

A lot of people gave their all to nuke Divine Strake



BARB GUY

A one-line e-mail greeted me last Thursday after lunch. It said, "Your voice is not a miracle. Your voice can be heard. Divine Strake is dead."

It was from Pete Ashdown, an opponent of Divine Strake who lives in Salt Lake City. The message was to Pete's e-mail list, which he compiled during his campaign to oust U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch.

I smiled at Pete's fortune cookie brevity. To convince myself the news was real, I visited *The Salt Lake Tribune's* Web site. It had already posted Robert Gehrke's story, which ran on the front page of the *Trib* the next morning: "Feds pull plug on desert blast."

I was thrilled. Stunned. Thrilled. Stunned. Victories like these, where the little guy stares down the leviathan defense machinery

of the United States of America and makes the government blink, are rare and impossibly sweet.

Who gets credit for winning the battle? You do, if you called your representatives, wrote a letter to the editor, shared your thoughts at a hearing, engaged in a courageous conversation, participated in a poll, or submitted your concerns to the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. If you did anything at all, you helped win it.

Two people who earned big kudos are Steve Erickson and Robert Hager. Last year Erickson, a life-long policy wonk, signed his name to an intense legal document. It opens with these sobering words: STEPHEN ERICKSON [among 12 others], plaintiffs, v. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, DONALD RUMSFELD, [and two others], defendants.

Yes, Erickson sued the Bush administration to stop Divine Strake. Robert Hager is the Nevada lawyer who handled the case.

Erickson says it never would have happened without Hager, who credits Peggy Maze Johnson, head of Citizen Alert, a Nevada watchdog group. He also cites the five world-renowned experts who gave comments as part of the lawsuit -

two scientists, a legal scholar, a pathologist and a Western Shoshone elder. Hager adds, "I appreciate the public comments of everyone in Utah. You cannot underestimate the effect a dedicated group of people can have."

Ashdown expressed gratitude that so many spoke from their hearts at the public meetings. He says, "I'm extremely encouraged that [the government] listened to us. I'm encouraged Senator Hatch listened to us." Against all odds, beyond usual boundaries, people want to share the glory.

Erickson sums it up this way, "It's a nice little victory. Everybody did a fine job on this across the board. I think the lawsuit had a major role. Individuals, organizations, city councils, county commissions, the governor, and even the Utah delegation - all of that combined had an impact on the outcome. ... It's a team win."

It's such ecstasy to win. First the elections, then a round of resignations, and now this. For some, the world is just beginning to make sense.

But I hear Erickson choose the word "little" and it gives me pause. On one hand, I crave a victory party, but I also understand that it's never over. Vigilance is required. That's where "little" comes from. We

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can relax a moment, but must do it with one eye open.

A curt DTRA press release says in part, “[The decision] was not based on any technical information that indicates the test would produce harm to workers, the general public, or the environment.”

Right. You can tell they’ll be back.

A lot of people gave their all to nuke Divine Strake. So for the triumphant stakeholders, maybe a joyous revel is in order, but then it’s right back to staying informed and speaking out.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.