

Lunch with the mayor

by Dave Featherly

There was a time when lunch with Jack Spiker was a regular occurrence. But that hasn't been the case for several years. Our exchange of words has only been a passing acknowledgment of "Hello. How you doing?", when we approach each other in public places.

But, Jack's announcement the other day that he was not going to seek a third term caught me by as much surprise as anyone else in the city. And I wanted to hear from his own lips why he had made this shocking decision. So I called him and asked him to have lunch with me to discuss his announcement.

This past Saturday, we met at what I call "the aluminum restaurant" (Penny's Diner on Stillwater out north), a place we had taken lunch many times until about six months into his first term as mayor.

I wanted to ask Jack about his decision - and ask him a number of other questions about possible and probable candidates for mayor and city council.

When I asked Jack if there were any extenuating circumstances surrounding his decision not to run again for mayor - whether Patrick Collins had told him he planned to seek the office against him or whether the daily newspaper had told him that they would support Patrick over him, as some in the community have thought happened - he told me the answer to both questions was "no."

He said he had contemplated for some time - long before the sixth penny election or the entry into the mayor's race of some new opponents - whether he really wanted to seek or fulfill a third four-year stint as mayor and that he and his wife, Karen, had decided he was in a position

to "retire," and finally he decided that would be his choice.

When asked why he had recently said for public consumption that he would seek a third term, he responded quickly. "I don't know," he told me. He said on some days he felt like he might want to run again and serve another term if elected but on most days, he did not.

Jack has five grandchildren, all of whom will be in elementary grades at the same Cheyenne school this next school year. While he has tried to attend as many of their functions as he could in the past, it hasn't always been possible. He wants to have more time to spend with them and at their activities.

Many have thought the \$95,000 a year salary which will begin in January of 2009 would attract more and possibly even a better quality of candidates for mayor.

I have never believed that salary alone was the determinant of whom would run or whom would serve. Certainly, \$95,000 in Cheyenne goes further than it does in Denver and the other perks, limited as they are, are also attractive.

The mayor is eligible for the same health insurance as city employees and pays only 15% of the premium cost for that insurance. That is a benefit sometimes more valuable than salary. The mayor is also provided a vehicle and receives the "prestige" that comes with being mayor. The job is time-demanding and attracts both support and displeasure. A mayor who is universally liked is probably not doing very much. But, conversely, being widely disliked does not mean they are doing a lot. There is no middle ground.

One of the single biggest mistakes I think

Jack made in his 2000 run for mayor was to promise to eliminate the "executive assistant" position then held by Joe Dougherty. No co-mayor, he said.

I regret that I supported his stand, even encouraged it. I would not have taken the position - but we had a great candidate for the job, still Jack kept that campaign promise. I came to believe that Leo Pando was right to have had that buffer in the mayor's office. A good executive assistant - not a glorified secretary with no management or leadership skills - would allow a mayor to do a better job, without diminishing the position.

I would now recommend to the next mayor that he/she reinstall that position, then reduce the clerical staff in the mayor's office to help defray the overall cost. And seriously consider whether Cheyenne has outgrown the "strong mayor" form of government. The daily newspaper promised in 2001 to push for a city manager but then went silent on the subject.

After I had asked Jack in every way I could think of to determine whether there were other reasons for his decision, and not uncovering any (it is about family), we spoke about candidates known and unknown who would be running for mayor.

Jayne Mockler and Joe Dougherty have filed to date. Jack told me Joe had done so the day before. Jack said that Dougherty would resign his city job to campaign even though that's not required.

C. J. Brown, a former councilman, has told me directly that he was going to run for mayor. He had visited Jack and also told him that he (C.J.) was going to run. C.J. is a longtime State employee and served an interrupted three terms on city council, where he had been a strong ally and friend of Jack Spiker's.

Rick Kaysen, former president and chief executive officer of Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power will also be a candidate for the office. Rick was with Cheyenne Light when the City of Cheyenne attempted a

hostile takeover of that utility so his campaign should be interesting. That takeover attempt went nowhere but did cause Cheyenne Light anguish and expense.

The serious wagering in town has been on Patrick Collins running for mayor. I asked Jack what he knew about that possibility and he told me that Collins and Tom Segrave were not going to be running for any city elective office.

I had wondered why Jack would announce, and then quickly file, for a seat on city council from Ward II if those two guys were going to seek re-election. One scenario that made sense to me was if one of them ran for mayor and Jack switched seats with them - kind of like Joe Meyer and Max Maxfield do at the State level. Jack said that was not the case, that neither Collins nor Segrave would be running for anything this election. He also told me he would not have challenged them if they were going to run. They have become very staunch political allies.

He told me that incumbents Jimmy Valdez, Jim Brown and Don Pierson have filed for re-election. Collins, Segrave and Pete Laybourn have not filed as yet.

Of the challengers who have filed, the only one I know much about is Delmar Stone. Delmar would be a very good councilman and has been one of the city's strongest proponents of recycling - which is long overdue. He also has technical experience with building inspections and city code that would be beneficial.

Jack predicted the floodgates would open this week and there would be multiple candidates for every office up for election.

Jack Spiker departing the mayor's office without being defeated in a primary or general election will be a first. Every previous mayor under this form of government has been eventually defeated. None have walked away of their own volition. His seeking a city council seat after being mayor will not set a precedent. In 1996, when Jack was elected to city council, former three-term mayor Don Erickson was a candidate in that general election. Don finished third in that election, behind Helen Allen and Jack Spiker.

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