

Our City

Last week was one of those where I thought if I stopped I might get run over; but as I pressed forward I learned a lot about our community and the vision some of you have for making us even better. Often I tout that American Falls is the best place to live, and I believe that because of you. The folks who live and invest in this community are among the very best people I know; from the grade school teachers who inspire my granddaughters; to our local farmers who make life here possible for all of us; to the owners of our local businesses who do their best to provide opportunities to those who choose to live and work in a small rural community. You all make American Falls the best place to live. As I went from one commitment to the next the profound sense of pride I have for this community grew exponentially.

Monday night found me at a meeting sponsored by the School District and included the District's administrative staff, School Board, our elected County officials, our City Council, Senator Jim Guthrie and Representative Ken Andrus. Representative Kelley Packer was sick and unable to attend. We were there to discuss pending legislation that would likely impact our schools, County, and City services. The takeaways from the meeting included a discussion on education funding, our severe teacher shortage, our need for more Career and Technical Education opportunities in our high school and the reoccurrence of proposed Business Personal Property legislation. It would be easy to say all we had to do to address each item was throw money at it, but it is vastly more complicated than that, for in order to increase funding for anything, the perceived value of each must be recognized by the majority of the electorate. To those dedicated to changing values and long term perceptions, I applaud you. To those who fight for the status quo or less I admire your determination but fail to understand the long term societal logic or benefit. Yes, I know that is my problem. But consider this, the motto of these United States is: E Pluribus Unum. E Pluribus Unum Latin for "out of many, one." E Pluribus Unum refers to the fact that the United States was formed as a cohesive single nation. It concerns me that as a society we sometimes forget the true value and meaning of those historic words.

I attended the Eastern Idaho legislative forum with nine of my FFA students last Tuesday and it carried a similar theme to that of the meeting the night before. While educational funding wasn't a topic per se, Career and Technical Education (CTE) was as the regional worker shortage was discussed along with the need for more students in our high school and technical college programs. Water rights and our water shortage, urban renewal, health care for those uninsured, our highways, roads and streets were also discussed. Again topics that affect us all but revolve around funding and priorities. Can a balance be found? I will do what I can.

Tuesday night found myself, two of my FFA members and the City's Public Works Coordinator Jeremy Peirsol back at a School Board meeting. Odalis Gonzalez and Sofia Villalobos presented their chosen topic for their 2016 FFA Agricultural Issues team to the Board and explained their research and findings to date related to immigration and agriculture in Idaho. In the Reports portion of the meeting, the need for more Career and Technical Education courses was again discussed and related back to the discussion Monday evening with our legislators. Jeremy joined the conversation as we discussed how to collaboratively fund the construction of the new tennis courts. Cost sharing will continue as we collectively pay for the engineering of the courts. More than \$20,000 will be made available through grants from the United States Tennis Association this spring so that construction may begin in 2017, yes 2017. I know it is a ways a way but at this point it has a commitment from several private donors, the School District and City behind it. Next week Jeremy and I will meeting with the Power County

Commissioners to see if they will join in the cost sharing so that we can finally make this project a reality; E Pluribus Unum, in this case two tennis courts.

Wednesday morning I was on a bus with 20 students interested in a career in agriculture; specifically agricultural mechanics and welding. As we visited Double M, AMS and Petersen Manufacturing a few things crystalized for me and some lights of opportunity turned on for many of the students. The technical skilled worker shortage is very real. Young people in search of employment who possess the soft skills and technical skills required by our agribusinesses, processors and manufactures are as rare as diamonds and I would reiterate the words of a local employer, "they are even more valuable." Dollar signs usually turn the lights of opportunity on for kids and as my students listened to the three employers speak about needed skills, dollars, and opportunities, the lights came on. A problem unto itself gets created as I work with business and industry partners to help fill their employee shortage, but no extra time is available within our current agricultural program because I currently teach every period of the day and often more than one class per period. "A man has to know his limitations." I will keep making my best better but I would suspect I am close to reaching mine.

At the City Council meeting that night we began the process of renewing our 30 year franchise agreement with the Intermountain Gas Company which should be complete by mid-February. We also committed to begin an employee wellness program through increased fitness and activity levels. The Council adopted a new salary schedule which for a City of our size is competitive and designed to promote employee improvement through continuing education, training and incentives to provide exemplary service. We will also be looking into providing a means for your use of debit/credit cards as a means of payment for City services. A plowing schedule has been set up for the next two weeks among all qualified City employees to keep our streets safe and passable during the coming holidays, please help us help you as more snow comes our way.

The Ag Advisory Curriculum Committee met Thursday afternoon and worked to revise the current course offerings to better meet the Career and Technical Educational needs of our region's and community's employers. And, while the welding curriculum was modified to better meet the requirements of the welding program at ISU and the needs of local manufacturers, no progress was made in expanding the program to meet the growing labor demands. I remain hopeful that a resolution to the issue may be possible sooner rather than later.

As the committee of five adults and three grandkids toured our streets Friday night, it became obvious early on that it would be too difficult to pick the top three homes that light the night with Christmas charm and good cheer. So here are our top ten in no particular order: 509 Bannock, 213 Tyler, 216 Adams, 155 Johnson, 335 Grant, 330 Jackson, 375 Autumn Way, 835 Fillmore, 460 Taylor and 2218 Falls. There are some perennial favorites in the group; however, all are very good. Honorable mentions would have to include: 353 Autumn Way, 634 Falls, 705 Falls, 535 Calder, 713 Tyhee, 650 Calder, 739 Bennett, 667 Bennett, 647 Bennett, 680 Teton, 704 Hutchinson, 205 Polk, 575 Hillcrest, 135 Howard, 315 McKinley, 126 Tyler, 425 Hayes, 254 Van Buren, 260 Monroe, 355 Washington, and 560 Snowflake. As we marveled at the efforts of so many, we continually commented on the parts and pieces that make American Falls the best place to live. As I listened to the thoughtful comments of my daughters and grandkids, pride continued to swell within me. Your efforts warrant such reactions on my part, thank you.

Until next week...Merry Christmas...