

Anything two people know is not a secret

CHEYENNE HERALD

FREE - TAKE ONE

the local advocacy journal

November 29, 2011 -- Issue No. 230 -- Next issue December 13, 2011 ---- established January 30, 2002

When is the mayor traveling on official business and when is he just on vacation?

First, before his defenders take the bait, the mayor is entitled to vacation. My position has always been that the mayor is an elected official and, by virtue of that, is not limited to paid time for sickness or vacation. No mayor should have vacation "bought back" when they leave office, either. While voters may hope, even expect, that a mayor would burn the midnight oil, he is not required to do that. He could show up at the mayor's office only occasionally and no one could do anything about it except not re-elect him.

So, this isn't about the mayor taking a pleasure trip to Hawaii. He can go again tomorrow if he wants.

What I object to, whether the trip was paid for with public funds or private money, is a mayor and city councilman making a junket and pretending it is official business. If it were official business, the taxpayers would have paid for the trip. And it would not have been a closely guarded secret - either before and after. And, if it were an official trip, again regardless who paid the costs, it should have been reported and an accounting of what was intended with the trip and what was accomplished from it should have been shared with the governing body.

State legislators made a recent trip to Hawaii on official business. And whether you agreed with a trip to Hawaii to accomplish anything or not, Wyoming does belong to a western states group that moves the base for meetings among the participating states and it was Hawaii's turn. Except for the transportation expenses, I was reliably told that the room rates are less in Hawaii than in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, so the trip was, in some ways, cheaper than traveling 400 miles to hold the meetings. For attending the annual meeting in Hawaii, legislators were pilloried. Yet when the mayor and a single city councilman traveled to Hawaii on a pleasure trip that

included events coinciding with the 15th anniversary of the USS Cheyenne (SSN-773), the daily newspaper has been silent. Like the Cheyenne Herald, they were immediately informed about the mayor's presence via a Navy press release, including photos, yet they only printed a photo with a caption to cover the trip.

No story. No questions. No disclosure of who went or who paid. Nothing. Just a photo with the provided press release caption.

Nice job of reporting, no?

So, here's the story.

You be the judge as to whether you think the Hawaii junket was warranted and whether the mayor and a single city councilman (unapproved by other council members) should claim to "represent" the City of Cheyenne when they are not on official travel.

About a dozen and a half people, mostly from Cheyenne but maybe not all, were guests and considered "distinguished visitors" by US Navy's officials of the submarine, the USS Cheyenne, which named after this city, of course.

Arrivals in Hawaii were to be from November 7th to November 9th.

Among those making the trip were the mayor of Cheyenne, Rick Kaysen (his wife, their daughter and son-in-law), three former Chamber of Commerce Military Affairs Committee chairmen - from years 1998, 2004, and 2005 - (the daughter and son-in-law of one of them - who "live on the island" and the spouse of another), three CFD officials (no spouses there, of course), two travelers who claim to be "restaurant owners," including Noel Griffith (with spouse), and Patrick Collins (alone), shown as "City councilman."

Patrick is neither president nor vice president of the Council, nor, to my knowledge, a Navy veteran. He may have been included to diffuse criticism from the WTE - he is their darling and nothing he does would ever lead to their challenge or criticism.

Also present were two other men who are "related" to the USS Cheyenne through the local Chamber.

While this has not been presented as an "official" trip for the mayor and councilman, Collins at least required pick-up from the airport and he attended every event offered in conjunction with the visit but the mayor, for an unknown reason, did not commit to attend the Veterans Day lunch on-board the submarine and also did not commit to attend the "Post Deployment Awards Ceremony" on Veterans Day even though he was not scheduled back in Cheyenne until November 14th. He did not perform customary Veterans Day mayoral duties in Cheyenne, either. On vacation?

It is also interesting to note that the travel roster does not include a member of the military nor any Wyoming elected official like the governor, or even a state legislator. The Veterans Commission was also not represented, nor was the Navy - like the head of the Naval Fleet Reserve. This was mixing a vacation trip with being treated as a dignitary. "Distinguished Visitors," my ascot.

Noel Griffith is a local architect and vendor to the City. On the Hawaii trip roster, he was a "restaurant owner." What restaurant? Noel has always said Shadow's was his son's, not his. Was he a "sponsor" who paid travel costs for the mayor? Did he pay for Patrick Collins trip?

Among the scheduled events available to children and spouses of

these "distinguished visitors" were:

November 8 - "DV Cruise"
November 9 - "Command BBQ at Honeymoon Beach"
November 9 - "CHY DV Social at CO's House"

For my non-military readers, a "CO" is the Commanding Officer, and it's a pretty big deal to be hosted at his house. Some on the junket were also treated to a tour of the USS Arizona and other social events. Not bad hospitality for many who have no connection whatsoever with the military or local government. How does owning a restaurant (the claim of the two of the "DV" guests) entitle one to private tours and social events and to be treated as dignitaries?

My challenges to this trip by the mayor and one city councilman are:

1.) If it were an "official trip," expenses should have been paid by the taxpayers. The junketeers should have had to explain the purpose and benefit of that trip. And, if it were an official trip, why was a non-officer of the city council (Patrick Collins) invited (or allowed to attend) and others were neither invited or even aware of the trip. And, if it were an official trip having to do with anything military and coincidental to Veterans Day, why wasn't a real veteran on the city council invited? I know both Don Pierson and Jim Brown served on active duty and Jimmy Valdez has told me he had served in the National Guard. Finally, if it were an official trip, why didn't the mayor and/or Collins brief the council or public about the trip's purpose and benefits upon return?

2.) If it was not an official trip but a vacation, why did the mayor and councilman pass themselves off as elected officials in Hawaii? It was like flashing their badge to avoid a speeding ticket. And why were so many non-officials given treatment unavailable to other Cheyenneites?



www.cheyenneherald.com