

Our City

I hate it when my crystal ball quits working. Short of a functioning crystal ball, I usually have pretty good gut instincts, but this morning both are failing me. I can't see past this coming Tuesday and the pending results of our collective vote. It would be a lot easier to just wait and write about this next week. However, if I did that all I would be able to tell was that the streets are being swept, potholes are being patched, demolition will begin on the old tennis courts, we are still waiting on parts and prices to fix a few issues at the Waste Water Treatment Plant, there are several private building projects hustling to get done before winter, and the golf course is closed for the season. That would be the easy thing to do; but it would negate my opportunity to tell you beforehand how proud I am of our community and its future leaders.

Last Tuesday night I received a call from Vicki Meadows, the chair of the Water Bond Committee, asking for help. Like me the members of the Committee are social media inept and they needed help getting the word out on the importance of Tuesday's vote on the once in a lifetime Water Bond. Vicki's question was, "do you have any kids that can help with this?" Twenty minutes later American Falls FFA Chapter Secretary Shanice Allen, Reporter Odalis Gonzalez and I were sitting at the Water Bond Committee meeting strategizing on how to best proceed, with less than a week before the vote. The Committee was worried about two demographics voting favorably for the bond: citizens within the city, and adults ages 18 to 35, the millennials. Within minutes the Facebook page was setup and information was posted to it. Then the word went out, I think? That was the easy part.

The hard part was informing all of American Falls. Later today the FFA Chapter was to complete our annual community service project of picking up trash along the Pipeline section of the Snake River and McKinley Street from the Frontage Road to the Idaho Power Substation near Teton Avenue after having weeded and cleaned all the planting on Idaho Street last weekend. That changed with the Water Committee's request for help. Wednesday morning as I worked through a State Curriculum meeting in Boise, Shanice and Odalis visited each of Ms. Emily Fisher's and my classes signing up volunteers to go door-to-door throughout American Falls disseminating information on the Water Bond and encouraging citizens to vote. After explaining how critical the bond is to the 11 classes, Odalis and Shanice had 66 FFA members signed up to help in today's effort. More to follow...

As I drove back from Boise Wednesday afternoon on my way to Pocatello for a meeting with most of the cities in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA) region, I was in constant contact with Odalis, Shanice and our FFA Chapter President Maddie Wagoner to setup and facilitate today's get-out-the-vote effort as I am not in American Falls today. So, the success of today's efforts lie on the shoulders of tomorrow's leaders; these three amazing young ladies. Bill Meadows will be meeting with the FFA volunteers to further explain the importance of the Water Bond vote and why it is so critical to the future of American Falls and Power County before they go blanket the town with information. I would like to thank the City's Building Administrator, Jeff Nelson, for making a detailed map of American Falls available to the students for this effort.

As I sat through most of the ESPA meeting, I had to leave early for the City Council meeting at 7:00, I was again looking forward to this Tuesday's vote; still not knowing and agonizing over

its outcome. As members of the Idaho Ground Water Appropriators and the Aberdeen/American Falls Ground Water District we, as a city, are protected for the most part from pumping curtailment through 2025. However, that too could change should we begin to grow and require more water to meet demands. The coalition of ESPA cities is seeking a means that will allow municipalities to continue to meet their current needs and provide the capacity for future growth. Municipal growth; like agriculture and processing, is dependent on water. If held to the same rules that govern irrigators and processors, cities will be required to reduce pumping by 12 to 15 percent during the months of April through October in the next few years.

The passing of the Water Bond will solve a lot of future problems for American Falls and Power County in this regard. Yet, water is a finite resource and as such eventually the City will need to find a long term solution to the issue of water and growth especially if more agricultural processing businesses want to locate here. Currently the Director of Water Resources, Gary Spackman, gives cities like ours no credit for the water returned to the system as nonconsumptive use. In our case the Snake River and over 95% of the water we pump each day is returned during non-irrigation months. Under the initial outline for the GWMA, that governing policy will continue. Under the GWMA, cities like ours that return much of the water we pump back into the State's water system will be treated no differently than agricultural producers and processors who effectively use much of what they pump for irrigation or processing. Don't get me wrong. In the months of April through October city residents use a lot of water just like our local farmers and potato processors, yet we continue to return over 12% of what we pump to the Snake River but will continue to receive no credit for it within the GWMA. That policy is not equitable or just, and in the opinion of mayors across eastern Idaho, it must be changed. Our alliance with the coalition of ESPA cities seems to be the best alternative at this point, especially if the Water Bond doesn't pass.

Thirty-eight FFA members actually turned out to disseminate the Water Bond information throughout town yesterday afternoon. And according to Maddie and Shanice they got the job done and done well. On behalf of the City of American Falls, residents of Power County and the Water Bond Committee I thank them and the other American Falls FFA members who actually followed through and did what they said they would do on our behalf. Regardless of the various votes this Tuesday, young adults like Maddie, Odalis and Shanice give me hope for the future and that American Falls will remain the best place to live.

Until next week...