

Dear Editor: [Submitted to Yellowstone County News 05/11/2022 from Commissioner Don Jones]

As we continue the process of looking at the best way to manage Metra in the future there continues to be a lot of rhetoric that is outright misinformation and lies. A lot of this is originating from Commissioner Ostlund, a bureaucrat with over 30 years as an employee of Yellowstone County and 20 years as a Commissioner (drawing both a retirement check and a pay check from the County).

Commissioner Ostlund continues to use “scorched earth” tactics to attempt to kill the idea that the private sector may do a better job managing Metra than government (Yellowstone County). To recap, when this topic first came up on August 9, 2021 during a recorded Commissioner Discussion meeting,

Commissioner Ostlund stated “In the past (16 years ago) we have spent a lot of time looking at that (private management) and all the research and Bill (Dutcher) you probably still got **it it’s never worked out anywhere it has ever happened.**”

He goes on to say “if we were ever to do this, we need to notify all the users’ group because **it decimates those groups when you go to management contracts and you lose control of your arena and it doesn’t work financially**”. His

statements were absolute lies! To verify the lies I decided to start researching the concept further and contacted the General Manager (raised in Winnett, Montana) of the Ford Wyoming Center located in Casper, Wyoming. This facility has been home of the College National Finals Rodeo for over 20 years and PBR along with many other community and State activities. They have been managed by a private company for the past five years. I invited the most recent past president of the Metra Board to go with me. We met with the Mayor, City Administrator, County Commissioner, employees and many others. They were all very positive about private management. This information was totally opposite of Commissioner Ostlund’s rhetoric. On our drive back Mr. Reid and I both concluded that I would be derelict in my duty as a County Commissioner to not investigate it further. Commissioner Ostlund has falsely stated I did not go through the proper process. As with Metra, the County Commission has very few formalized processes which is to the advantage of the 50-year County bureaucrat. This is one of the reasons term limits are in place for most elected officials and should be for County Commissioners. The process as far as I know was/is to bring it to a discussion meeting which I did and put it on the regular agenda, which I

Commented [DJ1]:

did. My motion was to do a review of Metra management and ask for Requests for Qualifications and Information from private firms simultaneously so we could make an educated decision on what would be the best management for the future. Part of the process with the private firm(s) is to set down and negotiate what the final contract would look like. It was spelled out multiple times in the RFQI that a contract may not be awarded at the end of the process. Commissioner Ostlund's preference was to hire a firm to tell us what we should do. I spent three sessions in Helena [Legislature] and not once did I take the advice of only one firm to tell me how to vote. For the internal review we hired a firm to look at management and give us a report. We did receive the report and my concerns with management were verified. We have now received the RFQI's and a committee of three ranked them. ASM was rated the highest qualified. The next step is to meet with ASM I and see if an agreement that makes sense for the County is achievable. If not, there is the option to negotiate with the second highest qualified firm. If an agreement cannot be reached with either firm my recommendation will be to hire a recruiting firm to help us find the next General Manager. I hope as we go forward, we can start working together and cut out the rhetoric. **Metra has great employees and it is not fair for Commissioner Ostlund to keep being an obstructionist in the process.**

Don Jones, Yellowstone County Commissioner