

Post Number: 10915  
Registered: 12-2004

Best of Black Box? ★★★★★  
Votes: 3 (A keeper?)

Posted on Wednesday, December 9, 2009 - 7:57 am:



Removed a message by request; reminder, your real name appears by your messages at Black Box Voting. I'm going to recap the gist of the removed message, along with some expansion of my own.

The poster applauded Marilyn for the courage she is demonstrating in bringing this legal action.

The poster noted "the utter ruthlessness with which Marilyn has been attacked is not to be believed."

That is correct. Certain online publications and one local newspaper have allowed a character assassination campaign against Marks. They allowed posters to use screen names; there is no reason to believe that the posters were not just the opposing candidates to Marks, hiding behind screen names; some were undoubtedly current or former city officials.

Folks can divert attention as much as they want, but the issue Marilyn Marks is raising in Aspen is real, and of crucial importance.

The poster noted that he/she is grateful for BlackBoxVoting.org's interest in "this very important test of democratic resiliency in America."

Exactly. It is a very important test, which is why we selected the Aspen Project as one of our projects.

There is some additional information that I cut from the article because it was already overlong. I'll cover some of the political background in the Aspen mayoral race below:

#### THE BURLINGAME RANCH SCANDAL

Marilyn Marks uncovered overspending and underdisclosing on a government housing project, then ran for mayor and lost. Using her blog, "The Red Ant," Marks exposed massive cost overruns and significantly misleading cost estimates on the November 2005 ballot to approve Aspen's Burlingame Ranch "affordable housing" project. She later decided to run for mayor, dueling it out with incumbent Mayor Mick Ireland, a key advocate of the Burlingame Ranch project.

The Burlingame Ranch project technically did not go over budget, because THERE WAS NO BUDGET. What they had for this pricey project was literally numbers sketched on a napkin.

Now, here's how taxpayer-subsidized affordable housing works in Aspen, not to be confused with the HUD projects or the tenement housing built in inner cities. Aspen's land costs are way high, so high that people who work in the city can't afford to live there. So, the City has purchased land and, in the case of the Burlingame Ranch Project, apparently also annexed some land from local land owners. Then the City floated a bond measure out to the taxpayers to get them to foot the bill for affordable housing for people who live in Aspen. The housing, once built, is supposed to be offered through a lottery system.

The numbers provided to voters were way off for the Burlingame project - something like a \$68,000 taxpayer subsidy per home was told to the voters, when actually it was over \$400,000. These numbers being posted from memory and before finishing my morning coffee, take with that small grain of salt.

The Burlingame project was Mayor Mick Ireland's baby. And he wanted more, a Burlingame II and III. They were going to put bond measure for that on the ballot in 2008, but in part due to Marks's investigative work, it didn't make it onto the ballot.

Now, as to non-anonymity of the ballots: Imagine this scenario - With perhaps 300 or 400 of Aspen's 2500 voters living in affordable housing projects (and the rest of Aspen's workforce living out of city limits and commuting to work), getting your own voters into the city housing can help seal your incumbency as a city official. It would be real nice to know how the people in each unit of affordable housing have been voting.

and these are mm

An old tactic for city bosses was to have certain poll workers make a small mark in the margin of the ballot, so it could be identified later for coercion or payoff. The overkill in Aspen, seeking to prevent inspection of the ballot images, does nothing to allay concerns in this area.

allies helping you make the ang!

#### GOVERNMENT OWNED BUSINESSES

where is BH sitting her up? mm!

Aspen has other idiosyncracies. At one point, they were trying to get the city government to own the local bookstore. Currently the city owns the movie theatres. There is some blurring of the lines between government control and private enterprise there, usually justified by saying it would be too costly for local entrepreneurs, so the government has to help out.

One problem with this is that the more people who live in city-subsidized housing, the more people who work in city-owned businesses that in turn are owned by independent business owners, the more people you get under the thumb of the local government bureaucracy. All of a sudden, you really, really better be nice to the mayor because your housing or your job might depend on it.

I all the more reason to mark your ballot as you are told to do...