

Idaho fits into Ivory's 'nonprofit' business model

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Idaho Republicans thought Ken Ivory was serving their interests.

Turns out Ivory, a Utah state representative, had a business model.

And you were part of it.

Ivory promotes a fringe notion - that the Western states can sue the federal government into relinquishing its public lands. That runs contrary to more than 200 years of the U.S. Constitution, federal case law, congressional actions, state constitutions and the preference of the voters.

Ivory, through his nonprofit American Lands Council, is campaigning for the idea - at considerable profit to himself.

You can debate the motives of a newly formed Washington, D.C. watchdog group, The Campaign for Accountability, when it asks attorneys general from Utah, Montana and Arizona to investigate Ivory.

But the source of the watchdog group's information is the federal income tax statements Ivory is compelled to file.

Those documents show:

- In 2013, Ivory's nonprofit collected \$228,000 in membership fees. The Lands Council then turned around and paid Ivory, its president, \$95,000 - plus another \$19,715 to Ivory's wife, Rebecca Ivory.

"It's a fledgling organization that's devoted to education," Ivory told the Associated Press. "I'm the primary educator, and so they pay my salary."

- Ivory draws another \$30,000 from a second nonprofit, the Where's the Line, America? Foundation - where he serves as executive director.
- Rebecca Ivory has founded the nonprofit A Most Sacred Trust, which is so new it has yet to report income.

Some of the money Ivory collected from the American Lands Council came from Idaho County taxpayers. During the course of three years, Idaho County commissioners paid \$15,000 in membership fees.

And Idaho gave Ivory a real boost in another way.

Two years ago, he became the darling of Idaho's right-wing legislators, who launched a public lands task force aimed at pursuing Ivory's strategy.

Before they were through, lawmakers spent \$90,427 to hire former Interior Solicitor William Myers of Boise to tell them what Clive Strong, the attorney general's natural resources division chief, and deputy Attorney General Steve Strack advised them for free.

The task force also relied on a \$20,000 expense account to crisscross the state to learn once again that the state could not afford to manage the federal holdings - especially when it comes to fighting fires - without either bankrupting other programs or selling off these acres to the highest bidder.

Finally, they re-discovered lessons from three decades of Sagebrush Rebellion politics - Idahoans prize access to their federal lands and are skeptical of any scheme that would threaten that access.

In the end, the task force shut down. Even an attempt to forge an Ivory-inspired public lands compact with Utah died in committee.

But while it was underway, this activity burnished Ivory's credentials as he toured the West - or mingled with allies in Washington, D.C. He could claim credit for getting Idaho to move in his direction. He undoubtedly converted the buzz into new contributions.

What did you get out of it?

Two years of distraction from the real challenge facing rural Idaho - finding some way to diversify the economy and forging on-the-ground compacts among people engaged in the debate over natural resources.

Under the circumstances, it looks like Ivory got the better end of that bargain.

Maybe that's what Campaign for Accountability Executive Director Anne Weismann means when she calls Ivory "a snake oil salesman, cloaked with respectability by his position as a legislator." - M.T.