

The race for the House

by Dave FEATHERLY

As expected, the Republican field for Wyoming's sole seat in the U.S. House of Representatives will almost certainly see multiple candidates.

The roster will likely be a mixed bag. There will be those with no chance, those with little chance, and those who will be considered serious contenders.

The Democratic primary will have but one serious challenger. In that party, Gary Trauner did well in the 2006 general election against Barbara Cubin and will be unchallenged. Combined with the fact that the Democrats have no farm system in Wyoming, Trauner will get a "pass" through the primary on to the general election ballot because of the 2006 election.

As was shown when Craig Thomas' seat in the U.S. Senate became vacant upon his death, Republicans tend to be more competitive without an incumbent in the race. The list of wannabes for Senator Thomas' seat swelled to more than thirty.

One of the names conspicuously missing from the lengthy list of "choose me, choose me!" candidates was Bill Winney.

Bill had determined his pursuit would be for the U.S. House seat and has shown the courage to challenge a six-term incumbent in the Republican primary in 2006. He did not expect, nor did he ask, that he be "gifted" the U.S. Senate seat just because he was the single candidate for federal office in 2006 who could have been considered the most deserving.

Those who were not GIVEN the Senate seat, without election or scrutiny by voters, may now shift their craving to the U.S. House seat. They weren't there in 2006 - when it took a challenge to a six-term incumbent and a difficult campaign to convince voters that they had a better choice - as Bill Winney was - but now may decide that that office (U.S. House) was the seat they really wanted all along.

Joan Barron of the Casper Star-Tribune reported recently that Cynthia Lummis, one of those rejected for the U.S. Senate seat by the Governor and favored by only a few in the Republican Party Central Committee for the seat, would announce her candidacy for House in the next several days. Cynthia served eight years as Wyoming State Treasurer and was never really challenged in those elections.

In the 1998 Republican primary, she was unopposed and received only 80.4% of the total votes cast by Republican voters in that election. In the 1998 general election, against a marginal Democrat opponent, Ms. Lummis received 59.0% of the total votes cast.

It should be noted here that Max Maxfield finally made it into state office in 1998. He barely prevailed in that Republican primary and hasn't been challenged in an election since. His 51.7% of the Republican vote in 1998 earned him a free pass in three general elections since.

In 2002, Ms. Lummis (who is Mrs. Alvin Wiederspahn), ran unopposed in both the Republican primary election and in the general election.

It can also be noted here that Sniffin' Bill Sniffin, who constantly refers to his run for Governor in the Republican primary of 2002, finished a distant third in that primary (behind Eli Bebout and Ray Hunkins) with only 15.0% of the vote. Also interesting about that election is that Dave Freudenthal became Governor with 49.96% of the votes cast for governor. Now he's considered unbeatable. 98.6% of those voting that day voted for one of the [three] candidates for governor.

As has been pointed out in the Herald before, it is impossible to determine the true rankings of "the Republicans who wanted to be Senator without an election" based on the votes of the Central Committee in Casper because the 71 members had to cast as many votes as would survive each round or their ballots would be discarded. In other words, in the final round to winnow the names down to the three to be forwarded to the Governor for his choice, five names were on the ballot and three had to be checked. The votes were not weighted - such as 5 for first, 4 for second, etc. All counted as a vote. So, 71 members of the Central Committee cast 213 votes (3 each). A candidate who was third choice of 71 members would prevail over a candidate who was first choice of 45, second choice of 20 but not any choice of the other six.

As a reminder of the results of the three rounds of voting in Casper, readers may refer to the Cheyenne Herald website (July 2, 2007, Front page). Because of the process, one cannot determine how candidates really fared with even the 71 Wyoming voters who were paring down the list to be sent the Governor.

The process used to appoint a seat-holder until the next election is probably as good as any other but 71 Central Committee members do not necessarily reflect the will of Wyoming's 195,000 voters.

What will the field eventually look like? Will Matt Mead change his announced plans and opt for this race? Will Tom Sansonetti, whose reputation is that he would take any office in Washington given him but doesn't have the stomach for a campaign, throw his hat in the ring? Assuming Cynthia is a candidate, who else will challenge front-runner Bill Winney to face off against Gary Trauner next November? Ron Micheli? Colin Simpson has decided discretion is the better part of valor (he did horribly with the party insiders in Casper in June) and will not run for the U.S. House seat. What about Cale Case or Bruce Asay, both credible challengers to Barbara Cubin in '04? But, between them, they took the same number of votes as Winney did alone in '06.

Disclosure: The publisher of the Cheyenne Herald is an active participant in the Winney for Congress '08 Campaign. He serves as campaign manager.

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