



# TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT

by Jim Stiles

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## SOME PERSONAL THOUGHTS ON THE MOAB CITY HALL STORY, AND LOCAL JOURNALISM IN GENERAL

I've been doing *The Zephyr* for 27 years now and one of the problems with running a small independent publication like this is that, as publisher, I'm required to wear many hats, even when I don't want to.

It's not as complicated as it used to be, in its 'paper heyday,' when I made a Zephyr press run every eight weeks. As press day approached, I'd carry my cut and paste layout boards with me, in the old '86 GMC truck, and take the back way around Salt Lake to Tooele, to the printers at the Transcript. Usually I slept out the night before, on that long empty stretch of State Hwy 36, and get to the Transcript office at dawn the next morning. The guys there were great--the Tooele paper was and still is locally owned, by the Dunn Family--- and they'd have all 15,000 copies printed by noon. We'd load them into the truck and I'd head for Moab. Then came subscriptions and distribution, most of which was performed admirably by my friends like Linda Vaughan and Jose' Churampi.

But those were logistical issues that were physically exhausting and time-consuming, but pleasant in other ways. Loading and unloading and re-loading a couple tons of newsprint kept me in shape, I saw many good friends during the whole production process, and I always enjoyed the drive through the West Desert.

More challenging for me, and frustrating at times, has been trying to separate my various editorial caps when assembling content for *The Zephyr*, to the satisfaction of my readers. Over the years, I've been blessed by the participation of many talented writers who have contributed to the quality of this publication in immeasurable ways. But ultimately, the choice of content falls on me.

My own contributions have varied in style and purpose; I've certainly never hesitated to express an opinion in these pages, and political humor, in print or via my doodles, has been a staple of this rag, but I've also invested a lot of time and effort researching and writing investigative reports. This kind of journalism is the most difficult.

Of the countless stories I've done in over 25 years, let me cite three articles that especially come to mind--- the 1997 story on the police shooting of a Moabite, "The Death of John Dinsmore, the 10,000 word exposé from 2008 called 'The Greening of Wilderne\$\$,' and my "Bike Borg Moves South" article from 2013. There are many more, and most of the time, I kept my politics out of the articles and deposited them on the "Take it Or Leave it" page.

Some will argue that I didn't and don't succeed in sepa-

rating fact and opinion, but for the most part, I disagree. The "Greening" piece generated some really awful comments from organizations like the Grand Canyon Trust, who took the unusual step of writing letters to my readers, and calling me "mean-spirited" and "malicious." Yet, there wasn't an undocumented fact in the article. What I'd done was to quote people accurately and get my facts right.

[http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/  
blog/2013/10/07/from-the-august-2008-zarchives-the-  
greening-of-wilderne-jim-stiles/](http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/blog/2013/10/07/from-the-august-2008-zarchives-the-greening-of-wilderne-jim-stiles/)

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Likewise, the 'Bike Borg' story raised the ire of a few Moabites who thought I'd given at least one of the principals in the article a "bad rap." My "rap," in fact, was to transcribe taped testimony and print long excerpts, so that I couldn't be accused of taking comments out of context. To paraphrase Harry Truman, "I didn't give her Hell, I printed the truth and she thought it was Hell." There's a difference.

[http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2014/02/03/  
moab-is-assimilated-bike-borg-moves-south-is-resis-  
tance-futile-in-san-juan-county-by-jim-stiles/](http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/2014/02/03/moab-is-assimilated-bike-borg-moves-south-is-resistance-futile-in-san-juan-county-by-jim-stiles/)

The 1997 story about John Dinsmore, who was shot to death on the driveway of his home by a Moab police officer, is perhaps the greatest tragedy I've ever attempted to write about. Dinsmore had become suicidal and armed with a kitchen knife threatened himself and five law enforcement officers from Moab/Grand County. When my long article was published, many in L.E. complained bitterly, but no one ever challenged the information I brought forth. Though no disciplinary action was ever brought against the officer, the City did, in the aftermath, purchase non-lethal weaponry to deal with future inci-

dents like John's. For that alone, the story was worth the effort.

[http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/  
stiles-stories/dinsmore.htm](http://www.canyoncountryzephyr.com/oldzephyr/stiles-stories/dinsmore.htm)

Still, the argument continues---critics claim that whether I kept my own opinion out of the story or not, "Everybody knows where you stand." Well...okay. But does anybody think Glenn Greenwald loves the CIA? Did anyone think Woodward and Bernstein were Nixon fans? The bottom line is: The facts must substantiate the story. That's what I strive to do.

And finally, when it comes to writing Moab political pieces, there's the argument that I don't live in Moab anymore; therefore I have no right to express an opinion or present the facts. In October 2014, during the heated election campaign, City Councilman Bailey's wife, Carrie, made that very point. But that's like saying Ed Abbey shouldn't have been allowed to write "Desert Solitaire," because he no longer lived at Arches. The Zephyr continues to be a publication about Southeast Utah, and we continue to cover the issues that are of greatest interest.

\* \* \*

Now, with regard to the massive article in this issue, "What's Past is Prologue," my desire to get involved in the story reminds me of the WC Fields quote, who once said, "All in all, I'd rather be in Philadelphia."

For me, even Philly sounded better than getting mixed up in this controversy. It's true I knew both dismissed men and I used to see Ken Davey regularly, before I left Moab a decade ago. Now our contacts are limited to a few shared coffees every summer and the occasional exchanged barbs on facebook. Over the years and decades, Ken and I have argued about almost everything. But I have always admired and respected his intelligence and decency as a man.

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documented and fact-driven this  
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In a nutshell, the facts  
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As for David Olsen I've hardly seen Dave in 20 years. Anyone who knows me, knows that creating Trail Mix and helping to build 150 miles of bicycle singletrack trails---both accomplishments by Olsen--- have never been high on my priority list. But those differences had nothing to do with the way I view him as a man. Despite our differences, I never doubted his integrity or his passion. I know how much he loves his family and, to trump everything, he had one of the most amazing dogs I've ever seen. I knew David Olsen to be, like Ken, a good and honorable fellow.

Still I didn't see myself getting involved and I was under the impression that at least one and maybe both of the Moab weeklies might further investigate the details of the dismissals and pursue the story of the city manager's time in Kemmerer and Timnath. But, as far as I can tell, it didn't happen.

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Then I started hearing from citizens in Kemmerer and in Moab, frustrated people who wanted to know more but didn't know how. In one case, some interesting information had been gathered, by a family in Moab, but they didn't know what to do with the revelations they'd made. So they gave it to me.

Then I wrote a short piece, "Upheaval at Moab City Hall," which was more a collection of links and long quotes, from other media sources, to document Ms. Davidson's tenure as city manager in Timnath, CO and Kemmerer, WY. I was careful, however, with the information I chose to print, especially that coming from social media.

In Kemmerer, some of the rhetoric that I found, on a related facebook page, was full of anger and threats and accusations, from both sides of the battle lines and eventually, I rejected the comments from almost everyone who reached out to The Zephyr from that page. But sometimes, where there's smoke, there's fire and eventually, sifting through the highly charged emotions, I found some solid voices. From there, I pursued hard information via Wyoming Sunshine Laws and the Utah Government Records Access laws (GRAMA), as well as court documents from Timnath, Colorado. And we still have FOIA requests pending with the City of Kemmerer.

But from all that information, I've spent the past month trying to put it into a story that makes sense, to you and to me. The result is the 13,000 word article that appears elsewhere in this issue. Also, on January 11, I sent 15 questions to the city administrator, Rebecca Davidson, with copies to the Moab mayor and council members, hoping she could clarify, or resolve issues raised by this investigation.

As of posting time, February 1, 2016, time, we have not heard from Ms. Davidson.

A copy of the questions is included elsewhere in this issue.

Finally, I realize that no matter how well documented and fact-driven this article is, there will still be those individuals who will dispute the contents of the story, who will accuse me of bias, or "shoddy journalism," or that I'm "just trying to stir things up," or that I'm "trying to get the Zephyr in the news" (all of which are public comments posted about The Zephyr in the past months and year). Or most absurdly, that I'd "do anything to make more money." THAT comment is especially ridiculous, since almost all of my commentary these past few years has caused my ads to shrink, not grow. With a few exceptions, The Zephyr now relies on the support of individuals, via The Backbone.

But I accept these kinds of uninformed and emotional rants, because I know the information in this story doesn't fit some Moabites' preconceived notions. In a nutshell, the facts don't fit their biases. I realize that part of the problem for those people will be the conflicted and contradictory loyalties that will arise from this story. They'll find themselves at odds with others, and with their own core beliefs. Those sympathetic to the dismissed employees will also have to scrutinize the conduct of the city officials who were responsible for these events occurring in the first place. Somewhere along the way, those divided loyalties must be resolved.

**I do admit to being frustrated by any entity---government, corporate, or personal--- that takes actions or makes decisions that affect the public without even a hint of transparency. When instead of providing full disclosure for their actions, they hide behind "non-disparagement clauses" and "non-disclosure agreements," and threats of litigation and intimidation. Or bland gutless "public statements." Or "executive sessions."**

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and ultimately the truth, until eventually, finally, everybody either forgets or gives up.

Ultimately, the reason I wrote this story, like so many others I've produced over the past 27 years, is because I'm trying to do my job. Thomas Jefferson once said, "The people cannot be safe without information. Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe."

What the people do with this information, in this case the residents of Moab, Utah, is entirely up to them...

## WIND SUBSIDIES & CONFLICTED CORE VALUES-- FROM THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT



### "THANKS OBAMA?"

For more than a decade, I've grown increasingly disillusioned with the lack of honesty in politics and have observed a vast chasm between the professed ideologies of BOTH liberals and conservatives and the Reality of their actions. If I allowed myself to vent about the stunning hypocrisy of politics at the national level my rant would fill far more column inches than would ever fit in this publication, so let me limit my disaffection to my own neck of the woods.

It's no secret that a decade or so ago, I became disillusioned with my environmentalist friends whose once honest efforts to protect the remaining wildlands of Utah in their purest form, gave way to the huckster-like promotion of 'wilderness' as a product to be packaged and sold. In fact, at the infamous 'Wilderness Mentoring Conference of 1998,' a prominently displayed quote by Michael Carroll, now of The Wilderness Society, established the tone and direction of all that would come later:



**Bill urged support for Latigo and added, "Don't forget that it truly is a private investment of private money on private property."**

*"Car companies and makers of sports drinks use wilderness to sell their products. We have to market wilderness as a product people want to have."*

Seeking protection for wilderness became a bewildering and conflicted pursuit for me as I saw the environmental community turn a blind eye to the dangers and impacts caused by recreation and tourism. Almost 20 years ago, a leading Utah environmentalist warned that "industrial tourism" created "more potential to disrupt natural processes on a broad scale than just about anything else." Today, you'd never hear that sentiment expressed out loud.

The great conservation writer Wendell Berry once noted, "this is what is wrong with the conservation movement. It has a clear conscience." He added, "To the conservation movement, it is only production that causes environmental degradation; the consumption that supports the production is rarely acknowledged to be at fault."

Honest words that fall on deaf ears these days. As Monticello's neighbor to the north explodes with more motels and more gridlock, with predominantly low-paying jobs and with affordable housing a fading memory, clearly



many "progressives" have lost touch with their own core values.

\* \* \*

But what about Conservatives? Even right here in San Juan County...do they stay loyal and true to their core beliefs?

Consider the recent arrival of the Latigo Wind Farm with its 27 massive turbines, sprawled across the foothills of the Abajo Mountains just north of Monticello. The project has generated considerable debate and discussion among San Juan County residents. Some locals like Latigo, others loathe the project.

In a recent San Juan Record editorial, publisher Bill Boyle made the case FOR the turbines, noting that a preponderance of land in the county is publicly owned; consequently, he explained, the county needs to take advantage of whatever industry can be generated on private land. Bill wrote, "In a time of a decreasing tax base, the Latigo Wind Farm will help local governments maintain services and stem tax increases." Bill urged support for Latigo and added, "Don't forget that it truly is a private investment of private money on private property.

But when the story was posted on the San Juan Record's facebook page, San Juan County resident Scott Mitchell asked, "truly private investment?" How so if it is subsidized?

Bill Boyle replied, "A large number of industries receive subsidies of one type or another, but that does not determine if they are private or public. This includes farming, oil and gas pipelines, telecommunications, utilities, financial, health care, housing, education, defense. The list goes on and on."

That may be true, but to me, this kind of argument diminishes the credibility and honesty of the conservative cause. Bill, in effect, is saying, 'everybody else takes federal money, why shouldn't we? It's just the way it is.'

Isn't that EXACTLY why it's difficult to take conservative opposition to federal spending very seriously? The alternative energy subsidy program is a favorite of the Obama Administration, a Democratic president, who dramatically expanded subsidies for wind and solar projects across the country and who recently pushed to make the subsidies permanent. How is it possible that in Monticello, especially, so many of its citizens can find favor with a federal program promoted by a president they seem to, in all other ways, despise?

I recently looked up the voting results for Monticello in the last presidential election. Mitt Romney collected 856 votes to Obama's 95. Romney won the support of 90.1% of Monticello residents; Obama just 9.9%. Clearly there is little support for the policies of the Obama Administration. And yet, opposition to the wind farm has been muted at best.

<http://www.sanjuancounty.org/documents/Elections%20-%20Official%20Results%202012%20General.pdf>

Trying to determine what the mood of other conservatives might be, I sought the opinions of the conservative media and its views on wind subsidies....

In an opinion piece for The Hill, called, "Wind Subsidies Survive on Back Room Deals," Christine Harbin, deputy director of Federal Affairs for Americans for Prosperity, argued, "The Left says that it wants to inspire creativity and opportunity in the energy space and elsewhere, but they rely on old-school top-down handouts and mandates. Government-directed innovation simply doesn't work ...American taxpayers have seen very little return on our forced investment in wind energy over the past 20 years, especially in terms of long-term job creation and economic viability. Worse, decades on, the industry continues to lean on taxpayers and rely on special-interest, government giveaways."

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/262145-wind-subsidies-survive-on-back-room-deals>

The conservative Institute for Energy Research complained, "In his fiscal year 2016 budget proposal, President Obama wants to make the major wind subsidy (the production tax credit or PTC as it is commonly called) permanent. For the past 23 years, the American taxpayer has subsidized wind power to the tune of tens of billions of