

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

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Is the Republican Party derailing this election, too?

Ray Hunkins

Bill Winney

BY DAVE FEATHERLY

Disclosure: I serve as campaign manager of the Winney for Congress campaign.

Four years ago, as Ray Hunkins seemed to be narrowing the gap between himself and the anointed Republican Party choice for Governor, Eli Bebout, the Grand Old Party sent airfare to Al Simpson and he arrived in Cheyenne with guns blazing. At the time, the sense was that Ray was catching up. A poll commissioned by a newspaper suggested that, by primary election day in 2002, it might be a dead heat.

Alan was recruited by party insiders to trash his longtime friend Ray Hunkins. Simpson cut commercials, showing him in all of his paid sincerity, mouthing the absurd words: "Ray Hunkins wouldn't know the truth if it bit him in the fanny." He threw Bill Sniffin in for good measure but the television and radio spots were meant to lay waste to the charging Ray Hunkins campaign.

"Wouldn't know the truth if it bit him in the fanny." A pretty low blow coming from one who not only knew Ray Hunkins was, and is, one of the state's most honorable and honest men, but from one who had worked shoulder to shoulder with Ray when campaigning to win election or re-election for "Over the transom" Alan Simpson.

Coming so late in the campaign - to lay waste to a fine man without consideration of the personal hurt inflicted on an old ally and buddy of Alan Simpson's - the Republican Party had adopted a "win at all costs" posture on behalf of their chosen candidate, Eli Bebout. Forget for a minute that Eli had, in the not too distant past, been a Democrat in the Wyoming House and Ray was a lifelong and active Republican chair and campaigner.

Ray Hunkins became somewhat of a friend during that campaign. He exudes trust, honor, competence and leadership abilities. He is a fine and decent man who must have been devastated by the attack from a friend. Had Ray Hunkins prevailed on primary day, what would Al Simpson have done during the campaign leading up to the general election? He

would have been ineffective as a campaigner or supporter for Ray, after just telling voters of the state that Ray was a liar. Would he have shifted over to the Democrats and helped Dave Freudenthal prevail over his old pal Ray Hunkins? All of that is academic because that last minute slander by Alan Simpson **did** help Eli Bebout prevail in the 2002 primary election.

Fast forward to 2006. Ray Hunkins surprised this writer by agreeing to be the standard bearer for the Republican Party to try to regain the Governor's office. Assurances made to Ray to enlist his run would only be conjecture but I'd wager a lunch that the Party guaranteed him that there would be no repeat by Al Simpson or his type - riding into town on a Greyhound at the last minute and making a "too late to respond" personal attack.

So, Ray Hunkins became the candidate. What he didn't get from Party officials, evidently, is their promise not to mess up his drive to unseat Dave Freudenthal.

Proving once again the validity of Murphy's Law, the Party dumped a major public records request on Gov Dave. (See accompanying story inside regarding the Herald's position on the damage this request will have on our efforts to do investigative reporting). Four years ago, in addition to the slime thrown on Ray Hunkins at the last minute, a destructive PAC was formed and their efforts to demonize Dave Freudenthal backfired on Party candidate Eli Bebout. Eli's past and the baggage he brought to the dance also contributed mightily to his undoing but that PAC compounded the problems.

The fishing expedition they call a request for public documents is not playing well in Republican circles (discount what insiders tell each other reassuringly). In fact, it can already be considered a public relations blunder of epic proportions. The Republican Party needs to take a seat. One of those chairs around the perimeter of the gym floor. Watch others dance but don't get up to join in.

Reminiscent of what happened to Ray Hunkins four years ago, the Winney for Congress campaign has already faced a challenge that could have been initiated by the Democrats, as a top Republican leadership said, or it could have been initiated in a similar vein to the Hunkins attack. The jury is still out.

The bottom line is that Bill Winney spent part of his Navy service driving a 8,250 ton nuclear submarine. He doesn't scare easily. And he ain't scared now.

On Wednesday, June 29th, Bill was contacted by a top Republican Party official who told him he'd like to meet right away to discuss a matter of urgency. A meeting was scheduled for the following day.

That meeting was attended by only the Party official and a well-known Republican elder statesman.

Winney was told that Dave Freudenthal "had gotten wind of" questions about Bill Winney's residency and that the Democrats planned to make trouble about it if Bill Winney won the Republican primary election on August 22nd.

Again, cutting right to the chase: There is no problem about Bill Winney's residency. He is, and has been, a resident of the State of Wyoming for nearly 30 years. The full story about his Wyoming residency is covered on our campaign website (www.winforwyoming.com) but suffice it to say that Bill has held a Wyoming driver's license, registered his vehicles in Wyoming and paid license fees on them, voted in Wyoming elections more often than Dick Cheney, had three sons enroll at the University of Wyoming as resident students, had one son join the Marine Corps from Wyoming, owned land in Wyoming while still on active duty in the Navy, planned the construction of a log home on The Hoback at Bondurant, attended the last two sessions of the Wyoming legislature and lived in an apartment in Cheyenne - all occurred during the past 28 years, most of which he spent on active duty in the Navy.

Instead of lining up with Bill Winney, he was treated as though maybe he had done something wrong. Instead of telling the candidate, "there's no way in hell we're going to let the Democrats choose their opponent in November," Republican Party operatives acted as though they believed the Democrat's charge.

At Superday in Cheyenne recently, Bill Winney was told by a knowledgeable and credible Democratic insider that the Democrats would rather run against Barbara Cubin in November than him. That makes sense because Mrs. Cubin has a record that is easy to attack and the Democrats will find it harder to attack a Republican with a clean slate and an impeccable record of personal accomplishments and service to his country.

The Party regulars didn't see it - this suggestion of impropriety - for what it was. If the Democrats could rid themselves of Bill Winney now, they would be assured of facing Barbara Cubin in November.

Another insider was brought into the web of deceit allegedly spun by the Democrats, and Bill spent a couple hours that day detailing his record of Wyoming residency that began in the late 1970's. Dick Cheney didn't face the same level of scrutiny from this Party when he chose to seek the vice presidency as a Wyoming resident while living in Texas in 2000.

Wanting to be absolutely certain that his record of long established Wyoming residency could not be LEGALLY challenged (anything can be politically challenged in a campaign), we met with attorney Jack Speight. Agreeing with us that Winney's residency and voter registration were proper and beyond challenge, Speight assisted us with the issue from there.

I will not allow Bill Winney, a fine man just like Ray Hunkins, to be slimed like Ray was four years ago. Whoever is throwing the stuff better be prepared to receive it on the return. Democrat or Republican, don't tread on us. We won't take it silently or sitting down.

Governor Freudenthal did not respond to my request for comment about this story. Nor did the Republican elder statesman.

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