

from our viewpoint...

Tough task ahead to find manager

The two new city commissioners were somewhat joking last Monday when they complained it was unfair for City Manager Ron Pickman to announce his retirement the same night they were sworn in.

From the first meeting, though, it looks like Annette Fairbanks and Joshua Dechant will be excellent additions to the commission. They got their feet wet rather quickly.

Replacing Pickman will not be an easy task. He has worked hard to find ways to move the city forward, and over the past 10 years he has helped shepherd some great projects from design to completion.

Over the past couple of years, though, he has been at odds with some of the commission members, and this showed during the annual contract and salary reviews.

After a conflict last year, Pickman indicated he was hoping for a change in the commission. He did not get it, and he said he did not feel it was worth fighting the battle any longer.

The salary review last year lasted until December, and created some sharp feelings between Commissioner Dean Blume and Mayor Rick Billinger. Pickman was told bluntly that when his contract came up for renewal next year, it could be blocked.

Billinger was gracious with his words of praise for Pickman's performance as the city manager last Monday. That was markedly different from his attitude before. Now the mayor and the other commissioners will have to go through a search in hopes of finding a good replacement.

Some will be glad to see Pickman go, because they felt he was in the way of progress. However, mostly that has been because someone wanted to bend the rules and Pickman was making sure the city did not get harmed.

Whoever the commission selects to be the next city manager will face a list of issues left unattended by recent commissions. It will be up to this commission to set the policies to lead the city and work with the manager to accomplish the most urgent tasks.

The city needs to replace its sewer plant, improve the streets, replace more water lines, find new sources of water and continue to raise water and sewer rates so those funds can build a reserve to pay for the new costs.

Those are the big things, but there are many more involving the utility department and the need to push ahead the wind farm project to help supplement the city's power supply at a lower cost.

Finding the right person to be city manager will be quite a process, and the city commissioners are likely to get dozens of resumes from all over the country. Getting the right fit for Goodland is the goal, and that person hopefully will develop the same appreciation for this great city that Pickman had.

The most relaxed person in the city office these days is Ron Pickman, and he deserves to be honored for his dedicated effort. He has done his best, and that was not bad at all.

There may be storm clouds over the commissioners as they decide on the qualifications and duties of the next manager. We hope they will look for the best qualified and best suited person to fill those big shoes Pickman leaves behind.

— Tom Betz

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Making a list better than empty packages

My husband has an interesting way of reminding himself, and me, of things we need to buy. He leaves the empty packages on the kitchen counter.

Right now, his grocery list contains shredded cheese, V8 and lemon juice. Last week, it was a dead 9-volt battery and empty vinegar bottle.

This is an interesting form of shorthand, I guess. Maybe others do it, too. It just seems strange that a man who is a writer by profession would make piles instead of lists.

I'm a list maker. I make grocery lists, to-do lists, Christmas-card lists and story lists.

I have a list of phone numbers on the refrigerator and a dry-erase board to list things I need to do this week or things that need to go with us on a trip.

My daughters are also list makers. The oldest one lives by her DayTimer. She wouldn't think of going on vacation without it.

I think she probably took it to Italy on her honeymoon. After all, she might have missed the Sistine Chapel if she didn't have it on her list.

Youngest daughter also lists everything.



cynthia haynes

• open season

Before she moved to South Carolina, she listed everything in her house.

Now that doesn't sound so bad until you sit in even a small room and list everything in it.

Try it. Go into the bathroom with a pad and pen, sit down and start listing what you have there — clock, towels, wash clothes, shampoo, cream rinse, toilet paper, wastepaper basket, tissue box, drapes, blinds, and we haven't even gotten to the medicine cabinet yet.

Son, on the other hand, doesn't list anything. When he goes somewhere, he packs 10 minutes before walking out the door. He shops without a grocery list and doesn't even bother with a television guide for watching the tube.

Me, I like to have my packing done a week before I leave, even if it's just for the weekend.

The high cost of cheap labor

By Richard D. Lamm

It is easy to see why illegal immigrants are attractive to employers.

These are generally good, hard-working people who will quietly accept minimum wage (or less), who don't generally get health or other benefits, and if they complain, they can be fired.

For some employers it is an abused form of labor. Even minimum wage is attractive to workers from countries whose standard of living is a fraction of ours.

But it is not "cheap labor." It may be "cheap" to those who pay the wages, but for the rest of us it is clearly "subsidized" labor, as we taxpayers pick up the costs of education, health, and other municipal costs imposed by this work force. That has become a substantial and growing cost as the nature of illegal immigration patterns has changed.

For decades, illegal immigrants were single men who would come up from Mexico or Central America alone, pick crops or perform other low-paid physical labor, and then go home. They were indeed "cheap labor."

But starting in the 1960s, these workers either brought their families or smuggled them into the country later. They become a permanent or semipermanent population living in the shadows but imposing immense municipal costs.

Illegal immigration today isn't cheap labor, except to the employer. To the rest of us, it is subsidized labor, where a few get the benefit and the rest of us pay. These costs ought to be obvious to all, but the myth of cheap labor and "jobs Americans won't do" persists.

It is hard to get an exact profile of people who live in the underground economy, but the average family of illegal immigrants has two to four school-age kids. It costs U.S. taxpayers more than \$7,000 a child just to educate them in our public schools. No minimum wage workers, or even low wage workers, pay any-



from other pens

• commentary

where near enough in taxes to pay for even one child in school. Even if their parents were paying all federal and state taxes, Colorado's estimated 30,000 school-age children of workers illegally in the U.S. impose gargantuan costs on other taxpayers.

The dilemma is compounded by the fact that about half of these illegal workers are paid in cash, off the books. Go to any construction site almost anywhere in America, and you will find workers paid cash wages. Virtually every city in America has an area where illegals gather and people come by to get cheap cash-wage labor.

The health care cost of this cheap workforce is also significant and subsidized by U.S. taxpayers. The total cost of this subsidized labor is impossible to ascertain and difficult to even estimate, but it is immense and growing as our population of these workers grows. A few benefit, many pay.

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