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How the Cowbirds Get a Free Ride



Back in February 2004, **Bill Ramsey**, President of the Fayetteville Chamber of Cowbirds, said that improvements for businesses in and around the CMN Business Park are among the chamber's top priorities. "We're getting a lot of concern, not just from (current business owners) but from people looking at that area that it is not very easy to get to, particularly from Interstate 540," Ramsey said. "We are concerned about access to the mall area."

Facing a reelection campaign, Mayor **Dan Coody** got the message and said that several different "pots" of federal money might be available to help Fayetteville solve issues such as traffic congestion at the CMN Business Park, where traffic from Kohl's and other stores as well as the Northwest Arkansas Mall is constricted near the Fulbright Expressway. "Most of the money is drying up because of tax cuts and the war," Coody said, but in 2004 he proposed that the city spend \$85,000 in our tax dollars to hire the **Van Scoyoc Associates** lobbying firm to help secure funds for the Chamber's priority of improved roads to CMN Business Park.

About a year later, the lobbying firm arranged an excursion to capitol hill for Mayor Coody, **Phillip Stafford** of the UA Technology Development Foundation and the **Fayetteville Economic Development Council**, and **Dennis Hunt**, past chairman of the Chamber of Cowbirds. The University of Arkansas also has a contract with Van Scoyoc to do the Washington work for their Vice Chancellor for Government Affairs, who is also a past Chairman of the Cowbirds, but the Fayetteville Chamber is not on the firm's client list. The Cowbirds got a free ride at taxpayer expense when the trio told our delegation that their top priority on the list was the Fayetteville Expressway Economic Development Corridor, which included \$16.8 million in federal funds for improvements to 71B.

The *Northwest Arkansas Times* said that "if the schmoozing powers of all these folks combined return a good deal of money to our fair city, the effort will have been more than worth it. The pesky pessimist within us wonders what Coody expects to accomplish within a week, besides sightseeing. We wonder if a few days worth of glad-handing will make that big a difference. "At least the Chamber of Cowbirds got Coody to accept their choice of roads for Mallville as the city's top priority, to hire a bigtime Washington lobbyist to pursue that goal, and to include Chamber and FEDC officers on the trip without having to chip in for the lobbyist's expenses. Sweet.