

Private School Licensing Senate File 69

by Dave FEATHERLY

After years of embracing the distinction of being one of, if not THE, most lax state of the fifty in dealing with diploma mill operations - degree sellers to the Cheyenne Herald - Wyoming has finally taken a long overdue step toward respectability.

Even though the recently passed legislation allows far too long for the scoundrels who have set up shop in Wyoming to gain accreditation from a recognized firm (by the DOE), it is a tremendous first step.

With my personal experience with the Department of Education, Trent Blankenship was the only one to take an uncompromising stand towards requiring rascals like Preston University and Kennedy-Western University to become accredited or leave our state. Others in the Department seemed content to avail themselves of the junkets to Guatemala, London, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), while allowing the despicable actions to have a safe haven in Wyoming.

Trent Blankenship was adamant. He told me more than once that the only course - the only solution - was to require accreditation. So, while others discredit his stewardship as the top elected educator in Wyoming, he took a stand on this subject before others in his office bought in.

And, apparently, legislators who were treated to the junket two years ago still support the illegitimate degree sellers over the State of Wyoming's reputation.

Kathryn Sessions (D-Cheyenne) not only voted against the bill in its final form (joined only by another Laramie County legislator, John Hanes, and Cale Case), she voted against even its introduction.

Sessions is a retired school teacher who should understand the difference between an education and a purchased document. She stands for re-election this year and if she is the best Laramie County can do, God Save the Queen.

For the most part, this long overdue correction flew through the session without serious opposition. It sailed through the Senate Education Committee on a 5-0 vote, then the full Senate 27-3.

Senator Jayne Mockler (D-Cheyenne), who had voted against its introduction, changed her vote and voted for passage of the bill when it came back around. Perhaps her anticipated junket did not materialize. Or she could see the handwriting on the wall.

When assigned to the House Education Committee, it again zipped through with no opposition. Representative Mark Semlek (R-Moorcroft) and a former Crook County school board trustee, voted in support of the bill in committee but changed his vote on the House floor. Perhaps he was promised that junket that Ms. Mockler lost. The only Laramie County legislator on the Education Committee is Becket Hinckley and he wisely voted in support of the measure.

When facing the full House membership, SF69 passed 51 for, 7 against, and 2 excused. Were the two missing checking Expedia for tickets to Pakistan? Dubai?

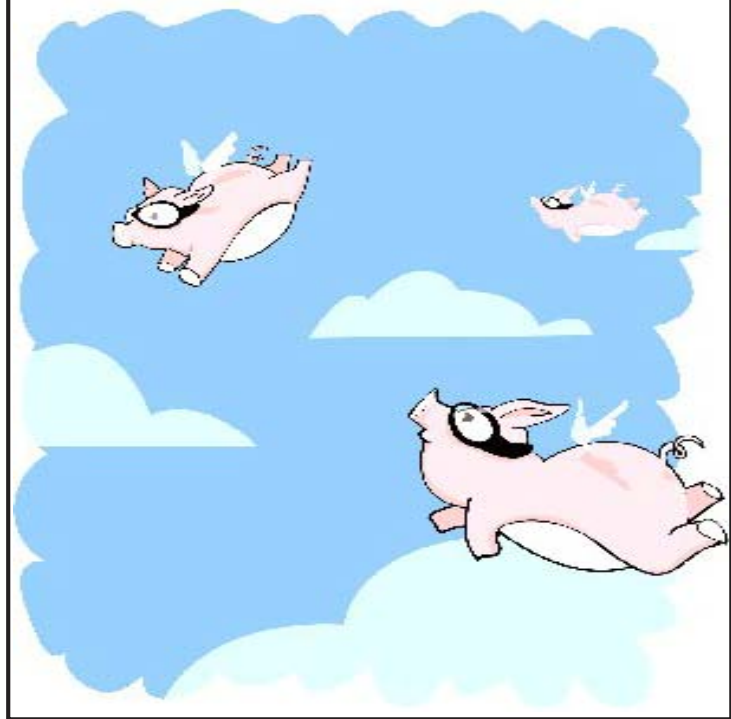
Nays were cast by the following:

- Rodney "Pete" Anderson (R-Pine Bluffs)
- Bob Brechtel (R-Casper)
- Jim Hageman (R-Ft. Laramie)
- Pete Illoway (R-Cheyenne)
- David Miller (R-Riverton)
- Frank Philp (R-Shoshoni)
- Mark Semlek (R-Moorcroft)

There are a few interesting similarities with those who opposed bringing Wyoming into the 21st Century on private degree-granting "institutions." First, all seven are Republicans. Maybe any business is a good business in their mind. Adult film production should be on its way. Three of them (Anderson, Hageman, Philp) would have been term-limited out of office had the Supreme Court accepted the will of the voters in Wyoming. This is a classic example of why a turnover in government is healthy and wise.

Pete Illoway, of course, is so lightly regarded by his peers that some still don't know who he is - after four terms. His intelligence is further reflected in another story in this Herald - where he supports smoking as a way to get people to die younger so they aren't such a health burden on Medicare.

Projected date when the Spiker administration will finally understand Wyoming annexation law.



Caution on the arson confession

As reported in the last issue of the Cheyenne Herald, there are a number of inconsistencies in the police department's reported confession of one Wyatt Johnson in the arson of the downtown buildings housing Mary's Bake Shoppe and Wyoming Home.

The man who supposedly confessed has already disavowed that confession, saying he was coerced. And, even though the police department suggested other law enforcement agencies had a hand in the questioning, the Herald has learned that may not be the case. At least in the direct interrogation that led to the confession.

In their zealotry to solve an arson which had stumped them for over a year, did they leap to conclusions which will not hold up in court?

Guesses about other routes someone may have used to gain access to the basement are unlikely to stand scrutiny. According to the Herald's information, the stairway to the upper floor(s) was permanently blocked off and could not be used.

Mary Coonts has consistently and adamantly said the front door was locked when she left that morning - and fire department personnel said it was locked when they tried to gain entrance.

Investigators must learn where the accused arsonist got a key. Or if he even gained entry through the front door. And what he used to start and sustain the fire. Authorities must be absolutely certain he is the arsonist - not just that he is a vulnerable young man who was quickly sent to the State Hospital for evaluation.

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