

from our viewpoint...

Fire Agreement may rise from ashes

“Step away from the fire department agreement.” The “fire contract” went up in a blaze of red on Tuesday with the city commission deciding on a 1-4 vote against approving the agreement with Sherman County Rural Fire District No.

Commissioner Annette Fairbanks was the lone vote in favor. She has been talking about this issue since she was elected to the commission six years ago. She felt it was a step in the right direction, but none of the other commissioners felt the agreement was a good answer.

We are disappointed the commission has failed to reach an acceptable agreement to consolidate the city and rural fire departments, but really expected the existing agreement to go down in flames.

We thought it might have been a 2-3 vote, but Commissioner Chris Zimmerman voted against feeling the agreement was not good for either department.

The question of better cooperation between the city and rural departments brought the issue to the forefront about six years ago. At that time the city commissioners, county commissioners and fire board established a working committee to find a way to reach across the apparent divide.

That committee met no more than twice, and did not seem to find any solid direction or solutions.

A second attempt was made a couple of years later, but again there was no agreement on how to proceed.

More than a year ago the Rural Fire Board asked the city to participate in a survey of fire protection services in Sherman County. The city, county and fire board spent about \$12,000 to bring in a consultant from Georgia to make recommendations about the fire protection across the county.

His first suggestion was to have the Goodland fire department cover the homes within a few miles of the city limits. His next suggestion was to place substations at Edson and Ruleton with a pumper truck and a tanker. The major reasons for these recommendations was to help rural homeowners reduce their home insurance cost by lowering the fire protection ISO rating.

Most of those who listened to the presentation were skeptical and little further action was taken on many of the recommendations. The city and rural firemen did take suggestions about improving equipment and improved their fire trucks to meet national fire specifications.

When the rural fire board asked the city last fall to allow them to name City Fire Chief Brian James as the Goodland Rural Fire Chief it appeared a new effort might succeed.

The hope now is City Manager Doug Gerber can pull something out of the ashes and draft a contract for services without mentioning consolidation or changing the fire board. The contract for services could continue the efforts of Chief James, and possibly find a way to get him some relief from the code enforcement duties. The building inspector portion does seem to fit with being the fire chief to help businesses be safe.

We feel the city firemen could help cover the rural homes within a couple miles of town as was recommended. This would help the rural homeowners, and be a small step forward.

Getting a contract drafted and approved could be a slow process, but one we feel is really worth the effort of both the city commissioners and rural fire board. — Tom Betz



Website reinforces need to get rid of nukes

For all our worry about nuclear war, it's amazing how much the average citizen doesn't know about these weapons.

I consider myself fairly average, and truth be told nuclear bombs are not something I know a lot about. I remember learning about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and being a World War II history buff I've read books that included that. I've learned a little about the Manhattan Project, and the Cold War.

I can remember when I was old enough to realize what those flat concrete things were in eastern Colorado and southern Wyoming. Much of the United States' nuclear response capability was housed in my backyard.

When I lived in Torrington, Wyo., there was a missile silo on the hill above the town. I was told it was deactivated, so I never bothered to look it up. Based on a quick Google search, I see that it belonged to the now defunct 400th Missile Squadron. It used to hold LGM-118 Peacekeeper missiles, but it has been empty for years, its rockets repurposed as satellite launching systems and its warheads moved elsewhere.

I didn't know that when I lived there. I suspect the reason I know so little about the subject is because the Cold War has been over for most of my life. I never had “duck-and-cover” drills. So maybe we all need a lesson in nuclear arms.

Enter NukeMap, an online project by Alex Wellerstein, a historian at the American Institute of Physics. Wellerstein has created a website that uses Google Maps to allow users to “detonate” a nuclear weapon anywhere around the globe and see what ground the affects would cover. It's fascinating, disturbing and — most distressingly — a little amusing. It's proved a popular site. Wellerstein posted Thursday that users had simulated more than one million “detonations.”

The world's first nuclear weapons were, of course, comparatively small compared to what we have today. When we hear the name Hiroshima today we envision a massive fireball vaporizing an entire city. In reality, the actual



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• simple tricks and nonsense

blast was quite small.

Using NukeMap we can see that if the Hiroshima bomb was donated in the middle of Goodland, say at 8th Street and Broadway, the fireball would cover about two blocks. The air blast, which damages or demolishes even the most heavily built structure, would reach from Second Street to 15th Street. A less-devastating air blast — which would still bring down most buildings — would reach as far as the National Weather Service Station. Thermal radiation — which causes third degree burns on any exposed skin and starts fires — would reach as far as I-70. It's hard to tell how the nuclear fallout would be dispersed since that depends on weather patterns.

Hiroshima, today a city of more than a million people, had a population of 350,000 in 1945. It was an industrial and a Japanese Army headquarters. Like many Japanese cities at the time, most buildings were made of wood, making it horribly susceptible to fire. Actual figures are impossible to calculate, but casualties from the bomb have been estimated at 70,000 immediately killed, with another 20,000 to 90,000 dead within the next days and months from the effects of the bomb.

The Nagasaki bomb was bigger. But both of these weapons pale in comparison to what the U.S. and other countries came up in the half-century after World War II.

When you plug the aforementioned Peacekeeper into NukeMap, the situation looks even more dire. The fireball would obliterate an area between 11th and fifth streets, the air blasts would reach well past the airport and south of I-70, and the radiation would set everything on fire for 10 miles around the city center.

The Peacekeeper is a 350 kiloton bomb, compared to the Hiroshima bomb, which was 15 kilotons. The largest bomb in the American arsenal is the B-83. Designed in the late 1970s, it delivers a yield of 1.2 megatons. The Russians built a bomb designed to have a yield of 150 megatons. Thankfully they only ever build one, and they test-detonated it at a yield of 50 megatons on an island in the Arctic Ocean. At either yield, you could pretty much kiss Sherman County goodbye, along with Burlington, Colby, Sharon Springs and St. Francis.

Why bring all this up? Because the Obama Administration has been catching a lot of flack lately for considering a reduction in our nuclear armament. We're already reducing it to meet the 1,550 deployed warhead limit required by the New START treaty, and the Administration wants to reduce it even further.

I believe this is the right call. Gone are the days when we really need “mutually assured destruction.” A war with China or Russia doesn't seem likely. We have too many diplomatic and business ties now. Our chief adversaries — Iran and North Korea — either have no nuclear weapons, or will at most have one or two in the forceable future.

The problem now is when one guy or one terrorist cell gets a hold of one old Russian nuclear device and sets it off in downtown Tel Aviv or New York. But that isn't something that our nuclear forces are a deterrent for. Those kinds of people A. don't expect to survive their attack, and B. don't fear retaliation.

Looking at the destructive potential of these weapons is sobering, and it really brought home to me the need for disarmament. As the only nation to have ever used these weapons on a population, I believe it is our duty to see that they never be used again.

However, before we can disarm, we must ensure that everyone else does the same. We must ensure that China, Russia, France, France, the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan and Israel all give up their nuclear weapons at the same time and we must ensure that no one else develops them.

Mid-February flowers a surprise

The green shoots were unmistakable from the second-floor bedroom, though I hadn't been expecting them.

The daffodils always poke their little heads out of the ground in mid-February, and they always surprise me.

It's still winter, after all, and it's usually cold outside. Makes no difference whether the groundhog or woodchuck or whatever saw his shadow, February hews to winter.

Except, of course, for the daffodils and that other harbinger of spring, baseball. For spring training kicks off at mid-February each year as pitchers and catchers report for duty.

That both would come the same day — Friday — is no surprise. What's surprising is that we're so mired in winter by the time that February rolls around that we can't see it's nearly over.

Nearly over doesn't mean we've seen the last of winter weather, especially in this country. We often see more snow from spring storms driven by big lows that sweep across the nation in February, March and even April than we do in the dead of winter. January can be dry and sunny here.

But March, March can be a bad time to be on the road. This year, however, it's warm enough, I suspect we may get more rain that ice.

Spring is a time of eternal optimism. The days get longer, and Daylight Saving Time makes them seem longer yet. All baseball teams start out even, and managers talk about how much better they'll be this year, even in Pittsburgh and Kansas City. Especially our own Rockies.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

Outdoors, the grass will start to green up and those first tender shoots will yield to bright yellow blooms in the yard. They'll be followed by crocuses, and eventually, by May, the irises.

Green grass will lead to green shrubs, and eventually, but not to late April, green trees. The cedars will turn from red to green again. We'll have to start mowing, but first there are

flower beds to rake and leaves to pick up.

It'll be time to drag out the hoses and water the grass before you know it.

Not this week, though. Right now, it's still winter. But there'll be baseball games on the radio by Saturday. And hope in the air. We know now we can survive a few more days of cold, a few more storms, a few more icy blasts. Because we know it's almost over.

And spring bring the promise of renewal, of baseball, of summer days.

But for now, it is still basketball season. And we've got a few weeks before blizzards yield to thunderstorms and tornadoes.

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