

County Commissioner Candidate Forum at the Laramie County Library

Opening statement

Good morning, I'd like to begin by apologizing for my absence. While I am able to make most functions with advanced notice, I was unable to find coverage today and am out serving the city as a member of Cheyenne Fire Rescue. I would like to thank the library staff for putting on this forum. I realize in the past few years the library has felt pressure from certain organizations and groups in regard to the way it operates and the subject matter it provides the public. I applaud you for using this as an opportunity to openly communicate some of those issues and seek input from those that are hoping to represent the members of Laramie County for the next four years.

For those that don't know, my name is Ty Zwonitzer. I'm a fifth generation Laramie County resident born and raised in a county pocket of Cheyenne. I attended all of my primary schooling through Laramie County School District #1 and received my Bachelor's Degree in Business Management from the University of Wyoming. I was raised as a member of two family businesses, Western Auction and Z's Home Furnishings. After college I brought the knowledge gained back to those businesses where I took an active leadership role until a unique situation was presented that allowed my parents to retire and lead me to seek other opportunities. I gained employment at the Wyoming Department of Transportation as a Land Acquisition Agent. I loved traveling the state and helping with various road projects, but found that the position wasn't fulfilling the part of me that wanted to give back and help others. I decided to pursue the dream I had of becoming a firefighter and was blessed to receive a position with Cheyenne Fire Rescue where I am currently an Engineer / Acting Lieutenant. The past seven years at CFR have shown me how much I enjoy helping others and giving back to my community and has inspired me to seek to do this on a larger scale as a Laramie County Commissioner.

Familywise, I was fortunate enough to meet my better half, Shawna, in the halls of East High School. She received her degree from the University of Wyoming in Business Administration and helped out in the family businesses as we raised our two sons, Aden and Eli, who are currently attending East and Carey. While I was pursuing my dream of becoming a firefighter she was also inspired to invest in our community and went back to UW to get her teaching certificate. She has been a teacher in the school district for the last seven years and is currently teaching the 4th grade at Rossman Elementary.

We have both seen the achievements that have happened as the county continues to grow, one of which is the beautiful building that we are in today, and look forward to contributing to the successes we will see in the future.

1.) What do you see as the county's budget priorities in the coming years and how does the library fit into those priorities?

The Laramie County Commissioners have many different facets they deal with, and they all have needs. Of the many priorities the county has, I believe that necessities should always be at the forefront. Laramie County is very fortunate in the fact that the voters have consistently

taxed themselves to fund road maintenance and special projects that they feel will add to the quality of life. When it comes to the library, state statute requires that the county commission will provide a suitable place for the use and operation of a public library. Annually providing operating funds through property taxes or otherwise for establishment and maintenance of that facility.

2.) Concerning property taxes, how do you balance the sentiment that property taxes should be reduced with the priority and obligation of county government to maintain vital community resources that provide amenities and resources we expect to maintain or improve our quality of life in Laramie County?

As mentioned before, it is required by the Wyoming State Constitution that the county library be funded through property taxes or otherwise. It is a constant juggling act to be able to provide quality services and facilities to the public while not putting a large financial burden on our population. I believe this is why the commission is currently looking for other ways to provide funding, like bringing new businesses and industries to our county such as data centers, horseracing, and continuing others that come with certain risks like firework sales and the gaming industry.

3.) What is your understanding of the county funds provided for the library's operation budget and would you plan on making any changes to this funding over the next four years?

The library is currently funded primarily through mill levies, 10% of the 1% optional sales tax, auto license fees, and some small miscellaneous taxes. While I don't currently see any reason for a change, I do believe it is important to continue vital services and look at the budget requests annually to assess how important they are to the success or detriment of each facility. The largest expense of any facility is staffing, and it is imperative to hire and maintain quality staff to provide the high-quality level of service the library is currently providing throughout the county.

4.) What education and/or career experience do you have that qualifies you to perform the job of County Commissioner?

I have a business management degree from the University of Wyoming and have run two local small businesses in town. I was also a local realtor in the community for over a decade and a Land Acquisition Agent for the Wyoming Department of Transportation, dealing with numerous road projects around the state. As a first responder, I have an in-depth understanding of our emergency management system and the multiple facets and facilities that it encompasses. Finally, I am a lifelong resident of the county with a deep love and appreciation for the community where I was raised.

5.) By Wyoming State Statute, the County Commissioners appoint five members of the governing board for the Library.

I. How would you ensure that the appointed citizens will enhance and advance the strength of the Library?

I believe having the right people in the right positions makes all the difference. Not only should they have the proper education/certifications and experience, but I believe they should have a passion for the entity they are representing with the best interest of the community at heart. I also believe every team should have diversity, so that many different opinions and experiences can be shared and best analyzed as a team.

ii. What is your perception of the type of oversight and authority County Commissioners should have over these board members once they are appointed?

I believe it is a commissioner's job to appoint the proper people into positions and trust that they have the best interest of that position at the forefront to do what they feel is right. County Commissioners are not facility managers, and they definitely shouldn't be micro-managers. If a situation arises that requires the Commission's attention it should be handled on a case-by-case basis with open communication and civility.

iii. What additional responsibilities, if any, do County Commissioners have in relationship to operation and administration of the Library?

Besides appointing the governing board, the only responsibility County Commissioners have in regard to the operation and administration of the library is to ensure it is properly funded and has the equipment and staffing needed to properly serve the public.

6.) What do you see as the role and purpose of the Library for the citizens of Laramie County? Please include in your answer any services you have noticed or used as a member of the public.

The role and purpose of the Library is to be a resource to the community. Our Library is a safe place where people can go to seek knowledge, entertainment, and education without discrimination or censorship. As a member of the public, my family and I have used the library for a multitude of things. Primarily we check out books, videos, and audio tapes, but also use the Library as a place to study, meet with various groups, play chess with my children, reminisce through school year books, and sift through the pages of genealogical reference material.

7.) What is your stance on intellectual freedom and the role of libraries in ensuring access to diverse viewpoints and information, particularly on controversial topics? Do you approach this differently for youth versus adult materials?

I believe it is the duty of a public library to ensure they have information or literature that represents a wide variety of topics from as many viewpoints as possible. I put faith and trust in the librarians that handle the day-to-day activities and give access to knowledge that they feel is beneficial to the public. In regard to youth vs. adult material, I again leave that decision to the people that handle the daily activities of the facility and are knowledgeable to the wants and needs of the community.

8.) Have you visited the library branches or bookmobile? Please include in your answer your thought on what services we offer the rural patrons of Laramie County.

I have not personally visited any of the rural branches or bookmobile but know of their existence and services they provide. Though not as large as the library in Cheyenne, both the Burns and Pine Bluffs branches provide daily activities for their communities to engage in. I was excited to hear that a site was identified in Pine Bluffs for a new facility and hope it will remain a staple in that community.

9.) What can the County Commissioners do to ensure healthy communication and cooperation with other governmental entities such as city councils, town councils, mayors, and state government?

One of the reasons I love Laramie County is because it still provides that sense of community. Even as we grow, the majority of our population maintains the friendly neighbor demeanor where we can agree to disagree and speak civilly about our differences. It really is as simple as having open communication and mutual respect. We are all servants of our communities, and it benefits everyone to work together to find solutions to the problems we face.

Closing Statement

Again, I would like to thank the library staff for allowing us to get together and speak on some of the issues they are concerned with. I'm a firm believer that we are all in this together and it's the things that set us apart that make us better as a whole. I was drawn to the county commission because I enjoy working as a team to come up with creative solutions and want to see great successes in the future of Laramie County. I believe I would add great value to the team through my deep roots, knowledge of the areas, understanding of the inner workings of multiple agencies, am very frugal in my spending, smart in my investing, and want to ensure that our community retains the values and traditions that make it such a great place to live. If

you have any questions, concerns, or issues that I can expand on or help with please contact me. Thanks, Ty Zwonitzer