

THE TRUTH ABOUT RAY HUNKINS!

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NOTE: This article was prepared during Wyoming's 2006 elections to help the Republican Gubernatorial candidate, Ray Hunkins. It was submitted to both large daily newspapers and 20 smaller, weakly newspapers across the State. All, run by Democrats and/or liberals, refused it. But the Wyoming Family Coalition printed it on its website. Further, Republican Party County chairmen in Natrona and Niaraoba Counties sent it out to every registered Republican in those two counties. Mr. Hunkins vote totals were much more competitive in those counties than in the others. Was that the result of voters seeing this article? Most Wyoming political observers think so. I do, too.

PINE BLUFFS — One does not have to be a politician to govern. But to govern *effectively*, a person must be intelligent, competent, and capable. Oh. And there's one more essential quality: leadership ability. Ray Hunkins has these traits — and more.

Raymond B. Hunkins, 67, the Republican candidate in 2006, believes he's intelligent enough, competent enough, capable enough, and has the ability to lead Wyoming as its next governor. People from all walks of life observing him criss-crossing the state holding press conferences and making public appearances, agree.

This isn't his first run for election. In 2002, Hunkins entered a crowded Republican primary that included Eli Bebout, Bill Sniffen, Steve Watt, and John Self — testimony that Wyoming's Republican Party annually produces decent men with the kind of energy, competitiveness, and daring that's responsible for much of what's right in the world.

Ray finished second to Bebout, a Riverton businessman and former Speaker of the House of Representatives. At the Laramie County Republican Party Convention in

April 2006, Chairman Greg Thomas commented on the 2002 election: "A Democrat cannot win election in this state unless many Republicans vote for him." That's what happened. Upset by a bruising primary, some of Ray's supporters stayed home in November; others voted Democrat. Enter Dave Freudenthal to the State House.

Seeing it coming, Hunkins tried to head it off. "I *did* back Eli [in the general election]," Ray said during our two-hour interview at the Plains Hotel on September 21st, on the heels of a press conference at which he unveiled portions of his economic plan for Wyoming. "I attended a unification breakfast, pledged my support publicly, and bought ads asking my supporters to back him." With a rueful grin, he added, "Guess I didn't convince lots of folks."

Having been rejected once, why run again? ". . . because I've always had a high interest in public policy and its intersection with leadership," Ray said. "I think I've got a lot to offer, and I'm ready to do something else after 39 years as a practicing attorney."

Has he been able to mend Party fences sufficiently? "I think so. [Former] Senator Allen Simpson backed Eli last time. I went to Simpson and asked him to be honorary co-chairman of my campaign this time around [the other co-chairman is former Senator Cliff Hansen]. He agreed and has been very helpful, contributing financially and with strategy advice."

A past chairman of Platte County's Republican Party, Ray benefited from 2006's lack of primary opponents. That there were few is not surprising. With help from a Republican Legislature aware of what it wanted to accomplish, affable, backslapping, career politician Dave Freudenthal has been a relatively good governor. "No one had

the guts to take him on," says Ray.

What else is different now? "I learned a lot in 2002 and from this recent primary. We re-organized and brought in another experienced person, Bonnie Foster, as Director of Operations. She'd been campaign manager for Mary Ann Collins [who lost her primary bid to Max Maxfield for the office of Secretary of State]."

Asked about the word on the street that he's merely a "token candidate" — someone everybody believes will lose in November — Ray allowed me to glimpse the assertiveness, quiet self-confidence, and healthy ego of this man who would be Wyoming's 32nd governor. "Untrue," he said in his straight forward manner. "I did *not* sign up to spend precious time and money to lose. I signed up to *win*."

Has he defined himself sufficiently for the voters this time around? "That's really for others to say," he responded thoughtfully. "But I'm a traditional conservative in all ways; fiscal, social, and philosophical. If there's a problem, it's *not* with the message."

This bodes well for conservative Wyoming. True, "Gov Dave," as his campaign signs trumpet, is somewhat conservative. But he is a Democrat conservative. When solving problems, he applies Democrat philosophical solutions. That's the rub. Politically, if we've learned anything in the past forty years, it's that Republican philosophical solutions — conservative ones — work best.

Born in Culver City, CA on March 19, 1939, Ray attended Billings Senior High in Billings, Montana. An athlete, he played end on the football team, both offense and defense, and did the team's punting. He also ran track, earning trophies in the broad jump, 220 and 880 relay events.

For Ray, college began in Boulder at the University of Colorado. That lasted for one semester, until he heard from the freshman football coach at the University of Montana. He transferred in time for spring practice, but eventually the football thing didn't work out. He stayed on at Montana, majoring in political science, with a minor in economics. However, he did not earn a degree there. President in his senior year of the Greek letter fraternity, Phi Delta Theta, he impressed the National office and was offered a full-time job as that fraternity's National Field Secretary. Jobs were scarce. "I had an offer and I took it," he says.

Bold, aggressive, independent, confident, and action-oriented, he filled that position until law school beckoned in 1964. But since his parents, Charles and Louise Breedlove Hunkins, were not wealthy, and Ray was reluctant to graduate burdened with student loans, he worked several jobs to pay the freight. Nothing good comes easy.

"I'd entered law school under a 3 and 3 Program," Ray recounts. "After some more work, I earned my B.S. Degree." University of Wyoming records confirm that Ray was awarded his Bachelor of Science Degree in January 1967, and his Juris Doctorate in 1968.

Ray, married since 1968 to the former Debby McBride of Buffalo, is the father of three grown children: Amanda, 37, Blake, 32, and Ashley, 26. Watching him unhesitatingly reel off this information, one gets the impression that his family is important, and at the core of his success. On the date of our interview, a day brimming with Hunkins campaign events, his wife and one of his daughters accompanied him to Cheyenne from their home in Wheatland.

It's in that city that Ray is a senior partner in the law firm of Jones, Jones, Vines & Hunkins, which concentrates on commercial disputes, real estate law, probate and trusts, and general civil trial and appellate practice in state and federal courts.

"When I graduated from law school, I had several opportunities," he told me. "But I wanted to go back to my roots — agriculture." He chose Wheatland and joined a law firm there. A member of numerous professional organizations, including the Wyoming Bar Association and the American Board of Trial Advocates, he has held leadership positions in many.

Martindale-Hubbell, the Directory which rates lawyers nationally, explains its Legal Ability Ratings this way: "C" — good to high, "B" — high to very high, and "A" — very high to preeminent in his field. They think he's an excellent lawyer, awarding him their "A" rating early in his career.

Apparently, in the beginning years of practice, this creative attorney developed expertise in defending murder cases: specifically, self-defense cases.

When asked about his most interesting case, Ray told me he once represented a father and son accused of first degree murder of the father's brother and nephew. A preliminary hearing, at which the state is required to convince a judge there's enough evidence to try the defendant, was scheduled. Most defense counsel attend the preliminary hearing, but will not introduce evidence of their own, leaving that for trial. However, realizing that the prosecution's case against the son was weak, Ray boldly introduced evidence to contest the State's evidence, resulting in a dismissal of the charges against the young man, and leaving only the father's case to go forward.

But media publicity surrounding the case was intense. Because of so much pre-trial publicity, Ray moved for a change of venue. His request was granted. A jury trial was held in another county. After three stressful weeks, they returned a verdict: "Not Guilty."

"I defended the case on the basis of fear and intimidation over a long period of time by the victims, perpetrated against the accused, which led the accused to believe his son's life was in mortal danger," Ray explained. "During an altercation on a lonely and remote road on a cold December day, the accused shot both his brother and his nephew when he perceived they had "ambushed" his son. After the trial, the 74-year old father lived out his life on the family ranch, in peace."

Nothing's more satisfying for a trial lawyer than winning a case like that. It's an awesome responsibility to appear in a courtroom beside a client, knowing that nothing stands between him and a prison cell except *your* ability to defend him adequately.

Asked if he'd served in the military, Ray chuckled. "At sixteen and a half, I decided I wanted to enlist in the Marines on my seventeenth birthday. But I needed a parents' signature. My mother signed for me."

He did his basic training at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego. Later, other duty assignments included Camp Pendleton, and the Naval Ammunition Supply Depot in Hawthorne, Nevada. He served four years in the active reserve and another two in the inactive reserve. "I was a peacetime marine. My service was undistinguished," he laughs. "But I am a proud Marine and proud of my service."

In a gesture of support and Marine solidarity, Senator Craig Thomas (R-WY),

says this: "As a former Marine, Ray Hunkins lives our creed of 'Semper Fidelis' — always faithful. I know Ray will faithfully provide the leadership Wyoming folks deserve as he secures the way of life we value."

Although Wyoming doesn't have an income tax, we *do* pay lots of taxes: sales and gasoline taxes, surcharges on our phone, electric, and gas bills, so-called 'sin' taxes (on things like cigarettes and liquor), social security and Medicare taxes, and of course property taxes. To ease the burden somewhat, Ray announced a plan to lower property taxes: cutting the assessment rate from 9.5 to 8.25 percent, the lowest rate allowed by Wyoming's constitution. "This simple step," he said, "will save Wyoming's taxpayers about \$43 million each year. That's money they can put away in college funds, invest or [save] for a rainy day." He has made a "Good Government Pledge": if elected no one in his family will lobby for money before any agency or department of any branch of state government while he's in office. He has challenged Freudenthal to a series of seven debates in every part of the state, "to offer voters a choice based on more than television ads and poll-tested sound bites."

A religious man, Ray, influenced in part by an audience in Rome with Pope John Paul II, converted to Roman Catholicism two years ago, along with his son, Blake. As he described his experience, the innate goodness of this man, and the fact that he's comfortable with himself, is clearly visible. He's pro-life, terrific news to the vast majority of Wyoming voters who share that view, and he seized the occasion of the birth of twins to his daughter, Amanda, on September 28th, to affirm his pro-life stance.

At the beginning of this profile, I wrote that Ray Hunkins has capability

intelligence, competence, leadership ability, and more. What more? Two things.

The first is integrity. With Ray, there's little difference between what you see of him publicly and who he is in everyday life. Many define that as 'integrity'. But does this characteristic translate into the ability to lead a state? Martindale–Hubbell, that previously mentioned lawyer rating group, has developed a peer review rating system which solicits confidential opinions from lawyers who know and have worked closely with the subject. Concluding that Ray Hunkins faithfully adheres to professional standards and ethics, is reliable and diligent, and discharges his professional responsibilities well, it has given Ray its highest rating. *These* characteristics definitely translate well.

Wyoming Republican Party chairman, Drake Hill concurs: "Ray is known for his great integrity, among those who deal with him [on a day-to-day basis]."

Further, Ray has something that people everywhere wish their leaders had: vision. Hill again: "Ray has a strong sense of what Wyoming could be if we put our minds to it."

True. Announcing his candidacy in January 2006, Ray demonstrated his ability to look to and understand the future: "Wyoming faces a critical juncture in its history," he said. "Our state is in the midst of an unparalleled boom in its mineral industry. This presents us with many opportunities as well as potentially adverse consequences. To ignore either . . . would be inexcusable and would severely jeopardize securing the best possible future for Wyoming and its people. Our state needs the right kind of leadership at this juncture: leadership grounded in principal and transparency; reform minded

leadership; leadership that is accountable and in turn requires accountability; leadership that is respectful of others and leadership with a vision . . .”

Can this attorney, rancher and civic leader defeat the entrenched incumbent in November? Many, including Hill, are enthusiastic. Reached at his law office in Cheyenne a few days ago, Drake said: “. . . Hunkins will give voters a chance to compare philosophies and approaches. His chances in November are strong. I’m getting good feedback. People are excited about Ray; many who voted Democrat in 2002 are coming home this year.”

Why are those voters returning to the fold? “Because promises Dave Freudenthal made [to get their votes] have not been kept,” Hill said. “One example is his promise to work to diversify the economy. He’s done little on it.”

Hill appears correct about Republican voters returning “home.” On Primary Day in August 2006, Republicans showed up at the polls and voted for Ray Hunkins almost 52,000 times. That’s double the number of votes — 26,688 — tallied for Freudenthal, thus lending credence to his and Gregg Thomas’s conclusions.

Preparing to write this piece I talked to many people. Time after time, the conversation turned to diversification of the economy and preservation of the environment. Wyoming is rich in mineral wealth: oil gas, coal, and some uranium. Those are non-renewable resources. Once depleted that’s it. What’s left? Agriculture and Tourism. A diversified Wyoming economy is essential. Ray understands. Here’s the way he puts it:

“A vibrant economy is critical to keeping our kids in Wyoming. I’ll demand a

dynamic, aggressive development plan that supports small business, welcomes clean industry and offers good jobs for the next generation. I'll say 'No' to businesses that threaten our environment and way of life."

If Ray Hunkins wins in November, will much change in Cheyenne? Dave Freudenthal is a folksy politician, popular with the press and with some members of both Parties. But he has *not* been a decisive leader. Drake Hill again: "[He] has avoided the tough issues. He has not [aggressively attacked and] solved the meth problem in Wyoming, and has not kept his campaign promise to work on diversification of Wyoming's economy."

These thoughts are echoed by Bonnie Foster, Director of Operations for Hunkins' campaign. "We're seeing a real groundswell for Ray," she said. "People are calling, wanting to help; they're even willing to go door-to-door, because they don't want four more years of what we've had."

Nationally in 2004, voters, especially conservative Republicans, had a clear choice: John Kerry's waffling moral relativism or George W. Bush's firm leadership. In Wyoming *this* year, the choice for governor is equally clear: "Gov Dave" the jovial, backslapping, Democrat career politician who displayed little leadership during his term, or Ray Hunkins, a REAL REPUBLICAN in every sense of the word.

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