



Editorial: A Simple Verbal Exchange That Spoke Volumes

By Robert Thomasson

On Monday, November 18, a small number of concerned residents sat in on a meeting that was held in Commissioner Kurt Schlegel's office between the Elbert County BOCC and loan officers from Wells Fargo. As chairs were being gathered for the small audience that came to watch the BOCC explain why Wells Fargo should not be concerned about the financial morass in Elbert County, a verbal exchange occurred between Robert Rowland and me. To the uninformed, it may not have seemed like anything particularly important, but to me it represented a galvanizing moment that reminded me why Elbert County citizens need to participate in matters of local government.

Before the meeting began, Commissioner Rowland turned in his chair and addressed me, most likely in response to an interview that I gave over the weekend to the Denver Post. His words, which are nearly exact, "So here's the guy who thinks he was my campaign manager!" Of course, this was loud enough to be heard by all in the room, and if you read the article, an "over the top" exaggeration of the actual quote in the Post's article. I responded to Mr. Rowland that I had never claimed to be his campaign manager. I did remind him that we met many times and I gave him advice. He recoiled and said, "Any advice I got from you was certainly unsolicited!" To which I calmly responded that in fact, he was wrong. I pointed out that he had solicited my opinion, even calling me during his campaign. He stood, walked toward the door, and over his shoulder remarked, "I must have been on drugs!" Of course there was the temptation to shoot back the obvious question to see if he was actually admitting that he was on drugs during his campaign, but I allowed discretion to be the better part of valor and dropped the matter there. The meeting began and the exchange was not mentioned again.

Down Memory Lane...

Robert Rowland first called me on the advice of former Elbert County Commissioner, John Dunn, back before I knew anything about the head of the Elbert County Tea Party. Rowland was running for Del Schwab's seat on the BOCC. We spoke for more than an hour and he made it clear that John Dunn and he knew if the two sitting commissioners could be beaten, it was going to take the effort of fiscally responsible Republicans, Independents and Democrats working in concert with one another. His thought was that if Larry Ross and he could make it past John Shipper and Del Schwab in the primaries based on both Republicans and Democrats running hard against the incumbents, that no matter who won in November, we would have better leadership. He was soliciting the help of a former Republican Commissioner and a former Democratic Commissioner candidate.

Spinning His Web

Mr. Rowland then heavily aligned himself with the Elbert County Oil and Gas Interest Group (ECOGIG) headed by Jill and Jim Duvall. ECOGIG is a nonpartisan group interested in helping to steer Elbert County toward responsible oil and gas development. Robert Rowland attended many of those regularly scheduled meetings and painted himself as an advocate for strong regulations to protect ground water from the hazards of fracking in the impending oil boom. Jill Duvall was running for Commissioner, and as you might imagine, all of our meetings were focused on a healthy and prosperous future that included responsible oil and gas production. We all exchanged election advice and strategy. This behavior could not be interpreted as anything but a solicitation of support.

And then came the decision by some members of the Democratic Party, and I was one of them, to switch party affiliation to Republican so that we might have a vote in the Republican primary. In retrospect it was a mistake, and I am willing to own the consequences of my decision. There were many reasons for my switching, but two stood out above the rest. First, I was certain that just as it had happened four years earlier, the Republican primary would be extremely close, so every vote was needed. Secondly, Larry Ross and Robert Rowland promised that they would be good commissioners and they would keep their campaign promises.

Twass All Promise and Jive

Larry Ross has done everything he could to keep his promises. As soon as the Republican Primaries were over, Robert Rowland ceased all contact with ECOGIG, ceased taking advice from John Dunn, and other than normal pleasantries, abruptly stopped talking to me. He fooled a great number of people into believing he was someone we could all trust. I have no problem admitting that I was duped by Commissioner Rowland. And in my opinion, Mr. Rowland's longest suit is deception.

Robert Rowland's flippant comment to me in public was disrespectful, but after a year in office, not unexpected. He obviously is under a great deal of pressure by those who never anticipated he would reverse himself on nearly every campaign promise he made. Pressure is also coming his way because he avoids transparency, disregards financial accountability, and is even the champion of raising local taxes. He has joined forces with Kurt Schlegel and together they are running an obvious campaign to rid Elbert County of anyone who stands in disagreement with their agenda. People of questionable qualifications are being placed in positions of authority. With no bidding for contracts considered whatsoever, we have paid consultants tens of thousands of dollars to paint a false picture of competency as we tiptoe to the brink of insolvency.

So after some thought about some unwarranted and undeserved remarks from a person for whom I have lost all respect, I have a response to Mr. Rowland's remark that he would have had to have been on drugs to take any advice from me: It is not you who must have been on drugs, Mr. Rowland. Anyone who was foolish enough to be tricked into voting for you based on what you espoused in your campaign for the position of Elbert County Commissioner must now feel that *they* were on drugs.