

Equality State?

In the last issue of the Herald, a reference was made to the University not interviewing a qualified African-American candidate to become its next head football coach. Here's what was written:

Another interesting thing about this search for the next head football coach at the University of Wyoming is that there was no real consideration given to an African-American candidate. Turner Gill was probably the best choice and he was given no consideration. He was an assistant coach at Nebraska when they won three national championships. The Equality State? Wyoming? Not so.

A reader, one who occasionally e-mails about errors planted in the Herald so that readers like him can find them and feel superior - at least for a bit - criticized the reference. He believes that not interviewing a black candidate does not affect Wyoming's claim as the Equality State.

And, he's right. That alone does not take away the right to claim that this state, above all others, is the Equality State. In spite of his reading every issue, every line and every nuance, he has not picked up on a writing style of "hyperbole for effect" and a tongue-in-cheek manner of presenting some things to get readers to think. Not to agree. Not to get mad. To think.

Women readers have no problem grasping what is meant by the less-than-serious position that Wyoming is not the

Equality State. Ask them about the disparity in wages between men and women holding the same job. Equality my ascot.

Many defenders confuse the fact that Wyoming was the first territory to grant women the right to vote (suffrage) with equality. Wyoming can be legitimately proud of being the first territory to grant women's suffrage. But they should know that the deed was an effort to gain population - thinking it would be easier to get families to move to the territory with that offering - not fairness. And that right was not granted without great opposition. All of the western territories were doing the same thing and all territories that gained statehood during the period were granting women the right to vote.

The reader also pointed out that Wyoming was first (again as a territory) to allow women to serve on juries. Technically correct, he may be unaware that the right was rescinded and not re-granted for decades.

An article in Women Lawyers' Journal, dated April 1927, pointed out that nineteen states allowed women to serve on juries and Wyoming was not listed among them. It was also pointed out that women were "eligible jurors" in Utah but were exempted from jury duty so they did not serve. Nice touch. Equality, though.

New York considered bills that would allow women to sit on juries to be "experimental legislation."

Apparently, Wyoming did "experimental" things because of the lack of residents. That same 1927 article went on:

"It is interesting to observe the history of the recognition of woman in the position of juror. In 1870, women were called for duty in outlaw settlements in Wyoming albeit under the law they were not eligible. They were drafted because of the necessity for reliable citizens. Later the practice was discontinued. Although first to grant woman suffrage and first to elect a woman governor, Wyoming still disqualifies her daughters from the jury box."

So, while Wyoming can lay some claim to equality when it comes to women serving on juries, there are facts lacking from that boast. Insofar as having the first elected governor, that is also accurate as far as it goes.

Nellie Tayloe Ross was elected Wyoming governor but that's not all of that story. In 1922, her husband, a Democrat who had run for elective office several times but always lost to a Republican, was elected governor of Wyoming. A year and a half into his term, he died. The Democrats nominated his widow, Nellie Tayloe Ross to run in the ensuing special election and, despite not campaigning, she won easily. In 1926, she sought re-election and was defeated.

She was the nation's first female governor and Wyoming's **ONLY** female governor in large part because of the circumstance of her husband dying in office. She was much more successful as Director of the National Mint from 1933-1953. At the 1928 Democratic National

Convention, Ross received 31 votes for vice president on the first ballot.

It is interesting to note that the Wyoming Constitution, continuing women's right to vote if Wyoming were granted statehood in 1890, was approved with more than 2/3 of the vote - **ALL MALE!**

Also, when the suffrage bill was written, there were but 22 members of the Wyoming Legislature. Done today, there is a question whether the male dominated Legislature would again approve women's right to vote. (This is a joke. Save your e-mail.) Equality, of course, has to do with much more than women's right to vote. It is about equal treatment.

The same e-mailer pointed out that Wyoming had the first female justices of the peace. That also is true. The year before women were allowed to sit on juries temporarily and out of necessity, two women were appointed justices of peace - one being Esther Morris, a Sweetwater County justice of the peace. She had barely stepped off the stage from Illinois when she pressed to grant suffrage to women, believing it would attract more women and families to the isolated territory. Lost in the excitement of women's suffrage is the fact that other laws were passed in the 1869 Wyoming legislative session, giving married women the right to own property, the right to serve on juries, and equal pay for female teachers.

Some Wyoming women had equal pay in 1869. Do they in 2009? And they lost the right to serve on juries for decades. Wyoming should be called the Women's Suffrage State, not the Equality State.

GAY WOODHOUSE

Law Office

211 W. 19th St.
432-9399

Gay Woodhouse
has 30 years
Legal Experience

Past-President of the
Wyoming Bar Association



Former Wyoming Attorney General and Federal Prosecutor

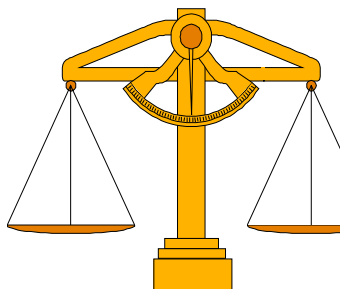
**"Dedicated to the protection
of your rights."**

**Liberty & Justice
for All**

GayWoodhouseLaw@aol.com

FAX: 432-7522

www.gaywoodhouse.com



The Wyoming State Bar does not certify any lawyer as a specialist or expert. Anyone considering a lawyer should independently investigate the lawyer's credentials and ability, and not rely upon advertisements or self-proclaimed expertise.

CHEYENNE'S ORIGINAL STEAKHOUSE



STEAKHOUSE AND SALOON

12700 E. I-80 Service Rd.

Dining: Mon-Sat 11 am - 10 pm / 4-10 pm Sunday

SMOKE-FREE DINING ROOM

SMOKING (AND DINING) IN BAR

5 miles east of Cheyenne - Hwy 30 / Pershing / I-80 at Archer (Exit 370) / 634-8750

T-Joe's Steakhouse
Has Your Favorites Every Night
Walleye, Grilled Chicken,
Pork Chops, Steaks, More!

**Blackened Prime Rib
Marinated Rib Eye**

Nightly Specials!
Fresh Hand-Cut Ribeye Steaks

Pete's Pickle Parlor

WyomingNETWORK.com

What's your opinion? Read and participate in
the forums at www.CheyenneNetwork.com