

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."

THE CHEYENNE HERALD

the local advocacy journal

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Do you want to pay part of a city employee's donation to United Way?

by Dave FEATHERLY

The City of Cheyenne employees 2007 United Way Drive has a stated goal of \$44,000 and is offering several incentives to encourage employees to donate through payroll deductions to the United Way of Laramie County.

While the material presented City employees is vague and poorly written, it appears that most of the prize drawings and incentives are being offered by United Way.

An example: Those employees who contribute \$156.00 or more (\$13.00 a month or more) are entitled to "one entry into the drawing for \$20,000 toward the purchase of a vehicle of your choice." It goes up from there - \$390-\$545 gets two entries into the drawing, \$546-\$1091 gets three entries and \$1092 or more get four.

It is probably safe to assume that there won't be many employees at the City getting four entries in the drawing. But, I'd love to be wrong.

There is also an opportunity for City employees who will pledge \$75, \$100, \$125 or \$126 and more to get multiple entries into a drawing for four **Club** tickets to a Rockies / Giants game on September 4th. Those tickets are being donated by Maurie Brown, whose name was spelled wrong on the notice.

Finally, there are what appears to be donated prizes for different levels of pledges. A room with breakfast and two tickets to **Gypsy** next February from the Plains Hotel to 6 months free parking in the Cox

City of Cheyenne Employee's United Way Incentive Program

TIME OFF

"The Mayor has approved any employee that pledges ½ hour of pay per month = ½ day off from work or for any employee that pledges one hour of pay per month = two ½ days or 1 day off from work at the discretion of your supervisor."

Source: City employee pay envelope

Garage (now that's one donors should salivate over), to gift certificates from local businesses and restaurants like DeSelm's Art Gallery, Outback Steakhouse, Texas Roadhouse, Little America, Poor Richard's, Red Lobster, Egg & I, the Albany, Cheyenne Depot Museum guest passes (4), several Cheyenne Grizzlies baseball team items, etc.

Back to the offer above.

And let me make it clear this criticism in no way reflects on the United Way program. A very long time ago, United Way forged partnerships with employers to use payroll deductions as a method for employees to make larger donations, spread over a period of time. In spite of the value of United Way, they do not fund all worthy charities and programs. For example, here in Laramie County, the list of agencies receiving partial funding through United Way includes no "medical" charities. No cancer, heart, diabetes, ALS, alzheimer's, stroke, MS, etc., charity, receives funding from the local United Way. Of the 27 agencies receiving \$702,892 in funding in 2007, the Boys and Girls Club of Cheyenne (\$63,241) and Needs, Inc.,

(\$74,199) were the two largest recipients.

The point of the disclosures here is that for the City to authorize paid time off for employees who contribute to United Way, which funds worthy agencies but by no means ALL worthy agencies, is just plain wrong. Whether it is illegal is still being determined. It should be if it isn't.

The drawings for prizes donated by local businesses are an acceptable way to promote employee giving and generosity and those businesses should be thanked and congratulated for their involvement.

But the notion that the mayor can authorize time off with pay for those who donate to a specific group is unacceptable.

The first thought that came to my mind when I learned of this "incentive" was whether the members of the governing body who have employees themselves offer similar incentives to give to United Way or another worthy charity. Do Jack Spiker, Tom Segrave, Patrick Collins and Jim Brown grant time off with pay to employees who donate similarly? What if City employees asked for the same

consideration if they donate identical amounts to the American Cancer Society? Let's say that an employee's hourly pay is \$20 and they make a one-time donation to the American Cancer Society of \$120 (½ hour pay per month x 12 months), will they be eligible for ½ day off with pay sometime during the year, "at the discretion of your supervisor"? If not, their charity is being discriminated against.

It is likely that some, perhaps many, City employees already pledge a qualifying amount to United Way. They have done so without the "incentive program." To now give them a financial reward worth, to the same \$20 per hour employee, \$80 (a half day's pay) is an unnecessary, unwise and unwarranted use of public funds.

As good and credible as the United Way program is, it is not the only one and should not be given unfair preferential City treatment. As always, private businesses have every right to favor whomever or whatever they want so long as it doesn't violate other protection laws. But the City has no money of its own. All they have belongs to residents - to the taxpayers of this community.

In addition, if the City has excess employees to the point of being able to grant another day off (with or without pay) to potentially so many of its employees, it simply has too many employees.

A questionable use of public funds; favoring one charity over others; giving a reward neither asked for nor demanded by employees to give; establishing that the City has too many employees; a public subsidy without public approval ... just **STINKS!!**

PUBLICATION DATE TO CHANGE!!

Beginning with the first September issue of the Cheyenne Herald, Thursday will become our "on street" day. The papers will be available in the morning on Thursday, as opposed to Monday afternoon or Tuesday, as has been the case since the Herald was started. A schedule for the balance of 2007 is on page 5.

Dave Featherly

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