

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2009

Cowbird Cabana Commissioners



Every year for several years now, the **Springdale City Council** pays the **Springdale Chamber of Cowbirds** \$100,000 from the general fund, \$60,000 from the advertising and promotion fund, and \$17,000 from the industrial development account. The Cowbirds are supposed to be doing economic development for the city, but they take this government handout and co-mingle it with other funds, then spend the money however they want with no strings attached.

Alderman **Kathy Jaycox** proposed that the Cowbirds would have to have submit quarterly reports on the services they were providing to the city and include an itemized list of expenditures, then the city would reimburse them for eligible expenses. That idea went nowhere with the captive Springdale City Council, a majority of whom are members of the Chamber of Commerce.

After that, **Anita Davis** filed a Freedom of Information Act request and discovered a rather curious pattern. During the last three years, the City has given the Cowbirds **\$531,000** to build their local economy. During that same period, the Cowbirds spent \$306,175 on travel and \$144,388 on dining, for a total of **\$450,563**. Other than travel agencies, it doesn't appear that local business are getting much benefit from the city's investment, but others certainly are.

Cowbird Executive Board Chairman **Brian Moore** got a honeymoon trip to Tahiti in 2006, and another excursion to Istanbul, Turkey, in 2007. He said these gifts were "commissions" for his volunteer work for the Cowbirds. Other exotic adventures paid by the Cowbirds included trips to Spain, Mexico, Hawaii, New York, California, Miami, and the Bahamas.

Perry Webb, who had previous been caught avoiding property taxes on the Chamber offices, said, "We're not doing anything wrong." **John Lea**, a former chairman of the Chamber's executive board, said, "We have nothing to hide and not a damned thing to apologize for. When [Anita Davis] challenged the integrity of the chamber, she challenged the integrity of a lot of people."

Yep, he got that right.