

'Dumbfounded' Ron Crane isn't dumb at all

Marty Trillhaase The Lewiston Tribune | 3 comments

Where ever did Idaho Treasurer Ron Crane get the idea you should cover the cost of his daily commute to work?

Everybody else in Idaho is shelling out \$3 and \$4 a gallon for gas. But Crane, who commutes the 50-mile round trip from his Nampa home to his office in Boise, uses a state-issued gasoline credit card to fill his tank. In the past three years, that's cost taxpayers \$6,900.

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Crane earns \$90,000 a year.

Legislative auditors, who uncovered the practice, referred the case to Canyon County Prosecutor Bryan Taylor. The focus seems to be Crane's sloppy record-keeping, although given the sums involved, Crane either was burning up the highways between work and home - or he spent some of the taxpayers' money elsewhere.

Either way, Crane and his lawyer, former Idaho Attorney General David Leroy, say no laws were broken. In fact, by filling his own car with state-provided fuel, Crane says he saved the taxpayers money over having them furnish him with a state-issued vehicle.

Hence, Crane said he was "dumbfounded" when legislative auditors referred him to Taylor's office.

Dumbfounded?

Really?

Crane is charged with managing millions in state dollars. So you'd think he'd know he wasn't entitled to a state-issued car. Since 1996, "the use of state vehicles for personal or other non-official business is strictly prohibited."

Dumbfounded?

For the past 15 years, state policy disallowed "expenses for travel between home and office or for other non-official purposes. ..." Crane didn't know that?

Dumbfounded?

This is a politician who served 16 years in the Idaho House before winning his current post in 1998. How can he be so out of sync? As John Miller of The Associated Press reported, four of Crane's fellow elected state officials drive their own cars to work and pay for their own gas. That includes Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, Lt. Gov. Brad Little and Secretary of State Ben Yursa. Controller Donna Jones makes a 120-mile round trip between Boise and her home in Payette. She uses her own car and pays for her own fuel.

Only Attorney General Lawrence Wasden uses a state-provided car to commute between work and his

Nampa home - and uses a state-issued credit card for the fuel. But Wasden's office notes that's part of a long-standing compensation package for the attorney general and he pays income tax on it. Crane paid no tax.

Dumbfounded?

Has Crane failed to notice how a third of the state budget disappeared during the Great Recession? How state workers were furloughed or even laid off? How they went without pay raises year after year? How school budgets were crimped and college students were forced to pay skyrocketing tuition to compensate for depleted higher education budgets? How desperately vulnerable adults were told the "new normal" of Idaho's economy required them to sacrifice some of their Medicaid-provided health care?

Yet he continues to live a life of privilege. Where did he get this sense of entitlement?

Could it be from state Sens. John McGee, R-Caldwell, and Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, who would rather sleep in Boise - rent-free, of course - during the legislative session but charge you extra through their legislative expense accounts?

How about state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, who refuses to pay income taxes and thinks he's entitled to steal timber off state lands?

Or the steady string of state lawmakers who convert years of legislative service into hefty state retirements by switching over to lucrative administrative posts late in their careers?

How about the part-time lawmakers who draw full-time health insurance benefits?

Or former State Tax Commission Chairman Royce Chigbrow, who cut sweetheart deals for his friends and escaped prosecution on a technicality?

Dumbfounded?

Hardly.

From here, it sure looks like Crane hasn't missed much at all. - M.T.