

Nothing like a weekend at the lake for better government

The Issue: Should Orange County taxpayers pay for their elected officials to attend a trendy management seminar at a lodge at Lake Arrowhead (pictured below) that is known for its "luxurious guest rooms" and "superb dining"?

The Orange County Leadership Symposium, sponsored by the Orange County Council of Governments, takes place next Friday to Sunday and costs cities and other government agencies \$375 to \$535 per attendee.

The Spin: The Council of Governments argues that officials should attend "because you care about the future of Orange County and future generations. ... And ... you want to enhance your leadership skills to enable you to work collaboratively on issues, instead of working in conflict."

The council says the event was located so far away "because the symposium requires a commitment. A commitment to listen, reflect and begin to implement the concepts and techniques that are introduced."

The Unspin: This is more wasteful, self-centered spending designed to stroke the egos of elected officials rather than help them do anything effective for the poor taxpayers who pay the tab. The symposium isn't as absurd as the Orange County Sanitation District's flap over paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to a New Age guru charged with filling the sewer district with a sense of mission. But it does reflect a similar sentiment: the navel-gazing of public officials, a loss of focus on the taxpayers and a willingness to squander public dollars in a way that is far removed from the agency's mission.

The idea that anyone who cares about the future and future generations should attend is pure silliness. I'd be happier if these officials cut us a break and cared about doing their tasks effectively and cost efficiently (can you say Peter Drucker?), without all the touchy-feely nonsense and pretense. Note the luxury, resort accommodations. You mean to tell me that officials can't get away from the hurly-burly (!) of government, meet other officials and listen to a motivational speaker in a hotel in Santa Ana?

Of course they can. But what's the point of learning to be better government managers if you can't bask in a hot tub at taxpayers' expense?

– **Steven Greenhut**

