

PARTY LINES:

December 5, 2006

### **Financial Control Problems in Davis County School District**

Recently, the Davis County School District discovered that \$4.3 million were missing during a five-year period. As a result, Susan and John Ross have been charged with a 47-count federal indictment on the misuse of Title I Funds given to underprivileged schools and the couple insists that they are innocent.

Clearly, there are questions being asked about their actions. Without question, we should not judge the Ross' and let the courts decide their fate. As taxpayers, however, we should be worried about the bigger picture. How could this have happened, why was this not revealed before and were there other misconducts that were hidden from the public? In a separate incident, questions are also being asked about the District's use of closed-door meetings. So, what is going on in the Davis County School District? Part of the problem can be blamed on us, the taxpaying public, as we continually permit government to govern without public involvement. Without public watchdogs, how are we to know what they are doing and can we ever trust our government? Our "one-party" form of government has undoubtedly created some unethical opportunities for a few government officials. True, corruption can happen with anyone and at anytime, but lax ethics laws in Utah have given some public servants rationalized reasons to act illegally or unethically. Reasons for some maybe the "bonus" they deserve, or maybe because no one is watching and no one will care.

But the School District is not the only problem we have in Davis County. We should also ask questions concerning our city, county and state governments.

Questions such as:

- Why are public records inaccessible from the cities of Clearfield and Syracuse in regards to public employee files?
- Was the Hilton Garden Inn in Layton built for the Davis Conference center or was the Davis Conference Center built for Kevin Garn's hotel?
- Why doesn't the Davis County Commission ever debate a single issue in their weekly public meetings? And why do they always vote unanimously on every vote?
- Why will Davis County not be honest with the public concerning the "retirement" of the Aging Services Director one year ago? Is it because they did not want the public to know about the unauthorized expenses the Director reported?
- Why has the State Office of Economic Development refused to publicly disclose tax-dollar incentives to out-of-state companies? Other states regularly discuss economic incentives in public meetings, but Utah Government seems to know better than the public.

These questions are not about a bunch of "whiney" Democrats, it is about taxpayers trusting our government. A normal two-party government is the only natural way to have checks and balances. Right now, our only government watchdog is the press. Unfortunately, our elected Republicans will continue to chop away the rights of the press and soon leave the public without a watchdog.

My hope is that the Davis County School District will correct their problems and give us a reason trust our government.

Richard Watson

Chair, Davis County Democratic Party