidate signs at the time of an election is intended to confuse voters. For years, no such signs were used. Now, they are. You figure it out. And, while candidates are not supposed to place their signs on public rights-of-way, the city can. Something is rotten in the State of Denmark, folks.

One objection that many voters have expressed to me is unfounded. Voters are not well informed about the use of the fifth penny money and many did not realize a small amount (1.67%+) was being provided to charities. With voter approval, of course. That is nothing new. And, this cycle, the City plans to punish the charities for their own failings but reducing the overall funding to them by more than the City will reduce their own spending. It is constitutional to help the poor.

## LCCC Board of Trustees election

Election of education board members works differently than candidates for other local elective offices. There is no primary to winnow out the weaker candidates and bring a ballot down to a manageable number. Because of that lack of a primary, incumbents have an even greater advantage the one time they face voters if there are many challengers.

Typically, an incumbent holding any elective office has a core of supporters and can rely on them for votes in any election the incumbent enters. The number of challengers should be small to enable unseating incumbents. If, like in the case of the LCCC Board of Trustees election in November, there are four incumbents facing election and eighteen challengers, the advantage goes to incumbents.

In an example like that one above, it is almost certain that the four incumbents would be re-elected.

Unless.

Unless the challengers have advantages of their own. Familiarity is one. Someone well known in the community. Someone respected and/or popular.

This upcoming election is a crucial one. It may mean the standing of LCCC well into the future. The reputation of the college has been damaged by a president who considers this community college his private piggybank - his private plaything. He does not concern himself with public perception. When an instructor organized a class trip to Costa Rica, the travel agency provided a number of free trips based on those bought by students.

Instead of negotiating that savings into lower student costs, the college president used free trips for himself and his

daughter(s) as a family vacation. He was not embarrassed about using the gratis travel for his personal benefit.

LCCC still faces a number of lawsuits filed by former employees - after settling one and with another still in process.

LCCC can hire compliant attorneys to render demanded decisions but eventually disputes will land in the hands of a court that does not benefit from LCCC legal matters - a court that will render rulings based on merit - not future revenue.

Of the four current LCCC trustees who will face re-election in November - and, most likely, all four will seek another term - two in particular must go. They are in the pocket of the disgraced LCCC president and cannot think independently on any matter involving him. They are the two men and they will most likely stand for re-election. There are also two women whose terms are up. They should be given an opportunity to convince voters they can be independent - that they can make tough votes and withstand intimidation from the president.

I am half tempted to put myself up for one of these seats. I would only do it on the basis of serving not more than 18 months. During that time, I would pledge to wage a fight to lead LCCC to its rightful place in leadership and respect among the state's community colleges. With the Hathaway Scholarship forcing Wyoming high school graduates into UW and the community college system, enrollment increases because of requirements of the Hathaway. Local students cannot receive the scholarship funds unless they attend UW or LCCC. With that unearned enrollment spike, the school should be doing better. Being on that board could be interesting.

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