

## Was Police Chief Bob Fecht lying then or is he lying now?

### *One Citizen's Opinion*

After several years of poking my unwelcome nose into public records at the City of Cheyenne and other governmental offices, I've concluded that there are three places where citizens of any city or town shouldn't tolerate, condone or ignore liars, lying, or the falsification or manipulation of records.

One is the water treatment facility. Because of the critical nature of their product, anyone caught making those test reports look more positive than they really are should be fired AND prosecuted. No exceptions.

Another place where liars and fudgers shouldn't be tolerated is in an agency which inspects restaurants and other places where food is prepared or served to a trusting and vulnerable public.

I first became aware of the potential problem with restaurant inspections a few years ago when the City-County Health Department was considering changing its inspection procedures and standards to make them more "restaurant-friendly". In order to become more knowledgeable about how they went about their business, I looked at hundreds of reports from previous restaurant inspections around Laramie County.

One day I discovered a report from an inspection at a well-known Cheyenne restaurant. There were several critical violations noted on the report resulting in a "score" which was only one or two points above the threshold where the Health Department would be forced to close the establishment until all the violations were corrected.

The report noted that the inspector had found flies and evidence of cockroaches and mice in the kitchen area, but there was only ONE 4-point deduction instead of three. Three 4-point deductions certainly seemed more appropriate but would have triggered the closing of the restaurant to protect the dining public.

When I asked about the solitary deduction, the person in charge explained that since the flies, the cockroaches, and the mice can all be classified together as "pests", only four points needed to be deducted from the establishment's already scary score.

"How much would you deduct," I then asked, "if you walked into the kitchen of a local restaurant and found flies, cockroaches, mice, AND a llama?"

"That would depend upon whether the mice were dead or alive," was the straight-faced reply from our cracker-jack public health watchdog. "If the mice were dead, we'd give the restaurant manager credit for trying to solve the problem and a deduction wouldn't necessarily be applied."

"But what if the mice died from eating the food which was being served to the public?" I asked in my most incredulous and confused tone.

Not appreciating my clever attempt at disarming humor, the health official terminated the interview. Bummer. I was just starting to hit my stride.

The third place where liars and lying should not be tolerated or ignored is in law enforcement agencies.

The people who work in those organizations are presumed by most judges and juries to be telling the truth when they testify in person or when their written reports concerning crimes, accidents, or incidents are introduced into evidence.

I mention this now because of some recent stories and editorials appearing in Cheyenne's daily newspaper. Several times now the Tribune-Eagle has obediently taken at face value Police Chief Bob Fecht's assertion that the house at 211 East Third Avenue was a "meth house" ... a place where meth was manufactured.

When Dave Featherly and I met with Chief Fecht in early 2005, he had a different story about the house at 211 East Third

Avenue. He said then that while the occupants who'd been arrested had USED meth in the house, no actual manufacturing of the drug was done there.

Now the Chief is telling the Tribune-Eagle that the house is so dangerous because of the manufacturing which took place there that no one should enter the building unless they're wearing special protective clothing. In 2005, however, he told no similar horror story when Dave and I were speaking with him.

In fact, I sent the Chief an email one day around that time telling him that I had observed people going in and out of the back door of the house when I stopped by to take a picture for one of our stories.

A neighbor later told me that when the police did come by, she informed them about the transients or squatters living in the basement of the house, but they did nothing to extricate them or to seal the house.

When Dave Featherly and I met with Chief Fecht in early 2005, we didn't know about his phony Master's Degree from a diploma mill in Mississippi for which the Chief was reimbursed \$2504 by the City of Cheyenne. We also didn't know about his plans to run for the State Senate in 2006.

We were there then to discuss the \$90,000 which had been transferred to the Police Department from the City's Community Development Office.

The Chief explained that the \$90,000 was needed to tear down the house on Third Avenue and two other shacks near the corner of Ames and West 20th Street.

He went on to say that a friend of his who was a contractor looked at the Third Avenue brick house and determined that it would cost \$30,000 to tear it down. The same figure ... \$30,000 ... was then used as a tear-down estimate for each of the two shacks on Ames. In reality, both of those probably could have been brought down in an afternoon by a couple of industrious boy scouts with a sledge hammer and a wrecking bar.

What's changed since early 2005? The most striking change appears to be Chief Fecht's election to the State Senate where he seems desperate to have a bill with his name on it pass.

To that end he says he'll be introducing a bill which will make it much easier and expeditious for cities to condemn suspected "meth houses". To make his case, he's using the house at 211 East Third as an example of one which must be condemned and demolished to make the surrounding neighborhood safe.

Please let me be clear about this ... I don't in any way condone the use of illegal drugs of any kind. I've never used drugs and I don't associate with people who do. As far as I know, I've never even been in the same room with any illegal drugs.

My beef is with public officials who trade upon the public's fear to feather their own nests. And when that feathering is accompanied by unnecessary exaggerating or outright lying, I'm particularly wary.

As a private citizen, I operate under the assumption ... naive, perhaps ... that it's both possible and preferable to be a Police Chief or State Senator who resists the temptation to exaggerate, obfuscate, or prevaricate to get what you want.

So what's the harm if our Chief of Police engages in some creative story-telling or fabricating to achieve a worthy purpose related to illegal drug use?

The problem comes when rank-and-file, on-the-street police officers start taking their cues about how to do their jobs by watching how the Chief does his job and how he conducts himself relative to public finances and other assets.

If they start believing that a little creative story-telling might help them with the conviction of a bad actor or two, then even those of us who like to think of

ourselves as law-abiding citizens have reason to worry about the ramifications.

My current concern is whether Bob Fecht might be the kind of Police Chief or State Senator who sometimes thinks that the ends justify the means. If that's the case, maybe it's time for him to move on.

ON A HAPPIER NOTE ... I'm sending a Thank You card this weekend to Earl Holding at Little America. I want to thank him for what he's done out there to create a positively great oasis of quality right here in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

In a former life, I had the opportunity to travel all over the country and to stay and dine in some mighty nice places. Each time I go out to Little America now to enjoy their terrific breakfast buffet, I'm reminded of some of those luxury hotels in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and other places.

The work on Mr. Holding's new convention center is apparently almost complete. The new areas he's created are spectacular ... even the restrooms!

While other venues around Cheyenne have lost some of their appeal over the years, Mr. Holding's commitment to quality is readily apparent. Instead of buying carpet and glass made by teenagers or children in places like Taiwan and Beijing, he insisted on furnishings made by real craftsmen. Carpets from England. Glass from Italy. It shows. Wow!!

Whenever I have special friends I want to treat, I'll be taking them to Little America. I hope I see you there. You'll be very glad you made the effort, especially as the holiday season approaches. Nobody around here decorates for Christmas like Little America.

Thank you, Mr. Holding ... and a special thanks also to the many Little America employees who knock themselves out every day to keep the place spotlessly clean and wonderfully special.

### *Jim Mathewson*

P.S. Events occurring these days in Denver suggest two related questions. (a) Will the Colorado Rockies ever lose again? and (b) Will the Denver Broncos ever win again?

The whole country is apparently getting caught up in the Rockies' improbable streak toward the World Series. Baseball fans will be talking about this for decades to come. And as for this year's Denver Broncos, does anyone really care?

Over the years, fans of THE CHEYENNE HERALD have repeatedly asked me and publisher/editor/copyboy/deliveryman Dave Featherly what they can do for us as a way of saying thanks for our tireless and mostly uncompensated efforts on behalf of the citizens of Cheyenne and Laramie County.

We've always turned down free drinks, free meals, free lawncare, free carwashes, and other gifts which might compromise our quasi-journalistic integrity.

In the spirit of the season, however, we've decided to relax our way-too-rigid standards so that we can properly honor our new heroes at the Colorado Rockies in person.

In other words, we'll gladly accept (and greatly appreciate) a couple tickets to one or more World Series games to be played during the next two weeks. Heck, we'd even take tickets in Cleveland or Boston if you've got some to spare.

While I personally prefer sitting about 20 rows up behind first base, we'll gladly accept ANY tickets you've got. As they say, beggars can't be choosers.

And they don't even have to be two adjoining seats since Dave and I spend entirely too much time together already.

No need to include a parking pass or extra money for snacks or other refreshments. We'll spring for those. Fair's fair.

Thanks in advance for heeding this shameless appeal to your sense of good citizenry and civic pride. We hope to be hearing from you VERY soon.



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