

It's only money

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho County Commission Chairman Jim Chmelik of Cottonwood. No one has been more of an acolyte to American Lands Council President and Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory. But it turns out Ivory is spending half of the money his nonprofit collects on himself.

The Washington, D.C. watchdog group Campaign for Accountability documented how the lands council collected about \$228,000 in dues in 2013 - of which Ivory claimed \$95,000 as salary and another \$19,715 went to his wife, Rebecca.

Chmelik has championed the idea of drawing \$5,000 annually from the county taxpayers and handing it over to Ivory's group.

Elsewhere across the country, the lands council collects:

- \$128,000 from 20 Utah counties.
- \$46,000 from 10 Nevada counties.
- \$11,000 from three Arizona counties.
- \$11,000 from three Wyoming counties.
- \$6,000 from two New Mexico counties.
- \$6,000 from two Colorado counties.
- \$4,000 from four Washington counties.
- \$2,000 from two Oregon counties.

Among Idaho's 44 counties, only Idaho County's leaders have seen fit to hand over your hard-earned tax dollars to Ivory.

Moreover, Chmelik has constructed a political career - he ran unsuccessfully last year for lieutenant governor - as a disciple of Ivory's discredited notion that the states can sue the federal government into relinquishing their public lands.

When the Tribune's Eric Barker caught up with him Tuesday, Chmelik didn't miss a beat: "We live on a federal plantation and 34 other states get to tell us how to live our lives."

What would you expect Chmelik to say?

"Oops?"

JEERS ... to Nez Perce County Commission Chairman Doug Havens. He didn't like Sunday's editorial about the county commission's apparent support for a partial tax exemption designed to encourage Clearwater Paper to locate its \$160 million equipment update at Lewiston's mill.

And he said so in a Wednesday "Turnabout" column.

All to the good.

This page will always welcome views contrary to its own.

Just one thing: Havens accused the Tribune of blowing off an April 16 county commission meeting when the tax exemption was discussed.

"Might I suggest in the future that the Tribune send someone to these important public meetings? The public is better served with accurate and timely reporting," Havens wrote.

Come on.

Havens should know as well as anyone the media can be outmaneuvered by a three-member board that meets in continuous session. Reporters can't be there all the time.

Throw in a vague meeting agenda such as the one for the April 16 meeting. It spoke of some sort of Clearwater Paper update.

Hardly the stuff to draw public attention.

Unless, of course, you just happened to know Commissioner Bob Tippett was talking with corporate officials before this session occurred.

Does that sound like transparency to you?

CHEERS ... to Washington state Sen. John Braun, R-Centralia. He's the chief architect behind the GOP Senate's plan to cut tuition at state universities and colleges by 25 percent.

If adopted, it would mean tuition at the state's universities would drop to about \$7,500.

To pay for it, the GOP has proposed spending \$245 million during the next two years.

Beyond that, Braun's plan caps future tuition increases to a percentage of the state average wage, now at about \$52,635. That wage tends to increase about 3 percent to 3.5 percent a year.

It's a dramatic reversal of the tuition inflation that has been particularly harsh to Washington college students. At the turn of the century, Washington State University undergraduates paid \$3,658 per year. For the next decade, tuition rose an average of 9.5 percent.

The Seattle Time's Danny Westneat says the plan makes Washington a national leader in college affordability.

"As with the \$15 minimum wage, we would again make national news for boldness - only this time coming from the starve-the-government party," Westneat wrote Tuesday.

JEERS ... to former Idaho Department of Administration Director Mike Gwartney and Deputy Public Works Administrator Jan Frew.

When the state was on track to launch its \$120 million Capitol renovation and expansion, Gwartney and Frew disregarded the disabled. If the Americans with Disabilities Act wasn't reason enough, the sheer ideal of expanding the access of all Idahoans to their elected representatives should have guided their decisions.

Instead, Frew and Gwartney looked for loopholes. They argued the state Capitol was a historic building, and therefore ADA did not apply to its renovation.

"We told them what they needed to do, and they ignored it," Kelly Buckland, who was then executive director of the State Independent Living Council, told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

That proved to be a \$400,000 mistake. The U.S. Justice Department's detailed investigation last week led Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden and U.S. Attorney Wendy Olson to strike an agreement involving 110 changes - including wheelchair-accessible seating in the House and Senate galleries, improving entrances and guiding people toward elevators they can use.

JEERS ... to Mary Jo Finney of Coeur d'Alene. Finney and her like-minded colleagues on a school district committee want the right to veto what public school students are taught.

Finney's group sought to block English teachers from using John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men." She says it's vulgar and dark.

Steinbeck depicted a brutally dismal period in American life - the Great Depression.

How should young people now growing up eight decades later learn about that era?

And what's next for the ban-the-books crowd?

"To Kill a Mockingbird"?

"The Catcher in the Rye"?

"Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"?

When the Coeur d'Alene School Board voted 4-1 Monday to keep the Depression-era classic, Finney advised parents to "pull their children from (District) 271, or better yet never put them in."

Who is Finney to impose her world views on the children of Coeur d'Alene?

Who made her the minister of culture? - M.T.

