

Wrrrrrreacked!

by Dave Featherly

You know how sometimes your expectations aren't met with reality? When the blind date described as a "knock-out" turns out to be a gal who can knock you out. With a right cross. How the movie built up as one of the best ever turns out to be a yawner? And you're out \$7.50.

Well, since early Tuesday night when it was obvious that the rec center sales tax proposition would fail, and fail big, I've had expectations about how Reed Eckhardt would defend his failure in his Saturday column.

My expectations were met.

Reed didn't let me down. He placed blame everywhere but at his own feet. He still doesn't get it. He doesn't accept how low his reputation has sunk - that people are inclined to go the opposite way he tells them they should go.

He assessed fault, of all things, with the "marketing" of Prop 4. Everybody and everything is to blame, at fault, responsible, a failure, except himself and the disrespected newspaper.

Reed can run but he can't hide.

The blame for this failure lies squarely at his feet. More than the PAC that tried to convince voters of the need and merits and more than the mayor who is notably unpersuasive at all times.

This rejection belongs to Reed.

What happened?

How could the election - the Prop 4 tax - have turned out so wrong for the mayor and his tail-wagging daily newspaper?

How could the one proposition they were so sure would pass - the mayor predicted by 65-70% of the vote, didn't he? - fail so miserably and the other three, less certain of success, be so widely supported?

Let's tear down Eckhardt's self-serving May 11, 2008 column a little more before dissecting the election results.

He's proved once again that his ego is as huge as the Wyoming great outdoors. He wrote: "Anyone who thinks voters here would have approved \$30 million for the county's Archer property in, say, 2000, is fooling himself." In other words, local voters wouldn't have approved such a measure before he stepped off the bus from Monroe. He has parted the Sea.

Actually, voters were never asked nor given the chance to approve a project that big in 2000 because insiders always claimed that a menu-style ballot was illegal and insisted on an "all or nothing" ballot and that usually meant nothing.

When voters were finally provided a faux menu-style ballot, large ticket items began

to be approved - such as the library in 2003. Laramie County voters have proven in the past that they will accept that sixth penny of sales tax - as they did by approving over \$50 million in projects the other day. Now, though, they've also said, don't try to force feed us a project that is poorly conceived, planned and presented. That we **won't** buy.

To avoid admitting defeat, Eckhardt pointed out that the City did get some money. Prop 1 and 2 provides about \$5 million for the Greenway, Botanic Gardens, and airport terminal design. What he won't admit, even though almost every one else in town does, is the terminal design hitchhiked through on the back of the voters generosity to the small towns.

Then he seemed to suggest that mayoral candidates were waiting for the election to see if the rec center failed and are only now are jumping out of the shadows to challenge the disgraced mayor. Not so. The candidates he mentioned made their intentions known awhile back. None have filed for the office yet - the only way to really commit to run - because the window for filing hasn't arrived.

It was the mayor who used the timing of the election to announce plans about the 2008 election. Had the rec center been approved, he would have taken credit. Should it lose, as it did, it would be too late for critics to say, you lost on your most important issue taken to the voters - step aside. He did not want to risk that outcome even while publicly braying the rec center would be overwhelmingly approved.

Reed wrote: "Still, Tuesday's results certainly give heart to those here who would think they can turn back the clock and send all the outsiders and their new-fangled ideas packing." He finally admitted that he is an outsider. Neither he nor the mayor have presented any "new-fangled" ideas. A rec center was proposed for Cheyenne while Reed was still wiping perspiration from himself down in the Monroe, Louisiana 100% humidity.

What is new-fangled about ideas Eckhardt chirps about in this column is the "spend all you have and then spend what you can borrow" fiscal mentality. Before he came, Jack Spiker and an earlier administration had managed to accumulate over \$40 million in excess funds. Now they have about \$40. If that much.

Reed makes further disparaging remarks about Pete Laybourn maybe not running for mayor after all - Reed so wants to win an election and thinks Pete would be an easy target and is confident Pete could be his first notch. Eckhardt sure didn't do very well in the last candidate election, when he constantly used the McCracken's newspaper to promote the candidacies of Larry Atwell and Mike Dowling in his failed attempt to unseat Diane Humphrey and Jeff Ketcham.

He just refuses to accept that the WT-E

no longer has any political influence in Cheyenne or Laramie County.

Hell, he used huge amounts of space in his swirling-down-the-bowl newspaper to order voters to support the rec center and they still didn't. Ross Perot can hear the sound. Only two ads were placed by opponents - one full page in the Cheyenne Herald and another full page in Trader's Shopper's Guide - yet voters went that way. Who's got the powerful voice now, Reed? (See the following page to see just how much space the WT-E used to push propaganda for the rec center.)

Reed, in his column, admits that he has spoken with council members who were going to "stay" because the rec center was a sure thing - "euphoria," he called it - and now may not because it failed.

When the going gets tough, the tough ... run. From this elected body.

Eckhardt, ever the Spiker boot-licker, wrote that Jack and the Boys have "done wonders to change not only the appearance of Cheyenne but also its mindset."

The appearance? Where? The downtown has never been in worse shape. Never. Most of the larger businesses have fled and the small ones come and go constantly. How could Reed possibly be unaware that the Tivoli is empty, Grier's is gone, ditto Frontier Printing, a block and half that used to be Dinneen's is empty, Roedel's Drugs closed, the Cheyenne Club has been empty, Mossholder's is again empty, P.S. Cook's building and land are barren, the Hynds Building remains shuttered, the hole in the ground to the west of it remains undeveloped, Z's Furniture moved from the downtown, Prudential Real Estate (Volk), ReMax, Benchmark and other real estate-related businesses are gone. And on and on. The only building vacant in downtown Cheyenne when Jack and Reed took power in January 2001 was the Hynds Building.

Jack Spiker's store itself has been reduced to about 40% of what it was when he became mayor.

A parking garage was perpetrated as a fraud on voters and residents. What goes 'round, comes 'round, Reed.

Yet, Reed thinks the appearance is good?

Mindset? It seems the voters collective mindset is what is now causing Reed to cry in his coffee now. Is that changed?

Reed is trying desperately to blame the failure of the rec center **ON** the rec center. I disagree. I think the major factors - the mayor and the newspaper - played bigger roles in the defeat.

"No doubt," Reed wrote, "I supported the full-blown facility in this column -- and I still do. But I always had an uneasy feeling that it was too big. The addition of the senior wing, it seemed to me, was the

weight that brought it crashing down."

Here's an editor, make than an "executive editor" of a daily newspaper who is admitting he lied, or at least deceived, readers, and voters, by editorializing in a way inconsistent with his true beliefs.

And the McCracken family is comfortable with that?

I have charged all along that the daily paper has surrendered objectivity for access. When you use the space they did to promote the rec center, all the while the editor believed the project was "too big" and that the senior wing broke the projects back but never whispered a word of that concern to readers, that is dishonest. But that's what this newspaper - or whatever we can now call it - has become.

He makes veiled reference to this group's "wins" since 2000 but doesn't list them.

Let me help.

They lost three major annexation battles. They spent \$300,000 on outside attorneys to fight a battle that was unwinnable and the daily newspaper was in their corner for every round. Was that one of the wins?

They made an end run on Wyoming statutes to build an unneeded, and now proven to be unused, downtown parking garage. For the first time in Wyoming history, a city used a resolution to approve the issuance of bonds to finance the garage to avoid using the normal, and required, ordinance which could have been challenged by voters. Was that a win?

They acquired the Belvoir Ranch, at full listing price, after that area had been dismissed as a possible future landfill by the Landfill Advisory Committee, and have not succeeded at any use out there save for grazing cattle. Where's the win?

Retail and restaurant growth is a credit to disposable income and unserved consumer needs, not government. So, there's nothing there to claim as a "win." Motels open because of the traveling public, not the mayor or city council.

Reed still does not know the common definition of "progressive." The guys shouldn't appreciate being called "liberals" or "socialists" in a conservative city like Cheyenne. But, if progressive is what Reed thinks they are, he knows them best.

I tried to provide some information about the rec center issue on these pages before the election. I did not ask voters to vote "yes" or "no" based on my words. I should not and they should not. Reed has now been told that words in tabloids like his or journals like mine don't influence voters - at least to much of an extent. And that's the way it should be.

So, what did cause the defeat of Prop 4? I'll offer my opinions on the following page. You probably have your own.