

Bells of Balangiga cannot be unrung

Which vets are Veteran's Commission representing - Wyoming or Philippines?

In an incredibly blatant display of poor judgment and worse timing, the bureaucratic Governor-appointed group known as the Wyoming Veterans Commission voted by secret ballot to demand the return of the Bells of Balangiga to the Philippines.

Minutes of their March 26, 2005 meeting reflect passage of the following resolution:

"Recommend to the Governor the original bells be returned to the village of Balangiga, Philippines, and duplicates be made of the bells to be placed in a suitable place in Wyoming."

7 yea's, 4 no's. Motion passed.

In one foolish and ill-fated action, this group of Governor-appointed apologists defied past decisions and present veterans sentiments - both at the same time.

Alternative resolution of the dispute surrounding the bells has been proposed before. Opposition to transferring the bells in any form has been strong and the subject was dormant until this group of desperate bureaucrats resurrected it.

A rejected alternative was to recast the bells and return one original and one facsimile bell to the Philippines and keep one of each in Cheyenne.

This wayward group, supposedly representing the interests of Wyoming veterans, took the action they could - albeit of very limited effect - to cause the return of both of the original bells to the Philippines and even move the two replica bells out of Cheyenne - presumably to Casper.

How can that possibly be representation of the veterans of the State of Wyoming?

What this boils down to is a battle between this Commission and the Veteran's Service Organizations (VSO's) of Wyoming. A coup to replace these privately-funded VSO's failed through lack of support from Governor Dave Freudenthal and the Wyoming State Legislature and the Commission's pride has been stung.

Attempting and failing to take over the "affairs" of military veterans in Wyoming by eliminating groups who now provide those services, the Commission has been relegated to second-class status and still trail the VSO's influence on behalf of veterans.

In an attempt to justify their takeover bid, the Commission wants the Wyoming public to believe that they represent unrepresented veterans - those not members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion (AmLeg), Disabled Veterans (DAV), or other established VSO's.

It is more likely that the vast majority of those military veterans in Wyoming who are not members of a VSO do not seek,

and would not accept, formal "representation" by any third party. If and when they need such representation, they will seek out a group to assist them with their problems or questions. At that time, it could be a VSO or it might be the Commission. It is impossible for the Commission to prove their contention that they represent ALL veterans who are not members of a veteran's service organization like the VFW, AmLeg, or DAV. 'Cause they don't.

At the March 26, 2005 meeting, the Commission allowed a supporter of the return of the bells to address their meeting with a lengthy and detailed presentation. No such opportunity was afforded opponents. The woman who convinced a majority of the Commission to change the long-held position of veterans, is the daughter of a survivor of the attack on American soldiers at Balangiga, the Philippines, in 1901.

In the past, she had opposed their return. She was hosted to a trip to the area and changed her position. One would have to speculate as to the reason(s) for the shift. Her father was the sentry that day, charged with the protection of the unarmed soldiers at breakfast, and he was taken by surprise and, some might argue, was partially to blame for the massacre. To be overtaken while on guard duty is similar to a navy commander responsible for a collision at sea. It ain't good.

Does the daughter feel a sense of gratitude to the Filipino townspeople and militia because they did not kill her father? They killed all of the officers but not all of the enlisted men, of which her father was one. Does she feel a sense of guilt because her father failed in his responsibility to keep his fellow soldiers safe?

What additional evidence did she present to convince the Commission to betray Wyoming veterans? She has waffled during recent years - much the same as a Veteran's Commission member.

As department commander of the Wyoming American Legion seven years ago, the same person (Joe Sestak) who now, as a Commissioner, wants to return the bells, said in a Casper Star-Tribune article of March 12, 1998, that he "was disappointed legislators listened to lobbyists from the Philippines but not to their own constituents." He was quoted as saying: "We didn't get equal time to tell our side of the story. We're opposed to dismantling memorials to our fallen comrades. In 100 years are we going to dismantle the Vietnam Wall and send half of it to Vietnam?" Sestak was also quoted as saying the "church bells were used to signal an unprovoked attack against American soldiers while they were eating breakfast on a Sunday morning," with their armament "locked up."

he wrong then or is he wrong now?

The Herald sees absolutely no similarity between Vietnam Wall and the Bells of Balangiga.)

Take two aspirins. Don't call us in the morning.

by Dave Featherly

We sat down in the living room of her modest little rental home. On the coffee table in front of us were bottle after bottle of prescription drugs.

This interview wasn't going to be easy and it probably wasn't going to be fun.

I was contacted because the 53-year old woman and her male friend had contacted everyone they could think of in an effort to find a solution to a problem evidently facing all too many unhealthy Americans.

For the three years she's lived in Cheyenne, after living in Casper and Wheatland previously, she has long battled a variety of maladies.

I couldn't keep up - writing as she spoke. Fortunately, I had planned to record the interview and can now refer to that tape.

I could see she was on oxygen. She suffers from multiple sclerosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, and more.

In all, there were 16 or 17 bottles, sprays, inhalers, etc., on the coffee table. She told me that there were two more bottles but she had run out of those prescriptions and couldn't get them refilled.

"She gave me a listing of her prescription drugs for calendar year 2004. The total from the Safeway Pharmacy on So. Greeley Hwy., paid by Wyoming Medicaid, was \$21,663.29."

She had been on Medicaid and received \$595 a month SSI (Supplemental Security Income) from Social Security because she's 100% disabled. At the age of 50, she was unceremoniously dropped from Medicaid, which paid for the incredibly high cost of her prescription medicines, and put on Medicare, which pays but \$600 a year toward prescription drugs.

She gave me a listing of her prescriptions filled for calendar year 2004. The total from the Safeway Pharmacy on So. Greeley Hwy., paid by Wyoming Medicaid, was \$21,663.29. There were four and a half pages - 217 orders filled. She paid \$1, \$2 or \$3 for each prescription (mostly \$2), for a total of \$428.00.

One of the doctors she had been seeing is John H. Babson, M.D. She had been dumped by him because, a form letter addressed to "Sir or Madam," read, "your account has been placed in collections." She was told not to "schedule appointments or request prescription refills."

Babson's office offered to "work with you to have your records transferred to another physician so that you can continue medical treatment."

It was a remarkable coincidence that this physician (who presumably took the Hippocratic Oath) decided to discard her after she was switched from Wyoming Medicaid (which paid for everything) to federal Medicare (which doesn't).

As of the date of the letter from Babson, \$18.21 was over 120 days and \$13.51 was over 90 days - the rest more current. The total this unhealthy and desperate patient owed his office was \$205.86.

Physicians asked Wyoming voters to surrender their constitutional right to a make a full claim for medical malpractice. This is an example of why voters should be proud they did not do that.

\$205.86! This was a patient dump. Some doctors have adequate business and can be selective. Patients who don't have adequate insurance - or whose circumstances change - will find themselves on the street. Those who owe \$31.72 which is dated 90 days or longer will be declared persona non grata. \$31.72! Shameful.
(Story concludes on page 11.)



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