

Discussion of political meetings

Politics



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During the second semester of government class, I was given an assignment to attend three public meetings. I chose to attend a City Council meeting, a Republican Party meeting, and a Democratic Party meeting. The first meeting I attended was a City Council meeting at City Hall. The purpose of this meeting was to determine what actions the city of Havre should take regarding the recent legalization of medical marijuana in Montana. The setting of this meeting was semiformal. The meeting was called to order and the city council members began discussing business.

The council began the meeting by discussing current zoning districts. There was a lot of confusion regarding the zoning of businesses in Havre. There are several different zones in Havre, including Residential, Commercial General, and Commercial Intermediate. Currently, there are areas where zones overlap. In addition, there are businesses that are currently being allowed to operate in incorrect zones. They didn't know which businesses or how many this applied to. The council members agreed that they needed to get a map that showed the current layout of the zoning districts.

The inconsistencies with current zoning left the city with no way to regulate any medical marijuana businesses opening up in Havre. Since businesses in Havre are already being allowed to operate in areas that weren't zoned for them, the city could not stop a medical marijuana business from opening anywhere in Havre. Secondly, there wasn't a zone currently defined that would apply to a medical marijuana business. It soon became clear to the city council that before they could even begin to address the issue of medical marijuana, they needed to get the zoning issues figured out.

One of the council members mentioned that the issues regarding zoning was first brought to the City Councils attention two years ago when a casino had been considering opening up in the old Tip Top Video location. He mentioned that businesses in Havre were allowed to open up anywhere regardless of which zone it was and that it only became a problem when a business asked first. Another issue regarding medical marijuana businesses in Havre was how to regulate them. Currently, there was no way of knowing how many were operating in Havre.

The city did not require businesses to have a license and so that limited the city's options. Other communities that required licenses were having an easier time regulated these businesses. By the end of the meeting, the council was in agreement that there should be a moratorium placed on new businesses opening up in the wrong zones until these ordinances could be figured out. The city council agreed that the city not only needs to keep a closer eye on where new businesses were opening up but become more aware of businesses that are operating in the wrong zone.

A motion was made for a moratorium to be placed to not allow for zoning variances for all businesses, including medical marijuana, for the next 60 days. It was seconded and passed. At the end of the meeting, people were allowed to express their concerns and opinions. Rowlie Hutton discussed the availability of drugs in the community and his concern that medical marijuana would only make the current problem worse. He also offered to pray for the city council members so that they would be able to make the right decisions.

The owner of a gun business in Havre expressed his concern that medical marijuana businesses would be allowed to operate in undisclosed locations. He felt that there needed to be more regulations and requirements for them. It is clear that the issue of medical marijuana is complicated and emotional. The second meeting I attended was a Democratic Party meeting. This meeting was very informal. The first issue of business was their budget. Currently, there was a balance of \$2016. 00 in their checking account. They seemed pretty excited about that. Upcoming elections and candidates were discussed.

They wanted to set up two separate candidate forums in the newspaper as quickly as possible, before the primary election. Holding a forum at the high school auditorium was suggested. . It was also recommended that the radio stations to broadcast it live. The Harvest Dinner Committee also presented their report. A group of five people was needed to set up tables and chairs. It was suggested to schedule the dinner after Festival Days, but as early in October as possible. The agenda was set up for a dinner at 6: 00, speeches at 7: 00 and silent auction at 8: 00.

Senator Baucus, Senator Tester, and Governor Schweitzer were to be invited to speak. The dinner menu was also discussed as well as setting up a decorating committee. The placement of candidate signs was also discussed. It was implied that the Democrats always use the right size signs and always place them in the proper place. While the Republicans, on the other hand, never follow the rules at all. Several other topics were discussed including plans for the Fourth of July, the drilling of water wells and the new

transportation system. The final meeting I attended was the Republican Party meeting on May 13.

After the welcome, the treasurer's report was given. There was \$3473. 84 available so they would be able to afford their monthly services. The upcoming Hill County GOP Convention in Billings was discussed. At this meeting new areas of business were brought up. First, campaign contributions to candidates were discussed. Candidates are allowed to accept up to \$800. 00 in donations from any political parties. They decided to give \$2920. 00 in donations to the candidates. The \$150, 000 debt of the State GOP was discussed. Each county was to raise \$500. 00 to help pay off the debt.

They decided they would donate \$100. 00 for the next five months. Other new business included plans for the Fourth of July, a vacation raffle, the booth at the Great Northern Fair, and Festival Days. After the new business, old business regarding the redistricting and apportionment meeting and Primary Election were talked about. An update on the candidate was also given. The meeting was adjourned after a period of open comment. I found that all the meetings I went to were interesting.

I was surprised to see how different the Republican and the Democratic meetings were. For xample, the democrats spoke poorly of the Republicans and accused them of not following the rules. The democrats also seemed less organized then the Republicans. At the Republican meeting, I was asked why I was there and even asked to join or help out at some of their functions. I never paid much attention to elections before or even thought about how much goes on behind the scenes. Both of these parties, obviously, play an

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important part in every election. After attending, the meetings of both the Democratic and Republican Parties, I do see the importance of volunteering.