

G.R.I.T. EDITORIAL: "Drivstuen's Drivel"
(Our response to Rusty Drivstuen's October 29, 2003 Monroe Monitor's Letter To The Editor, "Learn All The Facts Before Judging Mayor Rowe")

By Ray Kistenmacher and Loretta Storm

We were assailed by bewildered, gut-punch awe at Rusty Drivstuen's chutzpa in penning his October, 29, 2003 Monitor letter to the editor, "*Learn all the facts before judging Mayor Rowe.*" Here's a man who we believe should have been prosecuted for voter fraud because of the votes he and his wife illegally cast during Sultan's 2000 election Those two votes ended in a coin toss, sent Rob Criswell to council as a *non-elected* representative, and rewrote Sultan's future, And with this editorial, Mr. Drivstuen is trying to influence yet *another* Sultan election for C. H. Rowe by advising voters to use caution and to "learn all the facts" before judging someone. Can you say "hypocrite"?

I am outraged at his perspective and pleased to accept the challenge to refute it.

Mr. Drivstuen's statement that Rowe's "blame" for the LID 97-1 disaster is unfounded because Rowe is a property owner in the LID area and was therefore "excluded from all meetings in regards to this," is monumentally disingenuous. Rowe, like Councilmembers Jimmy Porter, Carolyn Eslick and Dusty Boucher, along with Planning Commissioners Janie Botting and Tom Green, (and to some extent real estate agent and economic development board member Bart Dalmasso) have NOT always recused themselves as they should. Deficiencies in the Appearance of Fairness Act notwithstanding, it's my belief that *any* public official has a deeper ethical responsibility, both to themselves and the citizens they purportedly represent, to step down when *any* question of a possible conflict of interest exists. The above-named officials have not always done that. (One recent example is when Janie Botting advocated and voted to expand by 165 acres Sultan's UGA, a goodly portion of which she and her family owns.)

More relevant to any discussion of Rowe's involvement in the LID debacle is the **fact** that Rowe's behind-the-scenes direction of City staff activities was never hampered by his inability to actually vote on the product of that work.

Drivstuen's cry for compassion regarding Rowe's "innocence" is blown away on the wind by another simple **fact**: He was mayor of Sultan during the time of construction of the LID. In that capacity, it was solely **his decision** -- and no one else's -- to continue the construction despite the blatant damage to the wetlands and stream buffers during one of the wettest winters ever. This work was done in direct opposition to specific conditions outlined in the U. S. Army Corps of Engineer's permit which forbid work during the rainy post-October period. It was, therefore, also in violation of the \$1.04 million grant received for the LID project, the underlying justification and "selling point" for which that the LID would result in "living wage jobs" for Sultan residents. (This federal grant, by the way, was paid for by *all* taxpayers, whether they live within the city limits of Sultan or without.)

The **facts** are that Rowe's willful scorn of city, state and federal laws draws a wall-sized, big-crayon mural of cowboyism that even the youngest child can easily interpret. (Children, at least, even in this "enlightened" age, are made accountable for their wrong-doing; Rowe was not.) This single decision by Rowe caused the enormous two-year cost over-runs for which he bears both the moral and official responsibility; yet these costs have been passed onto the beleaguered LID property owners.

Regarding Drivstuen's assertions related to Sultan's \$2 million City Hall, this was pre-G.R.I.T., when I was still commuting from Sultan-to-Seattle, and, therefore, had *no clue* what was occurring here. It's tough to dig up info on city events when one leaves the house at 4 a.m., returning some time after 6 PM. (And "digging up info" is what a taxpayer was forced to do in obtaining public information from city hall. But this was also before groundbreakers Mark Raney, Ron Kraut, G.R.I.T. and others began championing a true public process and open government, and the reasons we are so passionate about *well-publicized* communication and *effective* dissemination of information to citizens in a timely manner.)

Although we are sympathetic to Mr. Drivstuen's comments regarding "the cruelest attack on Mayor Rowe" related to the Falstich fatality on Route 2, I have not read any "attack" of any substance. I believe *most* people feel, as do we, that it was a tragedy that *could* have happened to virtually anyone. The material **fact**, however, is that it *didn't* happen to just "anyone." It happened to C. H. Rowe. And placed against that backdrop, this tragic event for all is just one more (albeit horrific) deep notch in a seemingly-endless line of life-impacting events where Rowe has been the shaft around which incidents have swirled. These events have been hurtful to *flesh and blood people*, not only to the hapless taxpayers of Sultan, and the list of events is gigantic, even by Soap Operatic standards.

A short list of some of these **factual** events follow (listed in general chronological order).

- (1) Ignoring violations by the developer and his staff during Willow Run's construction (of which he was fully aware, proven by a tape of the candidate forum debate at the Grange in November, 1999).
- (2) Hiring a felon to facilitate the 2000 council retreat, and later, after facts have been revealed, forced to retract that selection.
- (3) Proposing Roy Bysegger as the new city administrator in early 2000, without communicating to council members the details of his questionable past.
- (4) LID 97-1 (refer to **facts** above).
- (5) Maintaining and raising to an art form the "closed door" policy regarding dissemination of information, communication and Freedom of Information requests, within city hall. (Rowe orchestrated, or, at least, gave permission to the Coy-Boucher G.R.I.T.-bashing and libel in council in September of 2000, and a general anti-public, anti-First Amendment policy that culminated in the "Recording Wars" fiasco.)
- (6) Rowe (and Rob Criswell) both perjured themselves in affidavits, and by doing so, supported and facilitated Coy's theft of our G.R.I.T. name.
- (7) Revising and filing with the auditor two replats of Willow Run without council review, approval or knowledge.
- (8) Ignoring many Council mandates for action; among them, issues related to the traveler's park project and the selection of Sultan's ESA consultant. (To be quite fair, however, the *council* had a hand in this, as well. It was their *duty* to ensure enforcement of the implementation of council mandates to the mayor's office, thereby guaranteeing the balance of power between the Executive and Legislative branch.)
- (9) Losing the \$370,000 Travelers Park grant by ignoring specific council direction, not once, but several times. (During the October 29th town meeting, however, Rowe responded that this grant has been resurrected through "influence" from our legislative representatives. And although we agree with the result, we condemn Rowe's disregard of council direction which led to such an egregious situation.)
- (10) Initiating and completing several Land Use actions while mayor, on property owned by him, which was approved by staff he supervised.
- (11) Secreting the now-infamous DNR notification letter until the comment period had expired. This resulted in super-human efforts by "regular" citizens to fight back this project, and expended taxpayer funds in staff time used in subsequent communication and meetings with DNR, PUD, etc., supporting a "new" City position on the project, following overwhelming outrage by the community.
- (12) Firing City Administrator Bysegger for "insubordination," without justification.
- (13) Attempted firing of then-Administrative Assistant Colleen Hawkins because she was "too helpful" to G.R.I.T. in fulfilling our public information requests.
- (14) His behind-the-scenes influence and facilitation of the council vote on the Prop #1 election which resulted in the pro-Rowe council vote to *delay* that ballot initiative over 14 months. (As residents will recall, this forced ProSultan proponents to facilitate council accountability to respond appropriately to the voice of its citizens by filing a Writ of Mandamus in Snohomish County Superior Court.
- (15) Two spectacular suspensions of Sultan PD Chief Fred Walser, one without any explanation or apparent provocation and contrary to civil service laws; the second pending investigation of sexual allegations that some (myself included) feel Rowe may have had a hand in, due to its

timing, right before the ProSultan Prop #1 vote, and a family member's possible friendship with Walser's accuser.

- (16) Rowe has been the object of several lawsuits, many still outstanding, as a result of his Nixon-like, "I-AM-the-mayor"-shoot-first-deal-with--the-dead-bodies-later leadership style.

We could go on, but what would be the point?

In response to Mr. Drivstuen's last thought, related to the mayor's "charitable" activities in town, they are now so well-known and well-publicized that even the *Herald* is touting them on his behalf. This PR effort by Rowe has been well-fueled by his own enthusiastic and frequent communication of his "charitable" nature to the media and Sultan residents. During John Dick's Candidate Forum October 16th, Rowe made the following statement, "*I haven't taken anything from this community that I have not given back.*" After we picked our chins up off our chests, our next reaction was to stifle braying laughter at his disgraceful audacity.

Giving is only selfless and truly charitable when it is done without fanfare; done for the goodness of the act alone rather than for the political capital that it buys. Rowe ensures that he or his friends make his giving as public as possible in order to shine up his good-guy image. In our opinion, Rowe's true image is better represented by his steerage of Sultan into a moral cesspool, leading it to unthinking, Monroe-like, gridlocked development.

Finally, Mr. Drivstuen is on standing on quicksand when he urges people to "learn all the facts" before arriving at a judgment. Similar to presidential hopeful Gary Hart, who tossed a taunt to the press to "prove" something about his suspected amorous adventures, you and Rowe, have much to hide and little to gain by urging folks to scrutinize "all the facts." When we learned the true **facts** behind the Drivstuen's voter registration activities (which we decided not to make public), it convinced us that they should have been held accountable and *charged* with voter fraud. Although we feel it wouldn't have been appropriate for them to serve any "time" and would not have recommended it, we also believe they should have been charged, resulting, predictably in a suspended sentence. The prosecutor, however, is hard-pressed to prosecute criminals (and, if successfully prosecuted, may have nowhere to incarcerate them), is loathe to pursue white collar crimes. This helps to facilitate the rampant irresponsibility in our various governmental entities, leaving the "prosecution" of violations in the hands of the "average" citizen who must dig into their own wallets to find "justice."

In this post-Enron, politically-savvy, over-burdened taxpayer environment, constituents are looking for leaders who will lead by *setting the moral compass*, who will steer by the law, not by those who will sail past the point of no return and into gray waters to see how much or how long they can "get away with it." Today more than ever, voters should expect – no, we should *insist* -- that our leaders exemplify concern for the general good and long-term welfare, rather than the personal gain of a greedy few. And if we are not fortunate enough to be provided a valid choice of such leaders at the polls, then we need to do whatever is legally possible to insist that our leaders be held accountable for their actions after they are elected.

Ray Kistenmacher and Loretta Storm