

Idaho Education Network (IEN): Do You See a Pattern?

Chris Carlson/The Carlson Chronicle

Once again high officials in the administration of Idaho Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter have been caught misrepresenting "facts" and manipulating data in order to present a less than honest picture to the people of Idaho. It is intentional, done with malice aforethought, and it is deplorable as it is deceitful.

It is the latest issue in the long-playing saga surrounding the questionable award of a lucrative contract five years ago to a subsidiary of Qwest, the telecommunications giant and a contributor to Governor Otter over the years even though their bid was not the low bid. From e-mails produced in the subsequent lawsuit by the low-bidder, Syringa, which includes in its principals members of former Governor John V. Evans' family, it was clear to Supreme Court Justice Jim Jones that the then head of the Department of Administration, "First Bud" Mike Gwartney, had predetermined that Qwest would win. Justice Jones denounced this fix in scathing language.

Purpose of the contract was to deliver broad band width primarily to most of Idaho's many rural school districts so that they could offer their students dual credit courses, classes whereby students could get both high school and college credits for the class. Many states have these so called "running start" programs whereby a student can get a jump on going to college and earn early credits that reduce the cost of college for the student and save having to take heftier student loans out to finance a college curriculum. While nobly intended there is obviously something rotten in /Denmark that cries out for further examination: the cost!

Leave it to an enterprising reporter, Judd Wilson, for the St. Maries Gazette-Record, to ferret out the cost and ask the obvious questions on behalf of the taxpayer. Wilson looked at a press release put out by the Department of Administration last month which claimed that 5,010 students had earned 15,905 college credits through IEN, thereby saving families over \$2 million in tuition at typical rates, thus saving Idaho families hard earned cash. Give Otter's Department of Administration an F in Math if one is kind. Call it deliberately deceitful if you're not so inclined.

Since its inception in 2009, the Idaho Education Network has cost federal and state taxpayers \$28,552,670. Do the math yourself. It averages out to \$1,795.20 in taxpayer dollars for each of the 15,905 college credits touted by the Department in the report---except of course that number isn't there.

Hello! Is anybody there? How can this be justified? A dual credit at North Idaho College costs from \$65 to \$107 per credit. At Boise State the per credit cost is \$260 and at the University of Idaho it is \$311 per credit. So, can anyone explain why the IEN delivered dual credits cost almost six times as much as a Vandal credit?

Well apparently not. All one hears are vague statements about hard to measure intangibles that broadband brings to rural districts, such as---President Jimmy Carter appearing in some program presented to a government affairs class in some school like Kendrick? Give me a break.

This cries out for another Attorney General ordered investigation as well as a new oversight board to be put in place to prevent further rip-off of the taxpayer.

The irony of course is some colleges and universities, particularly elite ones, such as Dartmouth, are beginning to question the awarding of college credit for courses taught by high school instructors. As they should. Ask any instructor of a "running start" class and if honest he'll admit that many students don't belong in the class, care little for the subjects, but districts sure like the additional funds they can garner for having the class available.

Dartmouth has gone so far as to even not allow the SAT approved Advanced Placement classes in English, History and Math to be counted towards a Dartmouth diploma. Good for them as they are being honest about trying to insure the quality an education they provide costs.

Does anyone not see the pattern that is emerging? From the dismissal of the Transportation director for cancelling a contract awarded to an Otter favored entity to trying to skip through an investigation of CCA's falsifying work stubs to paying more than top dollar for the IEN contract it becomes ever clearer that there is no captain at the tiller of the Idaho ship of state. We are adrift in the rough seas full of pirates glad to take advantage of Idaho's apparent inability to really provide oversight of outside contracts.

The pirates smell the fat hog that they can keep cutting as long as there is no real leadership or any real oversight. Greed is rampant and the taxpayer is clearly getting gouged but does anyone really care enough to do something about it?