

Commissioners Comments  
June 17, 2010  
By Dan Kirkbride

Periodically we go to the doctor for checkups. He looks in our ears, makes us say “ahh,” asks us to cough and taps our knee with his little rubber hammer.

Every few years, county government gets a checkup as well when nine of its 10 positions are up for election. This year the voters will once again serve as the “doctor” evaluating whether or not local government is performing as it should and making personnel adjustments accordingly.

As a commissioner, but also as a voter, I think the public should be looking for this checklist of qualities when it goes to the polls to evaluate the “health” of county government at the primaries August 17.

I don’t know that any of these characteristics are more important than the next. They can all be most important at various times.

**\*\*Superior public safety departments.** This involves the sheriff’s office, dispatch and the county attorney. On one level we’re concerned that systems run smoothly in the event of emergencies. Beyond that, are the bad guys off the streets such that we can feel good about leaving our doors unlocked most of the time? Public health services also factor here in their ability to help us plan and prepare for crisis situations.

**\*\*Tight budgeting.** Until our wind and mineral ships come in, Platte County is always going to have to budget conservatively. Determining how to use the resources is in fact, the first responsibility of any public official. While our budget of nearly \$11 million may sound like a lot of money, we’re still only the 19<sup>th</sup> wealthiest of Wyoming’s 23 counties, and we must live accordingly.

**\*\*Professional services.** County government is essentially a service industry and the public has reason to expect courteous and efficient service whether that takes the form of a timely assessment schedule or an adequate gravel road past the house. I have several out-of-county acquaintances who specifically come to Wheatland to get their license plates because they like our treasurer’s office so well. That’s an admirable standard for all the offices.

**\*\*Consistent land use policies.** As one of Wyoming’s 16 zoned or partially zoned counties, Platte County maintains a planning office to help shape ordered growth. Zoning inherently curbs some rights, but grants the privilege of notice, hearings and the possibility of protection so that citizens aren’t defenseless in the face of development. Citizens may be on opposite sides of the spectrum at different times but need to know that the rules will be applied in a fair and objective manner across the board.

**\*\*A Tip Top Fair and Library.** We currently budget the library and the fair for about \$416,000 annually, not an excessive sum, but more than one fourth of the total county property tax revenue. Are these two institutions successfully providing their own brand of culture and fun in a manner accessible to all the county’s communities? Do they offer opportunities that I could begin to better utilize?

**\*\*Good Communication.** Local government has some unique rules and vocabularies, but it doesn’t need to be mysterious. Do officials readily make the reasons for their decisions known? Is it easy to find

out how things work and why they are the way they are? This can be challenging in smaller towns without daily newspapers but the Internet has opened up wonderful possibilities in recent years.

**\*\*Access to Opportunities.** County impact multiplies by the volunteer work of 30 individuals on six boards appointed by the commissioners. An application form and fair selection process should guarantee that persons desiring to serve in these capacities have a legitimate chance to be selected.

**\*\*Objective Procedures.** Do the public officials abide by the statutes that guide their offices? Most notably, are the Wyoming Public Records and Open Meetings Acts followed assuring that public business is done in full view? Do standard parliamentary procedure rules dictate meeting structure? Respect must prevail even in the face of disagreement.

**\*\*An Eye to the Future.** Sufficient urgency surrounds most county business such that officials can be distracted from the task of ever planning ahead. The departments should spend time reviewing how the work is going and what it will look like five to twenty years in the future. What are the long-term construction needs? Officials do well to consider the impacts they can have long after their terms are completed.

Your checklist might look different than this, but it's important that each voter decides what he wants out of local government, then takes the time to vote in the August 17 Republican primary (only Republicans have filed) when, barring a write-in campaign, all the county positions will be filled. That day, for certain, the doctor will be in.