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THE CHEYENNE HERALD

the local advocacy journal

In depth. Independent. Stories of Local Interest. Since January, 2002.

August 29, 2005 ♦ Issue No. Eighty-two ♦ Next issue September 12, 2005

New Superintendent of Schools criticizes former boss ...

Blankenship fires back

Jim McBride, recently chosen by Governor Dave Freudenthal to complete the unexpired term as State Superintendent of Public Instruction left vacant when the elected officeholder, Trent Blankenship, resigned to accept the position of school district superintendent of the North Slope Borough in Barrow, Alaska, proved that he was a political neophyte by attempting to curry favor with a governor from the opposite party, at the cost of criticism of a fellow Republican.

by
Dave
Featherly

And, as the Cheyenne Herald appears to be the only media in southeastern Wyoming that Trent Blankenship will communicate with, it seemed fair to give him an opportunity to make a public response to the direct and veiled criticisms leveled at him by a former employee.

The selection of a successor to Trent Blankenship provided an opportunity for those in the Republican party to guess whom the Republican Party Central Committee would serve up for Dave Freudenthal to choose from - and then guess who would be chosen and for what reasons Dave made his choice.

Conventional wisdom might suggest that the party would serve up sacrificial candidates, believing that anyone chosen by the Governor of the opposite political party would have the least chance to be elected on their own next November.

Everyone - the Central Committee and the Governor - would claim that the chosen one(s) would be the best choice to advance education in the state. Period.

Anyone who doubts that any more thought or consideration than that would go into the choice really isn't very experienced around politics. It ain't beanbag, folks.

When asked which of the ten candidates he thought the Central Committee would select for the Governor's consideration, Trent Blankenship said he was somewhat surprised about the choices. I won't tell readers who he thought would be promoted but he was certain that of the three names sent forward, Jim McBride

I am told, but have not seen it myself, that Jim McBride made some kind of inane comment about he had seen the television commercials Dave Freudenthal (and his wife) have cut for foster parenting and knew, based on those scripted spots, that he and the Governor were "compatico."

of that new internal department did not make such a request of Blankenship. In fact, he never approached Trent about reducing any spending.

What follows are some answers to my questions - and comments from Trent:

Q. Did he ever suggest others should be terminated to reduce spending in the department?
A. No, Jim never had the big picture ...

Q. He was quoted as saying that he wanted to "push authority and responsibility down to the levels where it actually belongs." Your comment on that?

A. Well, I'm sure he means well, but at its core, it's only meaningless hubris.

Q. He was also quoted as saying that "what I think has been a little bit lacking is leadership." Did he share that concern with you?

A. No. He has a right to his opinion and the privilege to share it publicly. I hope by expressing it, it helps him lead education. I'm sure Reed Eckhardt and Dave Freudenthal are delighted to publicly share his opinion.

Also, "Jim is a bureaucrat. He never said a word to my face. He never sticks his head out. He says what you want him to say - just smiles and flashes you the peace sign, baby."

"He might also think about working on recalibration to insure small schools funding, closing bogus on-line universities, decreasing the drop-out rate, increasing vocational training opportunities, advocating increasing teacher salaries, improving student achievement, and continuing to hold people accountable at all levels for student achievement."

"Jim hasn't asked for my advice, but if he did, ... I'd tell him ... the Governor and the press will do everything they can do to keep him off message, but advocacy of these issues is so important. I'd counsel him not to be bullied or seduced by the editor of the WTE or the governor, or counseled in any way by Max (Maxfield). He should listen to Cynthia. She's been around the block, lives to serve the state, and never lies. Don't lose focus on what's really important. Get out with children. They are the real people, and matter more than all the rest of it put together. Be real in their presence. It's a tough job and the most important one in the state. I pray for Jim's success and that he can be stronger than I was."

Death of Dwayne Sells

Extensive reportage of the recent coroner's inquest on pages 6, 7, 11 and 12 (back). Were more questions raised than answered?

was a lock to be chosen by the Governor to replace him.

He had a couple reasons why he was so confident - confident enough to say he "would have bet his paycheck" on the choice. One was that the other two candidates put forward by the Party had baggage with the Governor. He had removed Don Bryngelson from the job he held when Freudenthal took office and Annette Bohling had had run-ins with the Governor during her time with the Department.

Only McBride would come across as meek enough to present no threat to the Governor - and to the Democrats as a candidate for re-election.

Blankenship also believes that McBride has no political base to build upon. The other two do. So the least dangerous to Democrats in terms of seeking re-election would be Jim McBride - in the opinion of Trent Blankenship.

It is possible that the Central Committee did not want to waste a candidate. That they felt the Governor would continue to demonize the department - especially if a stronger threat for re-election held the office. So McBride was the only choice.

So, at first blush, it appears that McBride will join Joe Meyer as Republican "Fawners in Toe" for the Democratic governor.

Comments the new superintendent supposedly made to other media suggested that he was a rebel in the ranks of Blankenship's administration.

According to Trent, that was not the case.

The new guy told other media that he thought the department was "top heavy." He had evidently bought into the biased expose by the WT-E that Trent had increased payroll by \$1.2 million since becoming State Superintendent.

When asked that question, Trent told me that \$1.0 million of the supposed increase came as the result of converting a contract with a Fort Collins, Colorado firm to an in-house section (department).

Who headed that department?

Jim McBride.

When asked if McBride had ever approached him and expressed his opinion that the department was top heavy and that Trent should let him go, the head

THE CHEYENNE HERALD ♦ THE LOCAL ADVOCACY JOURNAL
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