

Hate issues should never be placed on a Wyoming ballot

Wyoming has taken unwarranted hits about its hate, bias and prejudices. The Matthew Shephard killing will be forever perceived in a way different than the court records attest. The Bill Ayres speech at UW is considered around the country as yet another example of Wyoming people's intolerance of thought unlike their own. That one came with official backing - an unwanted president of the state's only four-year university did his best to squash free speech. Basically because it didn't agree with his own or some of the UW trustees.

I'm the last guy in the state who can complain about free speech being limited, restricted, controlled or eliminated. For over nine years, 212 issues and probably more than three million words, these pages have screamed out "free speech."

I want as many "frees" in this land as we can have. But there are some limits. There has to be.

I would never support the idea of placing the issue of segregation on a ballot to allow a group that might be influenced by a political campaign into telling the rest of the country that, except for the U.S. Constitution, Wyoming residents would go back to a segregated society. Far-fetched, maybe. Absurd? Probably.

Would you want to take that chance not only in Wyoming but in any state? You know which state would probably be most likely to approve such an action - segregation? No, not Mississippi. Not Louisiana. Not Georgia. Not Alabama.

Massachusetts.

If you wonder why I would say that about a bastion of liberalism, research "school busing" sometime.

Our Legislature, trying to stretch two weeks real work into two months, hash and rehash so many bills that it's not funny. When a bill loses, it is resurrected with minimal language change. Sometimes, the second time is a charm.

And, to help them chew up the 40 days allotted to them in a general session, they now debate putting measures to a public vote.

The more controversial the better. Legislators do not reflect the sentiments of a state - they reflect being ones who would stand for election and somehow get more votes than their opponent. In Wyoming, they are the first ones to the trough to put the "R" behind their name. Even the old "Snow Chi Minh" trail Democrats are being evicted from office.

As I've reminded readers countless times, Wyoming voters went to the polls in 1992 and, of those voting, 77% voted in favor of term limits. 77%!!!! Not for just a couple offices - for ALL offices above county commissioner. We approved term limits for even the federal offices when Alan Simpson was a U.S. Senator - a man beloved and considered irreplaceable by some. More than three in four voters said even he should be limited in years of service, regardless of whether he had gotten 65% of the votes in his latest election. Of course, term limits for the federal offices would have to come by way of a U.S. constitutional amendment. And that ain't gonna happen. We have term limits for our president, the most important elective office in the land (or so we believe), but not for U.S. Senators or Representatives?

In spite of that 1992 vote, the Legislature modified what voters had ordered and the Supreme Court struck it all down. The Supremes did not say that term limits are unconstitutional. They said the manner in which voters went about it was unconstitutional - that it placed another "qualification of office" and only a constitutional amendment could change the Wyoming Constitution.

Fair enough. I disagree with that conclusion but that is what went down. Our AG at the time, Pat Crank, took a "dive" and the Court was not presented the best arguments in favor of allowing term limits to stand. Crank may have been ordered to stand down or he may have lacked courage to bite the hand that fed him.

Wyoming voters, in almost 20 years, have never been given an opportunity to correct that mistake and vote again on a constitutional amendment to impose term limits on the five executive offices and state legislators. Why? Because the people who could allow that vote are the ones who would be most affected by what they know in advance the outcome would be. It doesn't even come up for debate. No legislator since Becket Hinckley has shown the guts to introduce such a bill. None.

Now, the only debates at your Legislature concerning votes on constitutional amendments involve hate, prejudice, religion or bigotry.

Teachers have become our illegal immigration this session and more bills than you can count have been introduced that show disdain and disrespect for those we count on to teach our children and grandchildren.

A legislator is quoted in local media as saying, "If you're going to make

Jessica Venable is now in Gillette

Jessica was transferred to the Volunteers of America facility in Gillette on December 7, 2010. She has found employment in Gillette and has made application for parole. Judge Peter Arnold had reduced her sentence by two years and that helped Jessica get moved to Gillette sooner than earlier expected. For the time that Jessica will spend in Gillette, she can still use financial help. So I encourage Cheyenne Herald readers to join my wife and myself in contributing financial help to this young woman who is still facing challenges on many fronts. Jessica has told me that letters, checks and money orders can be sent to her directly at the Gillette halfway house. Her address in Gillette is: Jessica Venable, VOA, P.O. Box 1346, Gillette WY 82716. If you prefer, you can send your donation for Jessica to me (please make your check payable to the Cheyenne Herald). I will buy a money order and forward all donated amounts to Jessica as I have for the past year. She is now just months from parole and eventual release from confinement. Donor support for her has meant a great deal to Jessica. She has been amazed that strangers care. Thanks for that.

Jessica Venable, VOA, P.O. Box 1346, Gillette WY 82716

a cultural earthquake take place, it might as well be done by the people." And, "I think the people have a right to speak."

A cultural earthquake? Does he believe any cultural matter should be put to a vote?

What if that cultural matter more directly involved religion? Like, say, all residents of states along the Utah and Idaho border had to be LDS? And, all residents along the Montana and South Dakota border must be Catholic? And, all residents of Wyoming bordering Nebraska and Colorado had to be Protestant?

Let's vote on morality. Let's vote to ban any person from our state Legislature who has been unfaithful, been arrested (not necessarily convicted) of domestic violence or drunk driving. Even DUI charges that were reduced to careless, inattentive, reckless driving, etc., would disqualify a resident from serving in public office. Or from being hired for a public job paid with public funds.

What this legislator really means is, "I don't have the votes to impose my religious beliefs on all others so maybe Wyoming voters will do it for me." And, the people have "a right to speak?" How about the 77% who did vote and tell the world Wyoming voters wanted term limits? What did their "right to speak" get them?

Wyoming voters have surprised those who thought the prejudice, bias, hate and religious feelings of some in office would be mirrored by a majority of voters. Voters would likely continue to do that. Wyoming voters are an independent group. Most vote Republican because of "less government," "less spending," "less interference in private lives."

You don't have to be a "liberal" to accept other people for whom they are - even if they're quite different from ourselves. And hate any group of people? Any group? We don't want the country to label us that way but we play right into their hands. No hate, prejudice, bias or religious issue on our ballots, please. That's not Wyoming. That's anti-Wyoming.

Jessica was denied parole

In a not unexpected action, the Wyoming Board of Parole denied Jessica Venable's application for parole.

It is obvious from reading the Denial Form that Board members know little to nothing about the circumstances of Jessica's incarceration.

What they read, if they read anything, is a case file in which she pled guilty to manslaughter (after initially being charged with first degree murder) and was sentenced to 6-12 years in prison. Nothing more.

It is not the Parole Board's duty or place to ignore a guilty plea - even in a case in which a pathologically lazy public defender coerced Jessica Venable into taking the plea rather than risk a jury trial at which he told her she might be found guilty of manslaughter (even the DA showed some conscience and had reduced the charge from first degree murder) and sentenced for up to 20 years in prison. Lacking confidence in himself, the PD could not assure Jessica that no jury of twelve Wyoming men and women would convict her of any crime and she would walk away from the trial a free woman. He had no confidence in himself.

The Parole Denial Form has 16 areas of consideration and one item (No. 4) has 14 separate areas of judgment. On Jessica's denial, No. 2 was checked ("Release at this time would depreciate the seriousness of the crime or promote disrespect for the law.") This is a woman who had no previous criminal record. One driving citation is her only "jacket."

The other item checked (on the Denial Form) was No. 4. - "Continued correctional treatment would substantially increase the inmate's capacity to lead a law-abiding life when released at a later date." Sub-letter C., "COMPAS recommendations." Jessica told me in a telephone conversation after the parole denial that all, including the Lusk warden, had recommended her for parole. The Parole Board continues a pattern of indifference and incompetence that permeates Wyoming's justice system.