

## That was the week that was...

During the week between my being nominated for chairman of the Knox County Board by our Democratic Party caucus and the county board organizational meeting, I was congratulated by friends of both political parties and some unidentified. They assumed that because the Democrats held a majority on the county board, that I have completed ten years on the board, have years of background in government and administration, worked for the Knox County Democrats for over thirty years, that I would be elected chairman.

To their surprise and anger, I answered, "I don't think they are going to support me." But this is politics. A mix of thwarted personal ambition, petty jealousy and a large dose of male chauvinism and you have the real recipe for what happened December 4<sup>th</sup> when I was not elected chairman of the board. I thought the purpose of a caucus was to work out differences in private and emerge united. Apparently for some members that is true only if they are nominated.

Three Democrats elected on the Democratic ticket, with financial help and support from the county party organization and one actively recruited by the Democrats, voted for a Republican chairman. For only the second time in a century, the Democrats had control of the board and the possibility of another two years of leadership and control of appointments.

So, we lost our opportunity for leadership and deserved to lose it. Even though our party chairman, Norm Winick, blithely says this kind of party desertion has happened before, I can only remember one time, and that was when Leo Hennenfent, a Republican, voted for Lomac Payton, a Democrat, for chairman because he was angry he wasn't going to be appointed chairman of the nursing home committee. The Republicans were furious and I doubt they ever forgave him.

Two of the Democrat party-switchers were mad they weren't nominated by the Democratic caucus to be chairman and vice chairman again. Even though they were both supported two years ago by the Democrats at the board organizational meeting. Dana Shallenberger (God rest her soul), hadn't participated in the caucus and it took three votes of the board and some serious arm-twisting from me for her to finally vote for Jan Occhi for chair. Occhi received my support then and for most of the last two years. She probably worked harder than any county board chairman and presided over the board experiment to meet as committee of the whole instead of the traditional committee system. The board did not renew the contract of the county administrator, so for the second year of her term, she was left in charge of about

everything, with the strong assistance of County Clerk Scott Erickson.

I enjoyed serving on the board most of these last two years. The board was issue-oriented and not partisan and I received far more information than during previous terms. Jan was fair during board meetings and members received equal treatment and recognition. But, there were some serious administrative problems developing and the general consensus among board members was that the leadership should change.

Greg, "Chops" Bacon, was the third member to cross party lines and doesn't seem to understand that if he hadn't been recruited and supported by the Democrats he wouldn't even be on the board. There is a time and place for loyalty to the party. I also figured that being a hard-working cable guy and member of ABATE, Chops would be more independent on the board. But he likes being one of the boys and thinks it's cool to be part of "Wayne's World."

Some claimed I didn't try to mend fences after the caucus. They are right. If my life or that of a loved one were at stake, I might kiss someone's rear-end, but not for the county board chairmanship. I felt nothing but hostility from Dale Parsons, Jan and Chops and had nothing to offer them. They participated in the caucus - it was their responsibility to honor the caucus decision.

Before Thanksgiving I started an e-mail dialogue with Allen Pickrel, now chairman of the board, about the upcoming election for chairman. I thought we had a good relationship, and silly me, I trusted him to keep our conversations confidential. In fact, I told him that. A week ago I learned that one of my private e-mails to him had been reprinted, copied out of context, and mailed to my Democrat supporters for chairman. Nice.

But there was also triumph last week. I completed my last class for a Master's Degree in Political Science at Western Illinois University. I finished eight graduate courses in 18 months and will finish my thesis next semester. Actually, I am qualified to be a county administrator, and with my administrative experience in the work place and volunteer organizations, if I had been elected chairman of the county board, the county would have had a hell of a deal for a \$35 per diem.

My concern now is that all board members are given an equal opportunity to represent their constituents in committee work and assignments. That's just good government, which should be our top priority.

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Dec. 28, 2006