

Does Yellowstone County Government Hold Value – Will This Election Define Our Future for the Next Decade?

[“You’re next Don”](#) (at 33:41) Mark Morse gives away the plan.



(Pictured here Mark Morse below, Denis Pitman top left, John Ostlund top right – screenshot June 14, 2022)

Dick Pence

Where is the John Ostlund Leadership Headed and What is John’s Agenda?

Prior to the June 7th 2022, Commissioners election, Commissioner John Ostlund was successful in ***steering the conversations*** away from the essential matters of the county to several more controversial issues. It is not unreasonable to suggest that these efforts significantly impacted the primary election of Mark Mores over incumbent Denis Pitman. As we will discuss, these actions were done in plain sight, they were observable. Further, these efforts were *not only* pointed at eliminating Commissioner Denis Pitman but also Commissioner Don Jones.

Because of this unprecedented effort to remove two fellow Republican, it is sensible for us to consider these issues. What motivations would lead one commissioner to openly promote a plan to get rid of the other two? We will document this relevant accusation and also ask the question that is the elephant in the room – **where is this going?**

I will also suggest that, at *this moment* in time, Ostlund's effort to eliminate the other two Commissioners is on track to be successful. It is only judicious to consider these questions at this point, **before the General election** in which Denis Pitman is electing to do a write in campaign. I will ask the question; **will this impact the direction of the leadership of the county for the next decade?**

Pitman has elected to do the heavy lifting of a non-party, write-in campaign for the November election. This is an important moment for our county and we must not allow the **conversation to be hijacked** by the shallow mantras - *sore loser, the people have spoken, time to move on* etc.

Re-framing the Debate - Returning the Narrative to the mission of the Commission.

The vast majority of Yellowstone County voters could not pick Mark Morse out of a police-type line-up for eye witnesses. They have no idea who he is - his character or relative experience. Did we elect Mark on a **single issue** not knowing him?

Elections should be about the candidate's **integrity and character, experience and reputation**, and **qualifications and fit** for the position. **This time around it is essential that focus the conversation on these factors. There are stark differences** in the aforementioned qualifications with the two candidates that we need to be exposed.

These factors and the essential business of the county were brushed aside as the voter's attention were shrewdly diverted to **speculations about the future of Metra Park** which is a side issue – a consideration of possible different management. But in the Gazette and other places, it was made to sound as if Pitman and Jones were going to destroy the facility completely. **Emotional cries of us "losing the place we all love and have memories of as children"** filled the sky. And, it worked.

Exposing "The Plan" how we got here – a Little History:

By now, many of you have seen how Mark Morse ***gave away "the plan"*** at the end of the June 14th Commissioner's meeting. He began to shout about transparency and then added ***"You're next Don,"*** openly exposing his and John Ostlund's devious plan to get rid of Don Jones and Denis Pitman. It is

impossible to overstate this moment and how it **drew the curtain back**. You can listen at this [LINK](#) at 33:41 minutes. This was NOT just some slight Freudian slip of the tongue. It let the cat out of the bag. In a split second, it also confirmed my sense **that Mark's judgement and people skills are problematic**.

John Ostlund has been entrenched in the County Commission for 20 years. A life-long bureaucrat, he retired from the County and is in his fourth term with four years left. Prior to Denis Pitman's election, he was in control of the commission. Then, four years ago, Don Jones was elected and Ostlund *became just a commissioner*. But what's the rest of this story – has anybody thought about that?

So here is the plan and it was not subtle, this was done in plain sight if you were paying attention.

Part A was, **recruit somebody to run against Pitman**. Mark Morse was his choice. Admittedly, Mark was not articulate, or experienced, was known for being brash and outspoken. However, he was willing to follow John's leadership.

Part B was, **mount a recall petition to remove Don Jones**. There were unsubstantiated accusations about how Don had dealt with contracts. This was mounted as an excuse for a petition drive to oust Jones. John has a very close friend who openly led the recall effort - they apparently like to fly airplanes together. That failed so, back to **Plan A**.

But before we go on – realize this. John and Mark have made it plain that they **will drive Jones off of the commission after this election, thus the comment "You're next Don"**. From conversations with Don, it is apparent that if the environment on the commission remains the same, he probably will not run again. If Jones even finishes his term, **who will Ostlund recruit next?**

Part C was to **frame the debate**. Here are a few of the *frames* – ideas to make the public think that Denis is out of touch with the county:

- ✚ Pitman was out to **hand over total control of the Metra Park to a California business**. This plays to the popular mentality in our state that **distrusts any outside influence**. Park employees would lose their jobs,

we would lose 4-H at the fair, anything to do with horse events would stop – the list went on. With the Media’s help, it worked. **The TRUTH is** that they were examining *the possibility* of letting firms who do **Executive Management** of venues like Metra Park give them proposals – the County would NOT lose control. The disinformation was that this would give control to a California firm. Reality is, there are NO firms in Montana that manage venues like this.

✚ **Convince the Recreational Marijuana Activists that Pitman** was the one that would take away their pot. If you followed this, there was a complex situation before **all three Commissioners finally voted to put Recreational Marijuana back on the Ballot**. There are reasons to believe John’s influence was involved. **IF... in fact you could PIN the second public vote on Denis Pitman** - that the revote was his doing - then you have reason for a **battle cry** from the marijuana Lovers to vote against him. Pitman’s picture began to mysteriously appear in Pot shops with slogans of **VOTE HIM OUT**. **Here is the critical rest of the story:**

- The Total votes cast for in the **Commissioner race were 28,423** – more than for any other county issue, Sheriff, Clerk of Court etc.
- The **glaring exception was, there were 45,812** votes cast in the Recreational Marijuana issue - 26,729 for keeping recreational marijuana dispensaries in the county.
- If only **one in 20** of the 45, 812 total voters– were **persuaded to vote against Pitman** you have your **margin of victory** for Morse.

✚ **Pitman destroyed the HUB**. Pitman and Jones led an effort to move the **HUB** to better serve the disadvantaged. There was significant mismanagement going on. The Gazette and other liberals caused a huge stink about this, accusing them of being insensitive to these folks. In the end, **all three Commissioners** voted for the change, but John made it sound like it was **all Pitman!**

✚ **The Election Money Issue - all three Commissioners voted for this**. But why was all the noise you heard **aimed only at Pitman?** Background - before the last major election, Yellowstone County Elections Administrator, Bret Rutherford asked the Commissioners to accept a grant of \$320,593 to run the election in the county. The money was later discovered to have been from Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. It did

turn out that there were no strings attached, but there was much concern about taking the money, after the fact. Lesson learned. You can examine a detailed accounting (every \$) at CTCL [Breakdown](#) of the money spent.

Part D - Follow the Money. Mark Morse spent a ton of money on billboards and media. **Where did that money come from?** Ironically, a good chunk of it came from those opposing dispensaries. To their credit, Ostlund and Morse's election strategy was better. They came out early even before the school board election. Pitman came out later.

The Bottom-Line Question – Who Are These Candidates?

In my earlier [Voters guide](#) (p. 13), I make the case that this election's defining issue was *what are the candidates' reputations for working with people* - those in a committee or governing group? You can find much more about these two in my guide.

Who Is Denis Pitman?

Denis Pitman has been a public servant for over 14 years. He served on the Billings City Councils for eight years before a six-year term on the commission. The commission is his **first time in the government employment**. He has owned and operated several private businesses and still does. Talk to ANYONE who has worked with him on boards and they will tell you he is even handed, fair, and decent to work with. **His service** also includes being past-president - Heights Kiwanis, past-president - Heights Business Optimist club, past chair of Heights Community Development Task Force, board member of the Friends of the USS Billings LSC15 and Yellowstone County Veterans Cemetery Board. **You don't get elected president** of service organizations if you are difficult to work with.

As a person of faith - for almost 30 years, Denis has been a mortician - entrusted with caring for families at a difficult time in their lives. He has done **hundreds of funerals during Covid**, especially for people in need who wanted a godly touch in their loved one's funeral.

His experience with the city makes him much more aware of the benefits of **City and County working together**. Denis and his wife Paula have been foster parents for over 15 years, they have adopted 7 children.

Who Is Mark Morse?

Mark spent 25 years as a Postal Inspector and twelve years in the Yellowstone County Sheriffs Reserve. He ran a private investigator business specializing in workers compensation. Mark also ran a large ranch in central Montana for two years. He has a reputation as running businesses well, the issue is with his reputation working with people.

Mark Morse has been categorized by **very different officials as problematic to work with - even toxic** at moments as you saw in the LINK Bove. He is hyper critical of elected officials but **has never had to make “that tough vote**, that controversial call.” A former Legislator categorized him as hard to pin down – one who would throw out random sound bites, but not go on record. A current Montana Legislator categorized him as having **almost no people skills**. One of his former Post Office employees echoed these sentiments. He was appointed to the **Lockwood Fire Department** board, but again, displayed poor abilities to work on a team and is no longer on the board.

It is one thing to hear such accusations coming out of a single source but these **comments came from several sources. The only way a personality like this would work** on our commission is if there was a situation of lock-step agreement on direction.

It all comes down to one name...

And it’s not Mark Morse, it’s John Ostlund. Mark demonstrates little ability to speak or act upon his own behalf. If you had been at the *Farm Bureau Debate* in Lockwood the week before the election you would have seen this **on full display**. We would show you this, but the Farm Bureau **has locked it down to members only**. Anybody smell an agenda?

Or, at the Republican Women’s Luncheon the week before – all he could do was read from a script. The debate was not even a contest – while it was

pathetic, it was also very revealing. Mark displayed **no ability to communicate, think on his feet or respond to unscripted questions.**

Mark understands part of the Metra debate, but **believes government can run it better.** He knows little about county affairs and that was on full display at the debate.

John has been labeled by those who have worked with him as a **narcissist.** If their right, this well defines the history of John's leadership. It's way beyond just being arrogant, self-centered, manipulative, taking credit for others' ideas, and having a sense of entitlement. The bottom line with John is a need for power and control. Many are even afraid to cross him. And we must ask the question, after he gets total control **where is he headed?**

Tuesday, July 7th, I [attended the Yellowstone County Commissioners meeting](#) as they discussed Executive Management of the Metra Park. I invite you to listen – and watch the body language. I had listened to a similar meetings June 14th that was very troubling so I wanted to be in person for this one. **The dynamics of interaction were beyond troubling, they were distressing.** It was fully on display that Commissioner John Ostlund was like the monarch, the ruler, and the other two Commissioners were just a nuisance.

Mark has **no record** of accomplishment in public service. He was promoted as a conservative, but we have **no record** of him being actively involved to verify this. We have **no real record** of his *relative* accomplishments or his ability to work with people.

From record of public service to reputation of working with people, this election should have been a slam dunk for Pitman. **Now, it's time we took back the conversation to what matters for Yellowstone County.**

Without question, ***an uniformed electorate drank the Kool-Aid that the Gazette and John were feeding them - they are ultimately*** to blame.

But now, the challenge is before us. **Do we “seed” the future** of the Yellowstone County governance to the wishes to Ostlund and Morse or do we do take up the challenge of making **the first ever write-in election in Montana a success for the people?**