

None Dare Call It Spying

By Commissioner Roger Koopman

At our last work session, I was taken to the woodshed by my colleagues on the Public Service Commission. Yup. A good, old-fashioned tongue lashing – led by that paragon of professionalism, Randy Pinocci.

Okay. I obviously had it coming. From Pinocci's perspective, the extensive hacking of my PSC e-mail account, which led to 39 of my messages being dumped onto the internet, was entirely my fault. I had committed the ultimate sin. I was speaking and writing openly about the work of the Public Service Commission, hoping the sunlight of public awareness might have an antiseptic effect on a diseased and dysfunctional PSC.

By the way. Randy Pinocci, with the help of Chairman Brad Johnson, was one of the hackers, having twice requested and received all of my e-mails through the Department of Administration. These commissioners had a specific goal of keeping this secret from me. Had they followed required protocol and requested the e-mails through the PSC itself, I would have been appropriately notified. But that would have involve more of that sunlight thing that they don't like. No, this little caper needed to be hidden from view. Commission view. Staff view. My view. And none dare call it spying.

What never occurred to these amateur Dick Tracys is that they could have spared themselves all the trouble and intrigue, by just asking me for them. It may have shocked them to know that I have nothing to hide, and I would have cheerfully passed them all along. But secrecy and intrigue are much more fun.

As if the commissioner-on-commissioner spying wasn't enough, a DOA investigation has revealed that at least one PSC staff person had also gained full access to my e-mail account, and for the past nine months has been secretly viewing all of my correspondence. This came to light shortly after the 39 e-mails were handed over to an alternative news service, resulting in a data security breach that has DOA and the PSC legal division deeply concerned. Considering the amount of sensitive and confidential information that travels through the PSC e-mail system, a breakdown in security undermines agency trust and greatly compromises our ability to do our job.

The most malicious aspect of PSC Spygate was the disseminating of three very personal, family-oriented e-mails that had nothing to do with my job. Personal communications are permitted on state accounts, albeit not encouraged. If Pinocci, Johnson or the guilty staffer had gone through the accepted procedure of a PSC records request, the privacy and legal review aspects of that process would have redacted or removed these extremely personal messages. But that process was circumvented and my privacy was intentionally violated. Which of these three were responsible? When asked, denials all around.

Concerning the spying itself, the two guilty commissioners are unrepentant. They believe they have done nothing wrong. Really? Then please explain to us, gentlemen, for what purpose this spying was done? What kind of "dirt" were you trying to dig up on me, and how much harm did you wish to inflict? From Pinocci came the disingenuous response so typical of this man: "I was trying to help Roger."

In fact, Pinocci is being so "helpful" that he plans to "release" more of my e-mails in the near future. He's being very strategic about this, to gain maximum impact and do (he believes) maximum harm. Such are the thoughts and actions of a politician, not a public servant.

Therein lies the problem with elected commissioners like Pinocci and Chairman Johnson. While running for office, they spout nice-sounding platitudes about protecting the consumer, and they get elected by having better name ID and the most signs on the interstate. But once on the commission, they remain in permanent political campaign mode. They read nothing. They study nothing. They express no original ideas and show no intellectual curiosity for anything the PSC does. Just view any archived PSC hearing or meeting and see how little these men actually contribute.

Koopman is serving his second term on the PSC, representing District 3 in southwest Montana. He previously served two terms in the State House of Representative as a Bozeman Republican.