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Lane County: 'Working for You'

"Research showed that people don't really know what Lane County does," according to public relations firm Cawood Communications. Lane County hired Cawood and branded itself with the slogan "Working for You" to solve that problem. The county started a series of explanatory videos on the county website — from the District Attorney Office's "Protecting the Victims" to Lane County Waste Management's "Hazards and Nuisances." That series was "zeroed out" in the most recent county budget, according to Commissioner Sorenson.

A lot of things were zeroed out or cut dramatically in the budget process. County employees were laid off; services from animal control to communities in need were threatened. Unions have been asked for concessions to meet a multi-million-dollar budget shortfall. On July 7 the sheriff's office announced that it would cut 84 jail beds in order to meet county budget requirements. The commissioners did not ask the jail to cut the beds; Lane County Sheriff Tom Turner made the cut without first notifying the board.

But Lane County found the money to pay almost \$50,000 to former news anchor and one time Republican candidate for secretary of state Rick Dancer to make videos about Lane County. Sorenson, who didn't know about the contract with Dancer or the planned videos, said the board didn't vote on the money.

According to the Lane Manual, the county administrator can execute "all contracts and agreements not exceeding \$100,000 nor three years in length." Unlike contracts authorized by the board, the county administrator's contracts do not need to be discussed in a public meeting.

Commissioner Bozievich said he couldn't be positive, "but I think that was initiated by the county administrator within her budget." He said the new series is a continuation of the public outreach of the "Working for You" series (see <http://vimeo.com/25829160>).

Commissioner Handy said the previous video series cut out at the recommendation of County Administrator Liane Richardson was similar in cost to the Rick Dancer series, and called the board's discussion of cutting the award-winning "Working for You" series during budget talks a "charade."

Handy said there was "no public process, and without any Budget Committee input this same county administrator grants about the same amount of money to yet another well-known, right-wing friend for a video series designed to persuade the public that union members make too much money and should make concessions to balance Lane County's budget."

The new series has a working title of "Your Lane, Your Voice, Your Government," and according to information from Lane County Public Information Officer Amber Fossen, Dancer was contracted to do 12 videos for \$40,800 and six "water coolers" — live-streaming chats — for \$6,000, for a total of \$46,800. The water coolers will be live panel discussions on major topics. The videos will be available on Vimeo, YouTube and the county's Facebook page. Fossen said the county contracted with Dancer "last fiscal year, utilizing money

saved in county administration."

In the six-minute video Administrator Richardson, who authorized the expenditure for the series, said "whenever you're talking about benefits it's hard, when you talk about health insurance it's harder."

The video takes aim at unions and workers associations, which have been asked to take cuts in health insurance, while employees have been asked to take 15 unpaid furlough days, in order that the county save money. Jim Steiner, council representative for the county's 680-member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees local (AFSCME), said those cuts hit the most vulnerable workers at the county, and he questions the choice to try to "balance the budget on the backs on the folks making the least amount of money." Steiner said that "80 percent of our membership are women. Many are single parents working in order to provide health insurance for their children."

Richardson and the video go on to place blame on the Endangered Species-listed northern spotted owl for the county's financial woes.

The first Sorenson and fellow Commissioner Handy heard of the series was after *EW* found it posted on Bozievich's Facebook page. The county budget took "hundreds of thousands of hits," said Sorenson, but within a few days it was "signing an agreement for a video series and has the county administrator talking about her view of what the county should do with the budget." Sorenson said, "That's not a really good use of our money."

Commissioner Leiken, like Bozievich, was apparently aware of the video series. He responded to posts on Dancer's Facebook page where he was promoting the video: "Timber revenues is what kept the county in business years ago and I believe past leadership were thinking that either timber harvest or the Secure Rural Schools Act would not run out." He continued, "United States (is) importing huge amounts of timber from Canada and South America that we should be harvesting here."

Doug Heiken of Oregon Wild questioned this assumption that logging is the fix for budget woes. "If timber payments did fund the counties, even modest increases in the possible money they could get from timber sales is very small," Heiken said. "The county funding does not come from timber sales; it hasn't for 20 years."

Leiken said, "Earlier in the year we did adopt a social media policy, so clearly this follows within that guideline."

Hopping and leaping on a Moonshadow

Lane County has begun another difficult process — redistricting. Every 10 years, following the U.S. Census, the county redraws voting districts. This year the process has started under a cloud of suspicion.

The Oregon secretary of state's office requires district boundaries to be contiguous, utilize existing geographic or political boundaries, not divide communities of common interest, and be connected by transportation links. Districts must be of equal population. They cannot favor any political party, incumbent elected official or other person and not be "drawn