

My Conversation with Forrest Gump about Stranded Gas

R. Boyce 6/22/06 Community Perspective by Rich Seifert with logo

My phone rings and it's my ol' college football buddy Forrest Gump.

I recognize his Alabama drawl immediately. "So, Forrest, what prompts the call?" I ask.

Forrest: "Well, now that I have a lot of money and can't be bought by oil company lobbyists, I thought you might want to talk to me about your beautiful state and something called "stranded gas." Now you know I'm not a smart man, but I do know what stranded means. See, I'm a lot like that fellow Tom Irwin, and I can read."

Me: "Forrest, you must have seen in our newspapers that our governor wants to have our best and brightest legislators change more than 10 details about that stranded gas act.

"Now, funny thing is, if those 10 or so items need to be changed now to make the gas deal fall within the law, doesn't that mean that the governor made a deal he knew was not legal?"

Forrest: "Well, that gas line deal, like so many, is a real box of chocolates. You just never really know what you're gonna get stuck with. I'm not a smart lawyer either, and neither is that governor of yours, so that's all I have to say about that."

Me: "Well, maybe you're not the smartest man, Forrest, but you are a good, honest man. Now if your governor made a deal where the legislature couldn't do its duty by changing a law for 45 years, and your courts and Department of Law couldn't make right some detail of that deal because all disputes had to be given to an appointed "tribunal," and, finally, you as a voter, who served in Vietnam, and got the Congressional Medal of Honor, and played ping-pong as a great patriot, couldn't even change your laws by an initiative of the voters because your governor's gas deal signed away that right too... I think you can see why we're a bit worried about where this is going. Sometimes I wish I were a smarter man too, Forrest, but I am who I am. And Alaska seems to be giving up just about all its important rights for this governor's deal.

Let me count them out for you:

1. The Legislature can't do its constitutional duty and change tax laws.
2. The people or the government can't make any legal challenges to the law or the whole deal in court. They are virtually powerless, so the basic power of our state to challenge legal aspects of the gas deal is taken from us.
3. We can't change taxes by the only method that's left to us: voting on a people's initiative petition. So we can't vote, nor can the Legislature act, nor can any of us sue in the courts to make things right we find are not working.

We might as well be prisoners at the Guantanamo Base for all the rights we've had taken away by this deal. What do you think Forrest?"

Forrest: "Well as you know, I'm not a smart man, but I do know what stupid is, and stupid is as stupid does. This deal, if what you said is true, is just downright stupid. Worse, it makes you slaves to that law, and to the oil companies. At least that's what it seems like to me. Now I don't know for sure, but I think I'd get that old stranded gas law out and NOT bulldoze it away, but see why it had those 10 items in it in the first place."

Me: "I think that's a pretty good idea, Forrest. All this makes me pretty tired, so I guess I'll have to think more about it. Sure is good to talk to you, and you make me think that the future ought to be better than this gas deal would make it. I remember that you once wondered whether we all have a destiny, or whether we are all just floating around without a plan. Seems like the governor wants to give us the wrong destiny. "

Forrest: I found that before you eat a box of chocolates, you've got to make sure they are real chocolates first, and open the box. You might be real disappointed if you aren't careful.

Me: Thanks Forrest. I'll tell the legislature.