

## Shooting dogs

I've been asked by a handful of readers what became of the story involving the shooting of a dog near Hillsdale, with the still alive dog being, allegedly, roughly dumped by the town's post office.

Contrary to what some Easterners (and one Wyomingite from Recluse) might think, this rural state has a great fondness for its animals. And eating horse flesh or shooting dogs is not acceptable in most people's opinion.

With the Hillsdale incident, an eyewitness told the Herald that a white truck came into town, backed up by the post office, dropped the tailgate and drug out the wounded dog everyone in town knew as Max, and unceremoniously threw him to the ground, then sped off fast enough to "throw gravel."

The eyewitness pursued the truck far enough and fast enough, the fleeing truck tried to outrun him, to get a description of two men in the truck and a plate number, which he called to the LCSD as he drove.

As I wrote before, when he told me he had the Sheriff's Department telephone number on speed dial, that initially surprised me. I quickly realized why rural folks would want that expediency. They might need help in a hurry and could avoid transfers or misdirection through 9-1-1.

When I contacted the LCSD, no trace of the call could be found. A deputy was then assigned to interview the eyewitness and others in Hillsdale about the matter. By that time, the owner of the truck had plenty of opportunity to clean up the box of his pickup. That first night, there may have been evidence that a dog was not carefully laid in the box then gently removed and laid on the ground. That

proof could be washed away within hours.

I later spoke with the LCSD, including the responding deputy, over a speaker phone on a call placed to me. The deputy told me he had interviewed the owner of the truck, who readily admitted to being the one who deposited the grievously wounded, twice shot dog in Hillsdale. But, his version of the story was considerably different from the eyewitness's, who others in Hillsdale have vouched for. He said he had found the wounded dog by the road outside Hillsdale and came into town to try to find its owner so care could be given the hurt animal. He said he went around town and no one knew who the owner might be. He said he had to get somewhere else and he and his companion had "laid" the dog by the post office.

The truth favors a different scenario. Others later asked around to see if any Hillsdale resident had been approached by someone that day, asking if they knew who owned the dog. None said they had.

I spoke with another Hillsdale resident whose dog was also missing. She told me there were four or five dogs that had suddenly and mysteriously gone missing. Dogs that did not wander from their houses and each being a desirable breed of dog with value. Other dogs were not missing - from the same yard!

It has been proven that serial killers often begin by torturing animals. When their blood lust can no longer be satisfied by that, they move on to humans. I don't suggest that will happen in rural Laramie County but I do suggest that investigations into wanton murders of nonthreatening dogs should be taken seriously by law enforcement. I have another report of a shot dog that had to be euthanized.

## Trent Blankenship

What a difference a week makes.

On Friday, May 21st, a process server came to our house with legal papers drawn up by a Cheyenne "Anything For A Buck" law firm and signed by "I'll get it right one of these times" Judge Peter Arnold, on behalf of "If you'll pay a couple thou for a trip to Costa Rica, the college president can fly there with you free" LCCC.

On Friday, May 28th, the final day of filing for office in the 2010 Wyoming primary election, I fielded a call at home about 1:30 pm. The man's voice told me he had just filed for office and wanted to tell him personally. And he said I was among the first to know.

It was Trent Blankenship and he was calling from Ethete. He had filed for the State Superintendent of Public Instruction office, an office he won eight years ago and resigned in 2005 to take a lucrative school superintendent's job in Barrow, Alaska.

While I was pretty critical of some of his decisions at the beginning of his term, I came to know him better and respect his candor, honesty, humor, humility and for his courage in doing his job. I raised hell when he arrived in Cheyenne and enrolled his three children in St. Mary's Catholic School. I objected to that move only because he had sought to be top dog of public schools in Wyoming and I thought it sent the wrong message for him to basically say they're not good enough for my children. I understood the religion training part of their education but thought then, and continue to believe now, that he was the only parent in Wyoming who should not consider sending his children to a private school.

As time went on and I spoke with Trent about the blight the scourge of diploma mills brought to the national perception of education in Wyoming, I found him to be a concerned educator. And, with his cooperation and encouragement, a few of us rid Wyoming of those bums. Jim McBride was not among those who played an important role in sending the degree sellers packing. The fact that the cleanup was completed on his watch doesn't change the fact that McBride had almost nothing to do with the effort.

When Trent called to tell me he would be a candidate, I asked if he'd do a telephone interview the following week and he agreed. On Thursday, June 3rd, we spent the better part of an hour discussing his candidacy. As always with me, he was open and forthright.

I reminded him that many voters felt betrayed when he resigned early in 2005 to take another job. He acknowledged that would be an issue he will have to address and, in many ways, he regrets not completing his term. At the time, however, his personal circumstances made it necessary that he accept the lucrative job opportunity he was offered to be superintendent of schools of the North Slope School District in Barrow, Alaska.

If Sarah Palin can see Russia from her front porch, Trent could read Russian license plate numbers from his.

Trent seems first and foremost a family man. His decisions are based on what is best, sometimes even necessary, for his family. After his stint in Alaska and back in Fremont County for over a year, his older children have graduated high school and he has one still in high school. While state superintendent, he had three children in school and missed most of their activities as he traveled the state tending to his state superintendent duties.

They are reasonable and fair questions of Trent: "Will you stay for a full term if we elect you again? Why should we accept your answer?" If he cannot satisfy voters about their legitimate concerns, he will not make it through the primary.

Trent Blankenship knows the job. He knows how to do it. He knows his opponents. Without arrogance or condescension, he believes he is the best qualified candidate for the job as state superintendent. He knows what faces public education in Wyoming. He would be better able to work with local school superintendents than has Jim McBride been able to.

Can he win?

It will be a tall order. What I can say about the man is that he has been strikingly available and honest with me. While other public officials do everything they can to avoid answering tough questions, Trent was always ready and willing to step up to the plate and take the high, hard one. Is he capable of being elected, even if a Republican Party outsider? Well, in 2002, he defeated the Republican-anointed candidate in that primary and handily won the general election that followed.

I expect his platform to continue developing and it will be announced. When he has a website, I'll let you know. Whether he advertises on these pages is his decision to make. There is no quid pro quo. I would just encourage voters to hear him out. And then decide. Then. Not before.

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