

**MEMORANDUM**

Date: September 26, 1994  
To: Senator Dole  
From: Alec Vachon ✓  
Re: Hutchinson News Editorial

- \* You asked about me to look into the attached Hutch News editorial, which seems to imply that you are involved in the fate of Convention Hall, and makes jibes about "unreasonable bureaucrats" and ADA. At Dave Spears's suggestion, I spoke with Hutch City Manager, Joe Palacios. As described below, he advised staying out of this matter -- it is a political hot potato and the future of Convention Hall will be on the ballot in November.

**SITUATION WITH CONVENTION HALL IN HUTCH**

- \* Convention Hall was built 80 years ago -- President Taft laid the cornerstone. Some historic interest, but not a landmark. It is a general facilities hall -- dances, lecturers, dinner, etc. Many Hutch residents have some sentimental attachment -- e.g., met their spouses there.
- \* The Hall is in poor shape and operates about \$60,000 in the red each year, so City Commissioners recently voted 3-2 to demolish it.
- \* In part, ADA costs were an issue: it would take \$500,000 to bring the hall up to ADA standards. It would also take another \$250,000 to meet fire codes, and \$2 million to make the building "first class." [N.B. According to Kathy, this office has never been contacted re any funding to renovate Convention Hall.] However, ADA and fire code costs are the most immediate costs, and the Commissioners thought the money would be better spent on another building.
- \* Although the editorial implies Convention Hall is a model of accessibility, it is not -- e.g., ramps are laid over stairs and a person in a wheelchair would be need to be a football player to even get in the building without help.

**WHY THE HUTCH NEWS EDITOR IS GRIPING**

- \* For some reason, the fate of Convention Hall has become a cause for Hutch News editor Wayne Lee, who moved to Hutch last year from Simi Valley, California. He thinks the City Manager's staff has overestimated the ADA renovation costs so the City would invest in another building--THEY ARE APPARENTLY THE "UNREASONABLE BUREAUCRATS" HE REFERS TO.

Dan

- \* Under ADA public buildings are held to a higher standard of accessibility than private businesses. The City considered selling Convention Hall to a private group for \$1 -- but no one wanted it. The Hall is built over a creek on bridge supports -- which are cracking.

#### **HOW YOUR NAME CAME UP**

- \* About 2-3 years ago during a visit to Hutch, you suggested folks talk to Gina MacDonald about ADA compliance. Joe said it was a "fantastic suggestion" -- Gina has provided smart, practical help.
- \* As a result, the City of Hutch got a Brady Award from the National Organization on Disability in Spring 1994.
- \* Nonetheless, the City Commissioners thinks Palacios and his staff have gone too far in making the city accessible. One Commissioner made a private remark that it cost \$350,000 to get a \$1,000 award. To date, Hutch has spent about \$700,000 on ADA--\$350,000 in city funds, \$350,000 in CDBG monies.

#### **CONVENTION HALL IS A POLITICAL HOT POTATO**

- \* In any case, the question of whether to demolish Convention Hall is on the November ballot, along with two other hot potatoes -- term limits and changing the election of Commissioners from at-large to districts. (Incidentally, the term-limit campaign is being run by volunteers and hired hands from Lawrence.) There may be a new City Commission next April.
- \* N.B. I visited this week with local business leaders and city officials from western Kansas re ADA, and implementation generally seems to be going well. I will have a detailed memo to you shortly.
- \* If you would like any other action on this matter, please let me know.