

Trent in Alaska

by Dave FEATHERLY

For those who want to believe that Trent Blankenship is holed up in an igloo near Barrow, Alaska - regretting the decision he made to abdicate his position as state superintendent of public instruction - and wishing he could re-enter political life in Wyoming, it looks like you can FORGET IT!

In a recent exchange of e-mails with the Herald, Trent had some words to say about his experience up there and some praise for the Herald's role in the new Private School Licensing legislation. Having grown up in northern Wisconsin, where temperatures dipped to minus 45° on what seemed like an all too frequent basis when I was a boy, one of the photos sent by Trent helped me remember why I don't live there anymore. A huge electronic thermometer in Barrow displayed -50°. That may explain the new head and facial hair worn by Barrow, Alaska's superintendent of schools.

It doesn't look like the kids are frightened by one now is regularly described in local media in less than flattering terms. Notice the little girl to his left, adding some devil's horns which will so enjoyed by Jim McBride, Dave Freudenthal, and the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle editorialists. Below is our exchange of e-mail messages:

My e-mail to Trent Blankenship on March 29, 2006

Trent;

I hope things are going as expected up there.

By now, you know that the public school licensing bill passed and was signed into law.

I will continue to credit that to your efforts. You should consider it a major part of your legacy as state superintendent of schools down here. I don't think everyone in the department shared your views about accreditation.

I'd bet money that some who took the exotic trips will miss them.

Take care.

Dave Featherly

Trent Blankenship's return e-mail to me on March 29, 2006

Hi Dave!!!

How is the last honest journalist in Cheyenne? Hope you had a good winter and a great Spring. I am indeed delighted to learn that Wyoming is slamming the door shut on those schools, but you have to give yourself the credit, my friend. YOU brought it to our attention. Shameful as that is. In retrospect, it was harder to hold bureaucrats accountable than almost anyone I've encountered. I'm sure it was due to the political nature of my job, and the fact that they always knew the lay of the land (and the landmines!) better than I.

At any rate, Shana and I are deeply blessed to have been released from that life, and have no regrets. The cold and the darkness aren't really much different than Wyoming, just longer in duration.

Life is good here. We miss some things about Cheyenne, but not the politics and the press (your able self excluded).

Hope this finds you well (and as ever, pursuing and writing the truth, and enjoying every minute of it).

Minor shortening of this letter.

Some things never change

Ft. Collins mayor also doesn't want to "give anyone the right to vote ..."
Sounds familiar.

City government officials of our neighbor to the south sings from the same hymnal as Cheyenne's elected officials.

The Colorado legislature was considering a bill which would allow homeowners in areas the city wanted to annex to be able to vote on the matter. The mayor: "I think you can't do good land use planning at the ballot box."

There are few certainties in life. One is that hospital and school cafeteria food will be awful. Another is that, once elected, officeholders never want to see anything voted on again. Whether in Uganda or Cheyenne, voting is only acceptable when there is no other option.

Twice in recent years, city officials here are navigated around potentially troubled waters which could result from an election by approving the sale of industrial revenue bonds to build a new animal shelter and a downtown parking garage. In both cases, data provided bond buyers has been shown to be exaggerated and the projects should not have been funded in that manner when "user fees" would be inadequate to service the debt. At the state level, once the Wyoming Supreme Court ruled that the term limits election in 1992 was improper and should have authorized a constitutional amendment instead of legislation, those able to provide an opportunity to voters to do it right, have refused.



Who should be the next Wyoming Superintendent of Public Instruction?

Wyoming - or at least some in Wyoming - seem more inclined to want to place at the top of the education heap here one who has never even visited the state than one who has played a role in local or state education for years. Re: UW.

Since Dick Cheney set the search standards by proclaiming himself, chair of the search committee for a running mate for George W. Bush, the best person for the job, the process has left something to be desired.

At the University of Wyoming, a head hunter firm of some renown conducted an exhaustive search - presumably following the instructions of whomever hired them to conduct the search - and came up with three candidates to become the next semipermanent president of the University. After a screening process that should have made known to candidates just what would be entailed, one candidate jumped ship before his/her name could be announced publicly. But he had made the cut to three.

Next, the head of a North Dakota school publicly stated that he didn't know if he'd take the position if it were offered to him. Also that he had not visited the campus. Probably hadn't been any further west than Fargo. While the embarrassment mounted, the same trustees who should have made the rules known to the hired guns decided to add the name of the interim UW president, Tom Buchanan, after a few hundred faculty members

signed a petition in support of him.

After that show of support for a new competitor for the throne, the third candidate also withdrew. Who in their right mind will now accept the position, knowing the faculty supports someone else?

When Trent Blankenship decided to follow his heart - after having decided with his wife that he would not seek another term as state superintendent - his successor was an easier decision.

Republicans served up three names from which the Governor would pick one to serve the remainder of Blankenship's term. Freudenthal made the easy choice. He chose the one he thought would have the least chance to win election on his own. Jim McBride, the "Peace Sign Kid," all of a sudden became Dr. Jim McBride, state superintendent of public instruction.

In a subsequent meeting with the Cheyenne Herald, Guv Dave made a reference to McBride's certain "cooperation," as though the appointed educator's docility would be a certainty.

Now, McBride has announced that he, a very recent Colorado immigrant, would run for the office. If Wyoming wanted a Coloradan as head of their state education, wouldn't Hank Brown be a better choice? If Jim Twiford, Jeff Wasserburger or Tex Boggs run, any of them would be a much better choice.



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