



Wyoming Historical Society

Beki Speas, President

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Dear Members and Supporters of the Wyoming Historical Society:

All of you are in the midst of voting on the first substantive change to the Wyoming Historical Society bylaws since 1953. These revisions are the product of work that began before most members of the current executive committee started their tenure. That said, these revisions will help carry the Historical Society into the 21st Century.

The Society has been faced with three primary challenges: 1) declining membership; 2) less than half the counties in Wyoming have affiliated local Society chapters; and 3) lack of independent fundraising ability. To address these challenges and further the mission of the Society, the executive committee is taking the following actions.

First, the executive committee has hired a full-time executive director to focus on outreach, partnerships and fundraising. To maximize the use of this position, the Society needs to streamline the administrative responsibilities required by our current bylaws. The executive committee has no desire to eliminate needed committees but instead seeks to make the committee structure of the Society more flexible and responsive to the needs of the Society. By doing so, we hope we can better serve our membership and encourage new members to join us in our mission.

Second, only 12 counties have Wyoming Historical Society chapters, but other groups proliferate around the state that are committed to the mission of preserving Wyoming history and educating our communities on that unique subject. Our goal is to ensure that the Society can support any group committed to

preserving and sharing Wyoming history, regardless of any formal affiliation with the Society.

Finally, the task of preserving and sharing Wyoming history takes money. The Society has had a long relationship with the Wyoming Historical Foundation, but, unfortunately, in recent years, the Foundation has become less transparent with the use of its funds. The Society needs its own fundraising capacity so that we can control how we preserve and share Wyoming's unique history. It is time for the Society to have independent fundraising capacity – including the ability to maximize contributions for the direct support of Society initiatives.

One such initiative would be preparing a long overdue audit of the Society's finances. The Society has not had a formal audit in at least 18 years. The current executive committee had hoped to make this a priority until we started getting quotes. An audit will cost approximately \$30,000.00 – an expense the Society cannot afford on its current budget. The Historical Foundation has offered to contribute \$5,000.00 to the costs of an audit, but this is insufficient to meet the cost of the audit. With additional fundraising capacity, we hope to raise the funds necessary to complete this audit. In the meantime, the Society's Executive Committee has continued to obtain independent external reviews that, while not as exhaustive as an audit, ensure that funds are kept responsibly.

Moreover, for the first time ever, our executive director is bonded to the full amount of assets under her administration - \$200,000.00. In the past, the Society's part-time executive director was only bonded to \$40,000.00. While this change caused us to have to use a new insurer for the Society's bonding, the bonding is now in place. This Executive Committee is committed to the responsible use and oversight of Society funds.

This Executive Committee is also committed to being as transparent as possible with membership. Unfortunately, in recent months a section of the membership has been threatening legal action against the Society and has even resorted to threats of violence against Executive Committee members and staff. The Executive Committee has therefore retained legal counsel and has had to meet with counsel in executive session to discuss threats made by a minority of the Society's membership. That said, minutes of all non-executive session meetings are posted on the Society's website at <https://wyshs.org/mission-vision/official-documents>, along with annual budgets, the Society's articles of incorporation, and the Society's bylaws. The email addresses for each member of the Society's

Executive Committee can also be found at <https://wyshs.org/contact>. We encourage any member who has any questions about the Society to reach out at any time.

While we hope that the current bylaws revisions, with your approval, will bring necessary changes to the Society; some things will not change. We remain committed to publishing the *Annals of Wyoming*, and, in cooperation with Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources, are in the process of updating the job description for the editor so the *Annals* may adapt to changing times. We will always focus on preserving and sharing Wyoming's unique history with our neighbors and the world; and hope the ability to partner with organizations outside the Society's chapters will elevate that goal.

At the end of the day, however, this is your Society. I encourage you to make your voice heard on the bylaws changes under consideration and vote. If you have questions about the revisions, do not hesitate to reach out to me or any other member of the Executive Committee. We are here to answer your questions.

While a very small minority of the Society's membership oppose our efforts to move the Society forward, I and my colleagues on the executive committee are confident that these are the changes we need to bring the Society into the 21st Century and ensure that our Wyoming history remains a vital part of our state's unique culture for generations to come.

Respectfully,



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