

On Selecting the Interim Kootenai County Clerk

Before even his first day as County Clerk, Cliff Hayes was preparing to turn over the duties and responsibilities of his office to whomever the voters might elect at the end of his term.

Cliff was a consummate public administrator. He fully and very responsibly understood that there was always a chance that what did happen, could happen -- that his term of office could be cut short by death or disability. What set Cliff apart and made him an exceptional public administrator is he prepared for that possibility. To the best of his ability, he prepared Pat Raffee and others in his office to continue the effective operations of the Kootenai County Clerk's Office in his unexpected absence. It is called continuity of operations. Its objective, Cliff's objective, is and was to prepare his staff to be ready to assume the duties of his office so the county government could carry on without him. He recognized that even in his absence, the job must still be done.

That is exactly the situation the County Commissioners are faced with. Cliff Hayes had prudently selected and prepared Pat Raffee to carry on the duties of that office now that he is suddenly gone. First and foremost in the County Commissioners' minds should **not** be, "Who will succeed Cliff as County Clerk?" Rather, it **must** be, "Who is best prepared right now to step in today and continue to carry out the statutory duties required of the interim Kootenai County Clerk?"

For the County Commissioners to not recognize the importance and urgency of the situation is unthinkable. They are not selecting a candidate to replace Cliff at the next election; they are selecting the person best able right now, today, to assume the duties and responsibilities of the office and carry them out as effectively as possible as required by law until a new County Clerk is elected. The job must still be done. That is what the voters expect of the Commissioners. That is, I believe, what Cliff would have expected of them.

It is absurd that the County Commissioners may be statutorily required to select an interim County Clerk from a list of nominees who may not be the best qualified and prepared to assume the duties today. To treat the untimely passing of County Clerk Cliff Hayes as routinely as the nomination, campaign, and election of his replacement in November 2014 would be an unspeakable insult to the continuity of operation planning and execution that Cliff did.

At the same time, the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee (KCRCC) members must realize that they have a collective duty as elected officials to choose nominees who are **all** qualified by knowledge, skills, abilities, and temperament rather than pick nominees based solely on political fealty or ideology. Their responsibility as elected officials is to ensure that the people they nominate are **all** qualified to immediately assume the duties required of the interim County Clerk.

Bluntly, the KCRCC can play their anachronistic political power games in May and November 2014, but right now, they need to set aside their political and ideological differences and nominate three qualified people from whom the County Commissioners must choose one to be the interim County Clerk. The job must still be done.

If the KCRCC nominates unqualified, unprepared people and if the County Commissioners are forced to pick an interim County Clerk from a list of unqualified nominees, then the KCRCC will deserve the public's scorn and ridicule for the consequences resulting from putting petty partisan political interests above the best interests of all Kootenai County residents. Because the job must still be done.