

# CHEYENNE HERALD

FREE - TAKE ONE

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## Laramie County Community College Held Hostage Day 835\*



Darrel Hammon's Reign of Incompetence at LCCC may have begun before August 3, 2008.

But that is the day he boarded an LCCC jitney that would take him, about two dozen LCCC students, a couple chaperones, and his two daughters to DIA to board a flight to San Jose, Costa Rica, a beautiful Central American country where students planned an educational trip that would earn them credits and the Hammons planned a family vacation, paid for by the students.

His takeover of LCCC, making it a personal plaything and private piggy bank took solid root the night the group left DIA to fly to Costa Rica.

Hammon arranged so he and at least one of his daughters could use the free trips provided by a Billings, Montana travel agency. The college usually uses Capitol Tours and Travel of Cheyenne but this was to be a junket funded by the students and a Montana specialty firm was used. The roster suggested that Hammon would have an official function and that the daughter(s) might be considered "chaperones." Neither materialized. Within hours of arrival in Costa Rica, one of the students became a concern to the others and Hammon was summoned. As quickly as he could, he moved the troubled student from his daughter's room, reassigned her sleeping arrangement to an LCCC employee's room and designated an untrained, unqualified and unlicensed student to be the girl's "pharmacist."

To read more about the Costa Rica, see the Cheyenne Herald website (shown below) and search "Costa Rica."

In spite of the risk posed to the student in distress and others, Hammon would not cut short his vacation trip nor seek a

volunteer to return to Cheyenne with the girl - return her to the loving and compassionate care of her parents and mental health professionals. Hammon had blogged before he left that the Costa Rica trip was to be a family vacation, regretting only that his wife could not go also because she was caring for "grandma."

Incidents during the stay in Costa Rica were frightening and frequent. Hammon was oblivious. His purposes of sight-seeing, zip lining, photography, horse-back riding and similar were met. Students and an instructor were responsible - either by Hammon's assignment or their care and concern for their classmate - to insure the safety and well-being of the young girl with issues.

After the return from that disastrous trip, an LCCC group called the Care Team was approached by students who, among other complaints, felt there had been no educational benefit to the trip, and some sought refunds. The Care Team encouraged those who had taken the trip to provide input about their experience. Students and others on the trip were promised confidentiality if they provided a report on the trip. Hammon himself wrote a review. His, of course, exonerated his behavior and covered for his daughters who were there at students expense. Neither was a student.

Despite his best efforts to keep the Care Team Report under wraps, it was mentioned at the wrongful termination appeal hearing for Dr. James Cook. The WTE tried to get a copy of the Report and was refused by LCCC. An unsolicited copy was provided to the Cheyenne Herald and its contents, highly critical of Darrel Hammon, were made public. Hammon quickly bullied the Board of Trustees and LCCC's weak-kneed attorneys into seeking a temporary restraining order to force removal of a story and Report that had

already been posted on the Cheyenne Herald's website. That TRO was granted by Peter Arnold and LCCC became the target of criticism, derision and ridicule around the nation and world.

The issue of publication of materials such as the Care Team Report was adjudicated with the Pentagon Papers publication back in 1971, nearly 40 years ago. Another president, one also despised by many, Richard Nixon, claimed executive authority to force the New York Times to suspend publication of classified information in its possession.

No one could argue that the Care Team Report was "classified." The college made other bogus and unsupportable arguments, one being that the Cheyenne Herald's publishing of the Care Team Report would cost the college millions of dollars in federal funds. That, of course, was a lie. Just one of many Darrel Hammon has perpetrated on the Board, LCCC attorneys and the public.

In the Pentagon Papers case, decided by the US Supreme Court, it was argued whether the constitutional freedom of the press under the First Amendment was subordinate to a "claimed Executive need to maintain the secrecy of the information." The Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment did protect the Times' right to print the materials.

And these guys thought they could make a prior restraint action against the Cheyenne Herald stick? Arnold quickly rescinded the TRO and LCCC became a joke to those knowledgeable about First Amendment and freedom of the press

\* As of November 16, 2010. Beginning on August 3, 2008, the day students, accompanied by the freeloading Darrel Hammon and family members, departed the LCCC campus on their biology class trip to Costa Rica.

rights and protection of both under the US Constitution.

Hammon's slippage of his vice grip hold on the hostages did not really start until the Jim Cook appeal. Hammon had previously been able to keep the Care Team Report under wraps. Then, the dam burst. For the first time, LCCC was being subjected to a level of scrutiny never before experienced. The Cheyenne Herald had ignored happenings south of the blue arches. It just didn't seem important enough to invest the time to investigate the many complaints lodged against Hammon since he arrived by Trailways from a failed tenure at Miles Community College in Miles City, Montana.

The Cook public hearing (Jim Cook deserves great credit for demanding that his hearing be open to the public and pursuing that right through the hearing officer, Paul Hickey) revealed much of what Hammon had slyly hidden from public view, not the least of which was the Costa Rica trip and his reckless endangerment of students on that trip.

Jim Mathewson recently wrote about his audit of credit card use and misuse at LCCC. That coverage will continue. In an effort to whitewash Jim's findings, Hammon finagled an inferior "review" of Jim's review by a local CPA firm dependent on LCCC remaining an account. Please see page 3 for more.

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# Thank you

Those among us who will seek public office are to be commended. Not all are qualified and not all believe they have a chance to be elected but, once announced as a candidate, each has to be prepared for the praise and criticism, true or not, that will be heaped upon them.

Wyoming operates much in the dark - like before mass media became dominant in covering campaigns. Because of that, coverage is limited although often wrong, biased and improper.

And, in Wyoming particularly, there is so little respect for the broadcast and print media that consider themselves important that voters take with a grain of salt what is said or printed. Insulated as we are in Wyoming, when scurrilous attacks find their way into the mainstream media, it serves only to hurt the candidate, family and supporters. It seldom affects voters or election outcomes.

With that as an introduction, I personally thank all candidates. You did something I will not do. Be a candidate. You offered yourself for the judgment of voters who often will learn little about you or your candidacy. Kudos for being willing to serve.

Thank you also for those who ran active campaigns. Voters will pay some attention to your words even if not enough but you have to try. Few have family names that will get them elected. Most have to try to inform voters. No made-up group will get you elected unless they're capable of throwing tens of thousands of dollars behind you and your campaign. Few in Wyoming can do that - even in a statewide election where tens of thousands of dollars doesn't go as far.

And thanks to those candidates who advertised on the pages of the Cheyenne Herald. Over the past few elections, the Herald has become the medium of choice for more candidates than any other. Our readers vote. They pay attention and they vote. My opinions and positions cost me advertising but I can live without those afraid to be seen in the Cheyenne Herald. There are fewer and fewer of them. I especially want to thank those who don't like what I write but were intelligent enough to know that I reach voters no other media in Cheyenne, print or broadcast, reaches. Those calls and e-mails to me had to be difficult.

In the end, campaign cycles are the most fun of the political process. Voters have to sort the wheat from the chaff and invariably get it right. They make the best choices. Candidates, thanks for running and thanks for serving. I respect that.

# LCCC held hostage (from page 1)

Since the Cheyenne Herald began reporting on certain activities at LCCC and by its president, Darrel Hammon, much discussion has taken place on campus and a few changes have been made.

The issue of the Costa Rica trip travel agency-provided tickets and reservations has not been investigated and must be. If this is not accomplished by the Cheyenne Herald, the new Board of Trustees should retain a qualified investigator or fraud auditor to conduct that investigation.

After the vague, incomplete and defensive "review" of LCCC credit card use was reported by the same CPA firm that does the college's annual audit, they should not be retained for any further work short of an audit. They did not uncover any of the questionable credit card practices that Jim Mathewson so ably reported on in the Cheyenne Herald. Being retained to simply review parts of Jim's work will not get to the root problem of credit card abuse by LCCC employees, including its president and other employees hired by him against the recommendation of screening committees and others. Hammon believes he has a "presidential prerogative" that trumps LCCC policies and Wyoming community college practices.

The coverage on these pages over the last several months has made the emperor aware that he is being watched, that his wrongdoings will no longer be allowed without comment. Our disclosures now have employees, good employees, of LCCC taking the necessary actions to insure they are not ensnared in the machinations of a rogue and unpopular president. Public meetings are being held that are exposing the tyrannical rule of marginally competent management.

It takes courage for any board of directors, or trustees as the LCCC group is called, to provide oversight to an arrogant, loud, vengeful, spiteful and generally mean chief executive officer. That's why we see corporate CEO's in so much legal trouble. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. Darrel Hammon claimed, with no objections from an obedient board of trustees, total power. As he put it, his presidential prerogative trumped all else. He honestly does not believe LCCC rules apply to him.

That power trip has cost the taxpayers of Laramie County hundreds of thousands of dollars paid, and being paid, to wrongfully terminated employees of LCCC. The end of those claims is not in sight and will not be so long as Hammon has an office on campus.

What due diligence was done prior to hiring this man? What was his reputation at Miles Community College? Contacts I have had from Miles City describe the man we are experiencing in Laramie County. Petty, demanding, dictatorial and not above pressuring outsiders to do favors he was not entitled to at the school. That may explain his despicable use of complementary travel for the Costa Rica trip that should have been used to reduce the cost to students.

If it were simply a matter of a greedy president, the community might be able to stand by and silently accept his misdeeds. But his actions, and his control over the current board of trustees, have diminished LCCC in the eyes of the education world here and beyond.

His taking advantage of taxpayer funds to eat breakfast at The Egg & I all too often and dinner at Little America while being paid over \$180,000 a year, is disgusting. Any right-thinking man, which he supposedly claims to be, would pay the \$7.00 for eggs and hard potatoes out of his own change purse - not stick you for it time and time and time again.

That's cheap and unprofessional. And, if those charges were coded to "out of town" travel to try to avoid scrutiny, that is fraud. Fraud is cause for termination.

Would he resort to fraudulent behavior to claim reimbursement for \$7.00 worth of eggs? This is the same man who used the free travel provided by a Montana travel agency, based on student-paid tickets, for the Costa Rica trip. We will find out how he charged meals and other expenses in Costa Rica - when he was on an admitted "family vacation." If he charged his meals and/or his daughters' meals to LCCC, that is also fraud, in my opinion.

Worst about Hammon's taking of that free travel that belonged to students is that he could have charged his trip, and probably his daughters, to LCCC. The board of trustees provided no oversight and required no accounting or explanation for any expenditure by Hammon. He did not have to steal the comp'd tickets. The trip (which he had no business taking except Costa Rica is a notoriously beautiful little country), would have cost him nothing. You would have paid for it.

I am an accountant by education and have spent many years engaged in accounting and was treasurer of two national corporations. I have respect for CPA's. I never wanted, needed, or intended to become one because I saw the boring work they did on audits and it didn't interest me. But, I have retained CPA firms for audits required in franchising and just for good business practices.

I disagreed with those who said a local CPA already performing the annual "audit" of LCCC operations (a perfunctory one, at that) would gloss over the truth and provide a report matching what would assuage the fears of some LCCC personnel. I argued that no CPA firm would risk their certification for a \$100,000 a year account. It's not worth it.

I still believe that. But LCCC got around that self-test for the CPA firm by not engaging them in an "audit" where they would have to render an opinion that the Herald would blow holes through.

Jim Mathewson will write about the powder puff response the local CPA firm gave to satisfy LCCC officials, primarily Darrel Hammon I am sure, but I must borrow a couple lines to give readers a flavor for just how shallow this "review" by McGee, Hearne & Paiz LLP was:

***"We were not engaged to and did not conduct an audit, the objective of which would be the expression of an opinion on the credit card information. Accordingly, we do not express such an opinion. Had we performed additional procedures, other matters might have come to our attention that would have been reported to you."***

What needs to be done at LCCC now is an extensive audit. Not only of credit card abuses but of all spending by certain people. What travel has been charged to taxpayers (the credit card charges are probably minimal compared to direct billings for airfare, hotels, rental cars, meals, etc.) for travel by the president, the athletic director and others? Why were trips made and were they necessary or more pleasure-than-purpose?

It is unfortunate that this board of trustees commissioned a tepid review. Nothing of consequence should be done until the new board members are sworn. Then, if the body wants to get it right, they might want to seek our opinion and direction. It hasn't been done well to now.

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