

Hunkins v. Freudenthal Who will win in November?

by **Dave Featherly**

In a state with more than twice as many registered Republicans as Democrats and Republicans being nearly two-thirds of all registered voters, it is a wonder that any Democrat can be elected to statewide office. And they seldom have been in the past three elections.

The only way to remove Republicans from the state offices has been through term limits. Jim Geringer and Judy Catchpole were taken out of office four years ago due to term limits and the 2006 election will see the end of Cynthia Lummis, Max Maxfield and Joe Meyer from the offices to which they were first elected in 1998.

It has always been my position that, in Wyoming, the only way a Democrat can win statewide is to up against a weak or damaged Republican. The imbalance in party registration makes it impossible for a Democrat to be elected with support of only Democrats and Independents.

As the top of the center table shows, even throwing the Independents (including Libertarians) into the mix, registered Republicans in the most recent election outnumbered the combination by about 60,000 voters.

The last Democrats elected to statewide office before Dave Freudenthal were Mike Sullivan and Kathy Karpan in 1990. Both, however, failed when they tried to move up to the higher offices (Sullivan, Senate and Karpan, Governor) in 1994 and Karpan again (Senate, 1996). Dave Freudenthal is the only Democrat elected to state office or federal office from Wyoming for 16 years.

The numbers strongly favor the Republicans. Almost insurmountable odds.

So, how did Eli Bebout lose the Governor's race to Dave Freudenthal in 2002?

First, Bebout was not a true Republican, meaning he had served in the Wyoming legislature as a Democrat. His conversion to the other party appeared to many to be opportunistic and an attempt by certain Casper party insiders to hand-pick a future Governor.

The table in the center of this page shows that Freudenthal won only eight of Wyoming's twenty-three counties. Those counties were the four along the UP tracks of southern Wyoming where Democrats usually fare best. Republican candidates have to expect that showing and they have to more than make up for the margin of loss in those (and Uinta) by outsetting the numbers in the other 18 counties. Laramie, Albany, Carbon and Sweetwater counties provided a 13,375 positive margin (36,637 - 23,262) for Dave. He also outpolled Bebout in Hot Springs, Natrona, Teton and Platte counties. These four counties provided a margin of 5,250 votes for Freudenthal (20,790 - 15,540).

The problem, though, for the Republican wasn't the counties that the Democrat won but the fact that Eli didn't make up that difference in counties with overwhelming

Republican voter advantages. Bebout lost in Hot Springs County, which has four times as many registered Republicans as Democrats. Look at Johnson County.

There is a 9.4:1 voter registration advantage to the Republicans. Bebout won the county by 566 votes! His loss in Platte County can probably be chalked up to the treatment of Ray Hunkins at the hands of the Republican Party when they brought in their sniper, Alan Simpson, to trash Hunkins as he was closing the gap on the chosen Republican candidate. That won't happen in 2006 - if Ray is the candidate.

Results in certain counties were related to a local newspaper's revelations about Eli Bebout and/or their endorsement of a Democrat in a Republican county.

In 2002, the Republican party fronted a candidate who would not, could not, and did not win the support of enough Republicans to win the election. He was just an unattractive candidate.

There were four other Republican gubernatorial candidates in the primary election. Collectively, they outpolled the Chosen One, Eli Bebout. Many of those Republican primary election voters did not vote for Eli Bebout. Many went over to Dave Freudenthal in protest or didn't vote at all for Governor. It's hard to imagine that many of Ray Hunkins' supporters went to Eli in the general election.

Another detracting factor in the general election - other than an unattractive candidate - was the formation of a political action committee which was funded by Casper money and whose purpose wasn't to support Bebout's candidacy but to try to demonize Dave Freudenthal. It was one of the most pathetic examples of stupid use of campaign funds and alienated even more potential Republican voters.

The table at the left shows that even the marginally unpopular Governor Jim Geringer garnered more votes when he won re-election than did Freudenthal in 2002. Dave won the election in 2002 over Eli by fewer than 4,000 votes. If 2,000 of those votes came from disaffected Republican voters who would return to the fold with Ray Hunkins, you have a dead heat.

If Ray Hunkins brings back some of the 8,362 Republican votes of 1998 that went elsewhere four years later, he would win.

Dave Freudenthal does have advantages. He is the incumbent. Wyoming has shown a willingness to elect a Democrat as Governor, even as all other offices go Republican. The state has been flooded with energy money and the budget surplus, though no credit to any individual or political party will be claimed by the incumbent. He will most likely poll well along the UP tracks - including Cheyenne, for which he is the "favorite son" candidate.

If Ray Hunkins is the candidate, as appears certain, and if the Republican party avoids another circular firing squad that they didn't survive in 1986, he can count on the help (help?) of Dick Cheney, Barbara Cubin, Craig Thomas and Mike Enzi.

	10/27/1998	10/31/2002	10/22/2004	
Registered Republicans	142,447	148,925	146,328	63.0%
Registered Democrats	70,926	65,775	62,385	26.8%
Independents / Others	26,166	26,500	23,683	10.2%
	239,539	241,200	232,396	

* Counties won by Dave Freudenthal in 2002 general election				Republican Votes
	Geringer '98	Freudenthal '02	Bebout '02	Change '98 to '02
Albany	5,436	6,772 *	4,404	(1,032)
Big Horn	2,579	1,438	2,579	0
Campbell	5,536	3,498	6,501	+ 965
Carbon	2,715	3,493 *	2,345	(370)
Converse	2,482	2,092	2,281	(201)
Crook	1,484	931	1,807	+ 323
Fremont	6,822	5,500	8,108	+1,286
Goshen	3,146	1,893	2,718	(428)
Hot Springs	1,158	1,212 *	942	(216)
Johnson	1,850	1,263	1,829	(21)
Laramie	15,227	18,563 *	11,487	(3,740)
Lincoln	3,704	1,887	3,520	(184)
Natrona	10,974	13,175 *	9,825	(1,149)
Niobrara	773	411	774	+ 1
Park	7,255	4,192	6,287	(968)
Platte	2,635	2,122 *	1,645	(990)
Sheridan	5,248	5,510	5,567	+ 319
Sublette	1,467	1,025	1,539	+ 72
Sweetwater	4,925	7,809 *	5,026	+ 101
Teton	4,342	4,281 *	3,128	(1,214)
Uinta	3,587	3,004	3,125	(462)
Washakie	2,237	1,533	1,805	(432)
Weston	1,653	1,058	1,631	(22)
TOTAL	97,235	92,662	88,873	(8,362)

Disparate Party Registration Counties (2004 - minimum ratio of 2.5:1 Republican)		
	Democrats	Republicans Ratio
Big Horn	696	4,293 6.2:1
Campbell	1,587	11,008 6.9:1
Converse	1,003	4,143 4.1:1
Crook	469	2,750 5.9:1
Fremont	4,067	11,049 2.7:1
Goshen	1,565	3,949 2.5:1
Hot Springs	481	2,042 4.2:1
Johnson	352	3,311 9.4:1
Lincoln	1,234	5,311 4.3:1
Niobrara	139	1,269 9.1:1
Park	1,887	11,002 5.8:1
Sheridan	3,393	8,724 2.6:1
Sublette	423	3,318 7.8:1
Washakie	733	3,323 4.5:1
Weston	465	2,678 5.8:1
+59,676	18,494	78,170 4.2:1

Some of the most glaring examples of Eli Bebout's failure to attract votes where he should have been able to:

Campbell County has about a 9,500 voter registration advantage for Republicans, but Bebout won the County by only 3,000 votes. Converse Co. has a 3,100 Republican advantage - Bebout won by less than 200 votes. Fremont Co., his home, has a Republican advantage of almost 7,000 votes - Bebout won by 2,500. Park County had over 9,000 more registered Republicans, but Eli took it by only 2,100 votes. There are more examples of Eli's failings.

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