

COLUMN FROM MAYOR TIM SHADBOLT

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THE HOTSEAT

Once again the highlight of Fieldays for me was taking part in the AgResearch Debate. The moot for this year was that 'A Blonde has more value than a Tractor'. The 'boys' team led by Jim Hopkins got away to a flying start as Sir Edmund on his 'Fergie 28' ploughed across the Antarctic ice to reach the South Pole. I concede that most farmers would rather snuggle up in bed with a blonde than a tractor, but while a tractor can pull you out of the muck, a blonde is likely to get you donkey deep in it. Then Ewen Gilmour, the 'Westie' comedian destroyed any hopes of victory. He pointed out that the good thing about tractors was that if you had a lousy day at work you could kick a tractor and you wouldn't lose your job as a television sports commentator. A loud groan along with a few boos erupted from the audience. Annette Presley and her team of blondes swept to victory.

Another disappointment for me was the failure of Rodney Hide to visit Invercargill last week because of ice on our runway. At present he is touring the country campaigning against Councils who engage in anything other than core activities such as roads, drains, sewerage and rubbish. One example he continually uses is how Tim Shadbolt went and bought a Lotto shop in Bluff. It's a punch-line that always gets a great laugh.

I wanted to point out to Rodney that buying a Lotto shop was a brilliant decision. It started when all the banks in Bluff closed down. Tourists going to Stewart Island, sailors coming off ships, as well as locals often wanted cash.

First of all I met with banking leaders and begged for an Eftpos machine to be set up in the town centre. They all refused. Then Council allowed its staff to give out cash, but there was little security at our Service Centre and on busy days we were giving out up to \$20,000. When the Post Shop came up for sale we grabbed it and then launched a successful campaign to have it transformed into a Post Bank. Problem solved.

Surely this should be used as an example of Council being proactive in solving a community problem. Does Rodney want us to sit on our hands and refuse to take any action because it's not part of our core business? Well, not exactly. What he is advocating is that if our Council wants to buy a Post Shop with a couple of Lotto machines in one corner then we should hold a referendum. The Lotto shop is worth \$25,000 and a referendum would cost \$50,000. Anyone who wants to smack little children knows how expensive these referendums can be.

In my view Councils should always inform locals about their activities and we continually do this, but binding referendums are a cowardly form of decision making. I believe that if you are democratically elected you should have the courage to make decisions. If the community don't like your decisions they can drop you at the next election.

Look at how this Government is behaving. An announcement is suddenly made by John Key that the Government will spend \$30 million on an Auckland waterfront 'party central' for the Rugby World Cup. Local government will be required to invest \$54 million and Auckland's rates will go up by 6.1%. The combined Councils of Auckland are already \$3 billion in debt so this is a heroic decision. Unlike our 'Lotto shop' no referendums or consultation is required.

Despite the views of Rodney Hide, it now seems that the core business of Councils is the Rugby World Cup, including facilities for cruise ships. It will be interesting to see whose views prevail, or will we have one law for Auckland and another law for the rest of New Zealand? If that's the case they may as well give everyone who lives in Auckland a University degree. Sounds fair enough to me.