

The office makes the man. It's not the other way around.

When I became involved in political campaigns, I was an idealist. Now, I'm a pragmatist. Maybe a realist. Not a defeatist.

My first campaign, at a very low level in Minnesota, was the 1980 John Anderson campaign for President. Anderson was a Republican and an eloquent speaker who had come to believe that Jimmy Carter wasn't up to the task and that Ronald Reagan couldn't separate reality from movie roles he had played.

The media was generous to Anderson and, even though Jimmy Carter refused to debate if the third-party candidate Anderson was on the same stage, Ronald Reagan agreed and Anderson had an opportunity to convince voters of his ability and, through federal matching funds, the campaign had quite a bit of money to compete. In the last few days before that 1980 general election, John Anderson spoke at a gathering at the University of Minnesota and support seemed substantial.

Then, the American people voted. While the polls during the summer had shown Anderson was a factor, he was not on that November night. It was obvious early that he not only would not win the election but that he would not win any electoral votes.

He was a good candidate in my opinion. His proposal for a 50¢ a gallon gas tax looks pretty smart now. Nearly 30 years ago, there was a presidential candidate with a plan to wean the country off foreign oil. Instead, we are more dependent on our enemies than in 1980.

John and his wife, Kiki, visited the Twin Cities after the election and my wife and I met them. In that small gathering, John Anderson promised to move forward toward establishing a strong third party - The National Unity Party. He promised that he would work toward fielding viable candidates for Senate and House races around the country two years hence.

Alas, the Unity Party was not to be.

John Anderson went back to making money as a speaker and college professor and his followers returned to their previous parties or dropped out.

I probably should have learned that far back not to totally trust politicians - that their word can mean little. That they would say what was necessary to get elected but then do what they had intended to all along but could not express because it could cost them votes and an election.

That 1980 election taught me an important lesson. That was, third party candidates cannot win national elections. They just can't. And if they could, they couldn't govern. We have a two-party system and even Ross Perot's 19% of the popular vote resulted in zero electoral votes.

That '80 election was interesting and didn't inflict much hurt because we were so far down the totem pole of importance.

I didn't do anything beyond voting in the next several election cycles. Few candidates ever stoked my enthusiasm enough to get involved in their campaigns.

In 1993, I had the opportunity to organize and direct a referendum toward building a new K-12 school in my hometown in northern Wisconsin. Local residents were at the point of dissolving the school district and sending students in every direction. To make a long story short, the referendum passed and the new school opened for the fall semester in 1995 and they live happily ever after.

As a result of that involvement from a thousand miles away, I determined the school board members had lied to me about the quality of education being provided so I decided to replace all five of them. Over the next three years, all were removed. Two heard footsteps and chose not to seek re-election and three were defeated by candidates I recruited.

That success from a distance stoked my fires about political campaigns and I've been involved with several more in the past dozen years.

I haven't been directly involved in as many local campaigns as some people think but I've played a role in a few and have had some wins and some losses. Wins are much more fun. You learn over time that the best candidate does not always prevail. You also find out just how powerful incumbency is. In fact, until this campaign for Bill Winney for Congress, I have never taken an active role in any campaign that did not involve an effort to unseat an incumbent. To manage an incumbent's campaign is akin to stomping baby chicks - easy to do but the result is very unpleasant and distasteful and leaves one ashamed. Backing an incumbent is the easiest way to success, however.

Successfully convincing voters to vote for your man over another candidate is highly rewarding. When that other person is the incumbent, it is especially gratifying.

But that satisfaction can fade after the election. After the swearing-in.

I'd like to be able to say that the only time the luster dulled for me was here in Cheyenne after the 2000 mayor's race but that's not the case. All too often, once elected, the winner morphs into someone quite different than the voters chose. The security of incumbency too often overrides the idealism of service and the person begins to think primarily of job security. Even when the job is unpaid, as it is with school board members, that seems to happen.

We will have some important races on the ballot in August and November. Even though the daily newspaper here thinks this mayor is invincible, he is not. In 2000, supporters of Leo Pando thought he had nothing to fear from the waterbed salesman but learned differently early election night. The powerful can be defeated.

Why, you may wonder, would someone who is jaded about the election process once again be actively involved in a political campaign - this time for Bill Winney in his pursuit for Wyoming's lone House seat. The simplest explanation is that Bill Winney is unlike any candidate I've ever supported in the past. He is intelligent, as evidenced by his Navy accomplishments and he is in the race for the right reason. He truly wants to serve. He could easily just retire to his beautiful new house at The Hoback and enjoy sunsets.

So I again will do all I can to see a candidate elected. Then I will watch from afar. I've seen too often where the office converted the man to someone else. I will expect Bill to reverse that trend.

The Rural City Council

In the 2006 election for county commissioners, there was great concern that if either of the two challengers were elected, the commission would become an extension of the Cheyenne City Council.

The challengers were openly and aggressively supported by the mayor, key city councilmen, and the daily newspaper.

With great planning and effort as well as considerable expense, supporters of the two incumbents rallied to their side and they were both re-elected.

But, in keeping with the story to the left, it's already beginning to look like it may not matter. It is beginning to look like having an impenetrable majority (of even two) will not provide good government. A solid majority voting bloc, whether two or six, will stymie debate, deliberation and independent thought.

Even though the two incumbent county commissioners came from opposite political parties, they bonded together to win re-election and are unlikely to be pried apart on any issue in dispute over the next two and a half years.

There is the appearance now that debate will not sway a commissioner - as it did for the six years prior to this last election. For that period, there was frequently Jeff Ketcham on one side of an issue, Jack Knudson on the other and Diane Humphrey was the swing vote.

That possibility does not exist any longer. Politics does make strange bedfellows. Fortunately, annexation by the city of distant county property seems to be behind us. There should be no confidence that the commission would support county residents if such an illegal annexation were to be approved now. Recent actions by the commission rival the City Council in terms of voting on a personal and impetuous basis.

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