

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

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# 305 State government employees make more than the elected officials

*And that does not include UW or Community College employees*

by Dave FEATHERLY

Penny rich and pound foolish.

The Wyoming Legislature takes 40 days to do what a well-run private business (excluding banks, stockbrokers and hedge fund managers) would do in a week with extended lunches and early dismissals.

They mean well and most of them try hard. But they waste so much time. It is becoming increasingly obvious that the two ends of the hall in the Capital Building don't play well together.

A bill that starts in one body, is assigned to committee, is debated there and, assuming a "Do Pass" recommendation comes from that committee, it returns to the floor for lengthy (sometimes redundant and tedious) debate and votes.

After that process ends, it goes to the other end of the hall. There, it is just as likely to be defeated or buried as considered and passed. There seems to be far too much "gotcha" than is healthy. "You kill one of ours, we'll kill one of yours," is what you sense happens.

Without taking a position that higher pay will attract better candidates for public office - I don't believe that is necessarily true (in fact, I can't for the life of me understand why some people offer themselves up for elective office for any pay - I surely won't), I do think elected offices should be fairly paid. "Fairly" will mean different things to different people and I consider the office, not the inhabitant.

So, whether I think Dave Freudenthal as Governor is worth \$35,000 a year or \$350,000 is immaterial. What is the Governor of the State of Wyoming worth? Remember, we're not competing for Warren Buffet or Bill Gates. There are few people in Wyoming who can count on making more than the Governor now makes - which is \$105,000. And, if we were broke and losing revenue fast, the notion that a higher salary for the five executive branch elected officials could be

summarily dismissed. But, we aren't. And we have had enough money to use a bunch for a "spray park" in Cheyenne and other highly questionable uses. We have enough money to staff a largely nonproductive Wyoming Business Council, staffed with high-paid non-producers.

In private business, when you try to hire "on the cheap," chances are slim that good people will stay with you. In public office, you can underpay some because they are like some prisoners - they know nothing else and are content just to be there. Joe Meyer is a classic example. He has always fed at the public trough.

In private business, you always consider what other employees are being paid. There are no secrets, you soon find out. You have to be able to face one paid less than another and provide a reasonable excuse for the imbalance.

That is where the rub lies in Wyoming.

Many, many, many state employees are paid more than the four elected officials other than the governor and too many are paid more than the governor.

Beyond comparable pay for the more demanding position, it is fair to compare Wyoming's governor salary to other states, especially similar states in area and population. And responsibility.

Granted, there will always be candidates for elective office, regardless of the salary. Some, like Mark Gordon and Gary Trauner, are willing to serve for reasons known only to them. Some, like Gordon, will spend much of their family fortune to gain a job that pays a fraction of what it cost to attain the job. To some, that makes perfect sense. To me, it doesn't.

Part of this story is about how many Wyoming state government employees make more money than do our five elected officials. Also, it will be pointed out the futility felt and time wasted by legislators on the House end of the hallway before a bill to provide elected officials higher salaries was killed by the Senate.

Last things first: HB86 was filed - it would raise the Governor's salary to \$152,934 (now \$105,000) and the other four to \$134,000 (now \$92,000). That bill was referred to committee, and it died. HB240 was filed by the Joint Appropriations Interim Committee. It would provide \$5,000 annual increases for all five offices. It was amended in committee to the same salaries as HB86 proposed. It was passed out of committee by a 6-1 vote ("Jeb" Steward, R-Encampment voted against it - he must not plan to run for one of those offices in the future).

It passed CoW and both readings in the House and was sent down the hall. The third reading vote in the House was 37-23, with Laramie County's delegation voting 2-8 against the bill. (Dave: *Democrats Byrd, Esquibel, Millin and Throne voted to deny you the raise*). A Senate committee voted 4-1 to pass, amending down to \$105,500 for the governor and \$92,500 for the others. \$500 raises? That is insulting. On the Senate floor, the bill failed 5-25 on third reading.

This is gamesmanship. And it embarrasses the Senate. There is no shortage of funds to warrant a reasonable increase in these positions. And it is not that they were protecting state funds zealously. They approved several bills that were less serious and less credible and some cost far more. It will cost \$150,000 to do a study about "tolling I-80." The answer, and you can send me the check, is "No!" And somewhere between \$400,000 and \$883,000 could be spent on "rangeland monitoring."

To dismiss this legislation, which I consider to be serious, and then pass a state butterfly bill, which I consider frivolous, borders goofy. Only nine members of the Legislature said "No" on the butterfly, including Pete Anderson. Good for him.

Why do I believe an increase in pay of some kind is warranted? Beyond the fact that the state can afford it and it is time? I could debate the correct new salary but not the fact that higher salaries are warranted for our five elected offices.

For starters, there are a shocking number of state employees who now make a higher salary than the five elected officials. I'm not comfortable with that.

*The listing I possess will change by the time the five offices (not these five elected officials, necessarily) would have seen an increase in January of 2011.*

As of last Fall, at least 305 state government employees made \$92,000 or more. More than 120 state employees made \$105,000+ (more than the Gov) and 32 were paid between \$100,000 - \$104,999.

Does it make sense that more than 300 state employees make more than the Secretary of State, not to mention the Auditor, Superintendent of Public Instruction and Treasurer? Hardly.

There are six on the governor's staff who make more than Dave does. Does that make any kind of sense to you? Do you think any of the six could do the governor's job? Of course not. Each of the four other elected officials has at least one department employee making more money than they do. In the WDOE, an employee makes \$56,000 more a year than Jim McBride.

An at-will employee in A&I is paid \$90 an hour. An at-will employee in the Dept. of Employment is paid over \$82 an hour. An attorney in the AG's office makes more than \$170,000 a year. Several psychiatrists in the Dept. of Health make \$85 to \$95 an hour. The highest paid state employee makes more than twice (\$215,000) what the governor is paid. The analysis does not include UW coaches, etc. The Business Council has nine employees being paid more than the four elected officials. The WBC director, with no special experience or qualifications, makes \$20,500 more our Supreme Court justices and almost \$50,000 more than Circuit Court judges. \$26,750 more than District Court judges.

I believe a salary hike is (was) warranted for the five elected offices. Legislative grandstanding didn't change my opinion.