

Warren National University's "hardship" appeal

In a move reminiscent of the boy who killed his parents then begged the court for mercy because he was an orphan, Warren National University (WNU) appealed the Wyoming Department of Education's (WDOE) revocation of their license/registration to operate once WNU withdrew their application for accreditation.

After years of fleecing "students" from around the country and world, in concert with lenders like Wells-Fargo, maybe to the tune of a half billion dollars, this unaccredited "institution" of 25 years behind the mask had the temerity to ask the State of Wyoming for more time.

While their grip is loosening, they still won't let go. They still will take course money, "degree" money - even graduation money - from students who are finally realizing what is happening and what has happened to them.

Forum postings by current and former students suggest that not all of them read or listen. Since the U.S. Senate hearings chaired by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) in 2004, it is hard to imagine that students who would plunk down their own or parents money, or borrow from lenders like Wells-Fargo so they could plunk it down - thousands and thousands of dollars for a degree from an unaccredited degree seller - and still did not know what kind of an operation they were entangled with. That they did not know the degree they would purchase - and I don't care if

they worked hard or thought they worked hard for it - would have diminishing value over time and little value when received.

But, more and more of them are becoming aware of their unwise purchase. And, it may be that a lawsuit on behalf of students who were cheated is in the works. More and more states are passing legislation to make the use of such a degree useless or illegal.

The nation's authority on listing unaccredited degree sellers was shocked to learn that Wyoming has no such law and that public employees like Cheyenne's police chief and the director of the Wyoming Department of Transportation both held such degrees. How many degrees from unaccredited degree sellers like Kennedy-Western, Preston, Newport International, American Central and others have received public funds for degrees sold to Wyoming public employees? That is my next investigation.

The chain of events which should lead to Warren National University ceasing to operate in Wyoming began in early January when WNU advised the WDOE that they had withdrawn their application, filed with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), for accreditation and asked for an extension of time to "teach-out" current students.

In a letter dated January 13, 2009, WNU was advised that WDOE did not have the

"necessary authority" to grant that request. WNU was reminded in that letter that "Wyoming law" required operations like WNU to either obtain accreditation, "remain a candidate for accreditation," or "otherwise be in the process for accreditation" to continue operating in Wyoming.

At that point in time, through their own choice, WNU was none of those three. WNU was advised of their right to a contested case hearing and told they had 45 days to request it. Shockingly, Wyoming law gives a scoundrel like WNU that extension to continue operations. In other words, to continue to solicit and accept fees from unwitting "students." Alabama shut down Preston on receipt of notice.

On January 27, 2009, WDOE notified WNU it was "revoking the registration granted on July 23, 2008 to Warren National University." WNU was informed it had ten business days to "provide evidence of compliance with all lawful requirements to retain its registration." And, "applying to another accrediting agency does not constitute lawful compliance."

WNU was still provided 45 days to

continue to operate. Forty-five days from January 27 is March 12, 2009.

A "Petition for Contested Case Proceeding" states it was "presented" to Jim McBride on March 12, 2009. The date stamp at WDOE is March 13, 2009.

In this "spill your guts" document, WNU disclosed to WDOE that a site visit by HLC had led to WNU be informed "it lacked the financial capacity to earn candidacy affiliation with the HLC." What happened to the tens of millions of dollars taken from gullible "students"?

WNU advised that by withdrawing, they could reapply within a year if they could "partner with a new investor," etc. WNU had asked for a "teach-out" period until June 30, 2009. That was denied. A bile-raising claim was made by WNU: That the extension would be "such a significant benefit to real people." Then, after acknowledging that WDOE had the "legal authority" to deny their request, WNU begged: "Rather, the Petitioner is making a hardship claim." Hardship accrues to the thousands of students who purchased these bogus degrees, not WNU.

The exchange of letters between Warren National University and the Wyoming Department of Education concerning their appeal of termination of their license can be read on the Cheyenne Herald website.

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The mall pall

I was a bit surprised to get such support for my stand in the last issue of the Cheyenne Herald - that I will not patronize Cheyenne's inferior enclosed mall so long as they have a ban on some of our youth.

I halfway expected a lot of criticism for standing up for a group of kids that the childless believe are all thugs, punks, hoodlums and druggies.

Rumors swirl regularly as to which of the retailers in the mall will be the next to close. Which large one. Small ones come and go all the time in a mediocre mall like Frontier Mall. Kmart owning Sears seemed like it would bring an end to both - sooner rather than later. That was kind of like Yugo owning Honda. But Sears is still open in the mall. A former GM of the J.C. Penney store in the mall once told me that the sales per square foot in the Cheyenne store were the lowest in the district this store is in. That may have changed. Let's hope so.

Neither of these national chain stores have full merchandise selections.

Dillard's is a marvel. How they manage the costs to remain in Frontier Mall - with two stores - defies explanation. If you walk through either location, you usually see more employees than customers. And the urban styles and colors presented seem better suited for a metropolitan area, not cowboy country. And the former Gart Bros. store? Can't say,

I don't think I've ever been in there except to walk through on my way to the "light store" or pet store with two of my nearly perfect granddaughters.

The retail stores are devoid of local operators. At one time, before it was obvious that local stores could not survive the high rents and "Common Area Maintenance" assessments, some local retailers tried. Do any remain? You might consider Taco John's a local place but that's a stretch. Franchisees operate all or almost all of the TJ fast food places.

There are malls, like Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, that dare ban certain groups of people. Their traffic is so great, particularly from foreign visitors, they don't need the young. To them, banning Orientals would bring more damage and they're not about to do that. The Minneapolis-St. Paul airport and Hubert Humphrey International airport are a short cab or bus ride from Mall of America. Some people are still excited about visiting what is reputed to be the largest mall in the world. Ho hum. To me, it is just a large mall. Nothing more.

What this mall did not consider when they decided to ban a group of young people rather than tighten security to rid the mall of the undesirables, was that those kids will become adults. And they have families. Friends. Will the ban work? Now and long-term? No. Management will look stupid and capitulate. They'll have to.

Billboards

There has been no movement toward removing the illegally-permitted billboard at Pershing and Seymour. In fact, new panels were put on the sign. That's what is called "a thumb in the eye" to the Court.

Obviously, the losers in the litigation, the City of Cheyenne and NextMedia, the billboard company that relied on the City's permit to erect the sign, have every right (and expectation) to appeal the district court judge's ruling. The City is experienced in losing at the district court level and typically have not appealed to the Supreme Court. NextMedia, on the other hand, has not only this billboard to try to protect but three others as well.

The judge made it very clear that the ordinance passed by the former city administration in 2006 is unambiguous - that it reads that new billboards are banned. The defendants in this action wanted the judge to rule on what they claimed the city "meant" to do, not what it did.

No can do. If a governing body gets it wrong but the language is clear, they are stuck with the outcome. And that is what happened in this case.

The benefactors of these wall-size signs called billboards include not only the billboard company but the property owner on whose land the sign is erected.

If each facing is sold for, say, \$750.00 a month, NextMedia brings in \$1500.00 a month for each billboard in question (if they can sell the signs which it appears they cannot do with any regularity).

One of the large new billboards is on the property owned by city councilman Patrick Collins, shared with his store, The Bicycle Station. This was one of the four billboards "permitted" after the City passed an ordinance banning new ones. If the City does not order the removal of that billboard, further court action will require it. If Patrick receives \$300.00 a month for that sign to exist there illegally, he will stand to lose \$3600.00 revenue annually. Revenue he, of all people, should have known was tainted.

Once these in-town billboards are removed, perhaps someone can take up the issue of those horrendous ones at the Colorado state line. They are a blight to our landscape and should come down.

You can read Goshen County District Court Judge Keith Kautz' ruling on the billboard matter on the Cheyenne Herald website.

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