

## Does Yellowstone County Government Matter – 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

### The Bottom-Line Up Front:

**IF... we care any about the future or the governance** of Yellowstone County, we need to realize that this race is about **two commissioners** and future control. John Ostlund openly set out to get rid of Denis Pitman & Don Jones. I have talked to Don and he will not run again if Pitman is defeated. The Commission has become toxic and with Ostlund in control, it simply would be fruitless to stay.

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

In the June 7<sup>th</sup> 2022, Commissioners election, Commissioner John Ostlund was successful in **steering the conversation** away from the essential matters of the county to the Metra issue – as we will discuss. At *this moment* in time, his scheme to get rid of the other two Commissioners is on track. But it is important to ask, where is this dynasty headed?

**Denis Pitman has elected to do the heavy lifting of a [write-in campaign](#)** for the November election. This is too important for us to – this time – allow the

conversation to be hijacked. There will be cries of *sour loser, the people have spoken* etc., but let them come. This is an important moment for our county.

### **Visionary Leadership - MetraPark and Good-Old-Boy Management– You have been lied to**

It was initially my intent not to discuss the Metra Park issue because the truth is that it is a side issue – simply an alternative to management. It became THE issue promoted by Commissioner Ostlund.

Then, I happened upon the report by Venue Solutions and it **made me angry**. They spent hours interviewing Metra employees, looking at the finances, etc. **This report exposes Ostlund**, the Gazette and many others for promoting **management that borders on corruption** – contracts not put up for bid, unprofessional dealings. [Read the report](#) and see if you can come to a different conclusion - **completely aside from the private vs. public management**.

Because opponents of Denis Pitman are shouting from the rooftops ***“He lost because of his promotion of Private management of the Metra,”*** maybe we ought to look at that issue head on. Set aside your opinion for a minute and look at the facts.

Here we find *different bedfellows*. August 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 the Billings Chamber is having a meeting. They are clearly promoting private ownership. Whatever your thoughts are about this idea, I suggest you spend a few minutes looking at their [MetraPark Resource Library](#). The Chamber did not do this report, The report was completed in 2022 and authored by [Venue Solutions Group](#), experts in, “venue services, including operations, engineering, security, guest services, sustainability, and administration.

**This report screams of unprofessional management in a host of ways.** Here are a few of their findings in bullet point format:

- Few, if any **written policies** and procedures...
- Currently there is **no documented process** for performing work orders and preventive maintenance at MetraPark.
- **Annual performance reviews** have not been performed for full-time MetraPark employees which is not consistent with industry ‘best practices.’ This screams of good-old-boy management.

- Lack of overall **organizational goal setting** and setting of employee expectations
- There seems to be a **culture of 'No'** at MetraPark and that the staff doesn't often seem willing to try and fix issues for people renting the spaces.
- A perception that MetraPark staff **doesn't have a customer service and/or problem-solving culture**; and noted challenges in collaborating and communicating with staff for a successful event.
- A pervasive perception that there is **not enough professionalism** and little responsiveness to the needs of event sponsors.
- **Contrary to recent headlines, MetraPark does not operate at a profit.** The facility's operational deficit requires a hefty multi-million-dollar subsidy of taxpayer dollars. At a recent Commission meeting, a well-known member of the Metra Board suggested that Metra Park was profitable.

**Whatever your opinion about Metra Park management, the Venue Solutions report ought to make you upset that, even within this issue, John Ostlund steered the public away from the relevant issues., Yes, you were deliberately lied to.**

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

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 we reframe the conversation to these factors.** The future of Yellowstone County, for perhaps the next decade, is at stake. **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 and mis-representation of other issues we will examine.

**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 or really even what this commission does!

By now, many of you have seen how Mark Morse ***gave away “the plan”*** (see **more below**) at the end of the June 14<sup>th</sup> 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. 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 accusation **that Morse is toxic.**

### **“The Plan” how we got here – a Little History:**

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. 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. John said the **quiet part out loud**.

**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 march in lockstep with John.

**Part B** was, **mount a recall petition to remove Don Jones**. There were unsubstantiated accusations about how Don had dealt with contracts. 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”**. Why would a successful business man like Jones stay in the toxic environment that these two have created? If Jones even finishes his term, **who will Ostlund recruit next?**

**Part C** was to **frame the debate** and Progressives are masters at that. Here are a few of the frames – ideas to make the public think that it was all Pitman’s fault:

- ✚ 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.
- ✚ **Convince the Recreational Marijuana Activists that Pitman** was the one that would 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**. Now think carefully for a minute.
  - 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 against overturning.
  - 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. 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 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 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 above. 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 acts a bit like a puppet, much like what we are seeing with Biden. 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 can do is 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.

**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. NO, 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 7<sup>th</sup>, I [attended the Yellowstone County Commissioners meeting](#) as they discussed Executive or Private Management of the Metra Park. I invite you to listen – and watch the body language. I had listened to a similar meetings June 14<sup>th</sup> 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 unformed 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?***