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One is coming. One is going.

The mayor helps a friend. The hospital will start over.

Scott Smith

by
Dave
FEATHERLY

Charlie Harms

Scott Smith is a nice guy. Basically kind, generous, caring and friendly, he would have made a good editor for the WT-E when that position last became available, but he was not chosen. He was passed over in favor of Reed Eckhardt, who is none of the things Scott is.

For over eight long years, Scott has had to tolerate sharing the same space as the discredited Eckhardt. But no more.

Scott Smith was recently hired by mayor Jack Spiker to a well-paid, newly created position at the City of Cheyenne. Scott has always been "nice" to Jack - even when Reed refused to endorse Jack for mayor in 2000, after demanding incumbent mayor Leo Pando resign. They, Jack and Scott, have had a long and friendly relationship.

But the position Jack created for Scott is unnecessary, unwarranted and untimely.

Of all the times for Scott to have problems with the WT-E and for Jack to find a job for him at the City, just before an election when that mayor is leaving office, this is a bad one. A very bad time.

Scott has been hired as "Projects Information Officer." When a public entity has to hire a PR person, they are not doing their job well enough to satisfy voters. The outcome would speak for itself if they were. They wouldn't have to "spin" it.

On Sunday, September 20, Scott Smith's name last appeared in the daily's listing of the WT-E editorial board. Without notice or fanfare, the following day, it was missing. Not much of a farewell for an employee who had endured so much to satisfy ownership and his boss, Eckhardt.

But that's the way they operate over there. Farewell parties are few and far between and no matter how long an employee has worked for the company or how underpaid they were, a cheap cake and coffee is all they can expect. In the past, a mention might be made of someone leaving or retiring. Not for an editor, though? At least not for this editor.

Had Jack Spiker, or another of the governing body members who own their own businesses wanted to put Scott Smith on

the payroll of their own business, good for them. A small reward for Scott's unwavering support of their actions - even the many illegal actions on the part of the mayor and city council.

You say Scott doesn't have any experience selling or repairing bicycles, selling or servicing insurance or insurance claims, servicing or installing air conditioners? Well, neither does he have any successful experience trying to sell the Cheyenne public on "projects" undertaken by this governing body. Recall his recent rec center advocacy. Also, because of what he's had to do to retain his job at the WT-E, he is too controversial and lacks credibility to get this sort of job done.

Why, with three and a half months to go in his term, did Jack decide the city needed a PR person? And who applied that didn't get the job? The hiring of Scott Smith was done quietly and without notice to Cheyenne's residents or media.

You'd think that hiring the opinion page editor from the second largest circulation daily newspaper in the state would have been considered a coup. Why the secrecy? If you want to assume that Scott's leaving the WT-E was acrimonious, as it well may have been, and no press release would have been printed over there, there are other media outlets in Cheyenne. Was Channel 5 informed of the hiring? Any of the radio stations with so-called "news directors"? Anybody?

Obviously, they didn't want me to know. But for years, the very top of this front page carried the words, "**Anything two people know is not a secret.**" Word was going to get to me. And it was going to get to me before the election.

This job can be eliminated by the new mayor. It was obviously created as a reward to a friend. That is not within the authority of a mayor. When we found out that Leo Pando named his campaign manager to be a municipal judge, Jack and I raised hell. The appearance of impropriety was bad. In this case, it is not a mere *appearance* - it is reality. I have asked the two mayoral candidates if they will "RIF" this position as Jack did to Joe Dougherty to get rid of him in 2000. Their responses (or lack of) is on page 7.

There was likely great delight for some as the result of the announcement that the local hospital's CEO Charlie Harms was "resigning."

I'm not sure I share that glee.

You see, I've been around the business world for quite awhile and it is commonly believed that doctors are notoriously bad businessmen (and women, of course). And it looks like the physicians, at least *some* of the physicians, at the hospital won in this staredown. I seriously doubt it was Charlie Harms who blinked. I also doubt it was the board of directors of the hospital who blinked. It is more likely that it was the two-member panel of the rural city council who blinked. Jeff and Diane.

Just a guess on my part but it has become obvious that you can get those two to back down, or step back, with pressure. How few people exerting that pressure matters less than who they are - the two member rural council formerly known as the county commission can be had.

So, a half dozen strategically placed telephone calls putting pressure on the rural council to put pressure on the hospital's board members (they appoint all the board members), could do the job.

How bad was it in the hospital? I honestly do not know. I do know that the calls I've received about the hospital over the past months and years (except for those about the Nob Hill disaster) had to do with patient care, not hospital administration.

In fact, just a few nights ago, I spent 45 minutes on the phone with a woman who was in great pain and in almost as much fear of her doctor at your hospital. Many patients do not think their voices are heard - that the doctors treat them without regard to their wishes, expectations or concurrence. I have been reluctant to write about some of the issues brought to my attention because I haven't determined that they were of the gravity to risk further avoidance of the local hospital.

When I met with Charlie Harms and two of his executives about why they chose the Nob Hill location, they showed me a marked map of potential locations for a new hospital and believed that visibility

from the interstate was a critical need for a new location and that was why they had chosen to evict a number of residents from their homes at the Nob Hill subdivision. I told them my opinion.

I told them that the location of the hospital had nothing to do with why local people and those traveling through Cheyenne from the north, west and east bypass this hospital to seek care in northern Colorado and Denver. They leave Cheyenne out of concern about patient care. Period. Not location. Not parking. And sure as hell not the name.

People as malleable as Jeff Ketcham and Diane Humphrey likely believe the threat when doctors say they will pick up and leave if they don't get their way. What Jeff and Diane wouldn't ask them is if they will pick up and leave even if they *do* get their way. The Casper hospital recently faced a similar problem and those few doctors came to Cheyenne for a time - increasing their patient list - and then took those patients with them back to a new surgical center in Casper.

Wasn't Charlie's predecessor also driven out? What will it take to satisfy the dissatisfied doctors? When they announced that three-fourths of the physicians voted "no confidence" of Harms and board president Bill Bagley, they couldn't remember what the vote was. If it were three of four, that doesn't say much. If it were 45 of 60, that would be a strong statement. By not disclosing the vote, one has to wonder just how many doctors participated in the power play.

The dissident group should publish the names of those doctors who wanted Charlie Harms dismissed. Maybe it's a lengthy list and the public would be impressed by their names. But if it's a handful of vocal and demanding doctors, it might say more about doctors than Harms.

It is sad that Charlie Harms' legacy will be the devastation of Nob Hill. Residents who were minding their own business and wanted to live out their lives among their many family members who had houses around them were needlessly and coldly uprooted. If I were Charlie Harms, that would trouble me much more than unidentified doctors not liking me.

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