

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

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Gov Dave starts to throw 'em over the side!

Close friend and campaign aide Phil Noble is the first to go

by Dave Featherly

One down. Several to go.

For over 175 years, those elected to public office have rewarded unqualified friends by appointing them to public office. Possibly inaugurated by Andrew Jackson in Washington D.C. in 1828, all national elections as well as state contest winners have kept the practice alive. (See the brief story at the bottom.)

When John F. Kennedy became president in 1961, he appointed his brother attorney general. It is a self-generated "right" to place friends in government jobs or to public positions - often to roles they cannot perform.

For some time now, I have been pointing out that Governor Dave Freudenthal had made some poor choices. Had he just arranged for them to have state jobs, that might have passed unnoticed. But to make them department heads or, as Bobby Kennedy was, to name one the attorney general, would not avoid the radar screen.

Assisting on a political campaign does not produce the qualifications necessary to head a state agency or department. A governor has to look at what his friend had done before the campaign to determine whether he (she) has any chance to successfully manage the office to which he is appointed.

"[Andrew] Jacksonian Democracy showed its face on inauguration day when crowds of celebrating supporters stormed the White House. Muddy boots trampled the fine carpeting; crystal and china were shattered and all the food and drink were quickly consumed. Disapproving National Republicans spoke fearfully about the accession of 'King Mob.'"

Many inauguration-day revelers were in Washington hoping to find government jobs. The term "spoils system" refers to the conferral of office on people based upon political concerns rather than fitness for office. Viewed in its best light, it was a further expression of increased democratization in American politics—one need not be a member of the elite in order to govern." (Note: Bold and underlining is mine.)

If a governor, mayor, or congressman leaves a private business to assume office and wants to hire a friend who is totally unqualified to manage that personal business while he's away, that is his prerogative. The risk of financial ruin is his to assume. But to hire one who is so obviously unqualified as Phil Noble was to head the Wyoming Parks and Cultural Resources department is almost certain to come back and bite the governor and the state's people "in the fanny," as Alan Simpson likes to say.

Now the day(s) of reckoning is arriving.

A story was presented to us several days ago about the State of Wyoming settling a lawsuit brought against the State by a former employee of the Parks and Cultural Resources department wherein she made allegations of wrongdoing which led to termination of employment.

I have spent several hours reviewing the Complaint and other documents related to this legal matter and am now more convinced than ever that my caution to the governor about his hiring practices was on point.

Before getting into specifics about this case, which some may have read about in the Casper Star-Tribune recently, let me remind readers of some of the other careless yet unpunished actions by appointees of the governor.

The head of the Department of Agriculture allowed a lobbying message to be circulated with state mail at state expense.

The head of Family Services has paid money to a religious institution which was likely used for improper religious purposes, such as leasehold improvements to their property.

AG Pat Crank has made more mistakes than can be detailed here at this time. He has decimated any Consumer Protection agency or protection the state used provide. A half million residents in the state with the ninth largest land area in the United States, has consumer protection service from a part-time person who formerly held the full-time job. He is also a full-time municipal judge.

Crank now supports the use of public money for a questionable religious purpose. A church providing day care services for needy or underprivileged children is one thing - to use money for permanent improvements to their structure is a highly questionable use of public funds. Probably unconstitutional.

Can anyone imagine the outcry if a Republican administration spent even a dime in the same manner? Wyoming would become the land of experts on the issue of separation of church and state.

I recently received a letter from a reliable and knowledgeable source who told me the governor had also made appointments of unqualified people to serve on the Public Service Commission.

I have criticized Reed Eckhardt of the other newspaper in town for accepting appointments to boards the WT-E should cover journalistically without bias. Those appointments were done for a purpose and it has worked. Just today (May 27), Eckhardt began his systematic attack on Ray Hunkins. He will be a toady for Gov Dave all through this election cycle. Anyone want to bet which candidate for governor will earn the WT-E's fraudulent endorsement? Did you guess Gov Dave? Good answer. Good answer.

Back to the case which recently set back the residents of Wyoming \$250,000.

The plaintiff in the case had worked in that department (Parks and Cultural Resources) for half of her life. She rose through the ranks from an archives tech to program manager of the Wyoming State Museum, a position she was promoted to in 1998. Her personnel reviews were "exceeding" or "meeting" expectations. She was a permanent employee and subject to termination only for cause.

Phil Noble was appointed Director of the Wyoming Department of Parks and Cultural Resources shortly after Dave Freudenthal became governor. Briefly, he served as Freudenthal's chief of staff.

Within six months, the plaintiff, according to the Complaint, "confronted Defendant Noble about perceived difficulties between them, including discriminatory

treatment of Plaintiff based upon sex." Then, "Subsequently, Defendants' treatment of Plaintiff became worse."

Noble also "overturned practices" of the Museum and allowed use of the museum's collections in ways contrary to normal (national) museum policies.

About eight months after taking over the department, Noble told the plaintiff that she was being reassigned. The reassignment was "immediate." He told her to "clean out her office, turn in her keys, and leave the office." She was to commute 45 miles each way daily and would be paid less on her new job. Plaintiff learned that the new job had not been requested by anyone in the department. Noble told his colleagues in state government who acted on plaintiff's grievance, that the move was not a demotion.

Not a demotion? Not much of a promotion, was it? Her new office was a "small cubicle with neither a computer nor a telephone." And, "she was told that she would have no supervisory authority."

I have been told that the Parks department has lost as much as 40% of its work force since Noble's ascension to a role he could not handle and which the governor had no reason to believe he could handle. He told the staff at an introductory meeting that the governor had put him in that position, basically, because "it wasn't important and he (Noble) couldn't screw it up." He did.

Eventually, in the legal proceedings on behalf of the plaintiff, Attorney Harriett Hageman got Noble to admit that the reassignment was punitive and disciplinary, not for any reason within the rules. In settlement, the State paid the plaintiff \$250,000. Of your money. Noble has been thrown over the side. Finally.

This 27 year employee (the plaintiff) of the State was demoted from being in charge of the respected State Museum to an office similar to the one from which Reed Eckhardt works. Reed does have a computer and a telephone though.

I have requested of the State's Human Resources Office data on how many Parks department employees departed while Noble was in charge. They advised me they would have that information next week (after presstime).

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