

No inspiration for taxpayers

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Culture doesn't come cheap.

Re-shaping it costs plenty too.

That's what we surmise given a recent newspaper report. It is one of those stories that is so preposterous, so utterly ridiculous, so far beyond the pale n that is it makes perfect sense.

Not ♦makes sense' in the sense that one iota of common sense is involved. Nah, the story ♦makes sense' because it is what we have come to expect.

We all know that the state of Idaho is having budget problems. We know that because the rest of us are having budget problems. While we aren't nearly as smart as say, a college professor, we mere taxpayer-types understand that when our income goes down, we have to make adjustments.

We cut spending.

Of course, it happens without all the fuss and muss that accompanies spending cuts in the public sector. There are no protests, no trips to Boise, no groups of people packing placards decrying the injustice of it all and n perhaps most notably - no reporters.

Whenever government budgets are impacted, much of the process includes hand wringing and teeth gnashing among government-types. That commotion garners attention of media-types who file reports about the dire consequences all of us face because this government budget or that government agency faces a cut.

And that has been the case this year at the University of Idaho.

Over the last several weeks, especially during the legislative session, there has been considerable coverage of the ♦tough decisions' facing administrators at the Moscow school. We've all read about the terrible, horrendously ruinous budget cutting required at the austere institution. We know that thanks to the extensive reporting about the situation.

And, thanks to more reporting, we learned something else about the University of Idaho budget.

We learned the school has \$112,500 to hire a ♦Chief Inspiration Officer.'

No, we did not make that up.

Well, except the part about ♦hiring' the Chief Inspiration Officer. What actually happened is the University of Idaho spent \$112,500 for a part-time Chief Inspiration Officer.

A really, really part-time Chief Inspiration Officer.

As in the lady comes to Moscow less than two weeks a month for her pay.

And this, we are told, is a good thing. Doug Baker, provost at the school, defended the spending and was quoted by the AP as saying the Chief Inspiration Officer is " . . . helping us

reshape our culture.”

Well then, as long as some culture is being shaped up then it sounds as if everything is well-managed at the University of Idaho. There is little doubt that the reshaped culture is reason enough for any unemployed logger to be perfectly satisfied that his tax money is being well spent. Besides, anyone who might think that \$112,500 for less than 18 weeks of work is a bit costly simply needs his culture reshaped.

Of course this is all insane. There is absolutely no justification for spending that kind of money for anything that even sounds like, looks like or acts like a ♦Chief Inspiration Officer.’

But the real tragedy here is none of this is surprising.

We are so accustomed to reading about zany government spending that a \$112,500 Chief Inspiration Officer in the midst of a deep recession barely penetrates the consciousness. What’s more, nothing will happen. Taxpayers will grumble and groan, then move on with our lives. The lady, who travels from Minnesota to inspire people at the University, will collect her pay. The guy who hired her will continue to work at the school and admire n presumably n the re-shaped culture there.

And next year?

Why, next year we’ll read more stories about the dire budget cuts facing the University of Idaho. - DAN HAMMES is publisher of this newspaper.