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EDITORIAL: Youth Commission

State agency doesn't do itself any favors by using guard money to buy new carpet

By The Lufkin Daily News

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Thumbing your nose at the Texas Legislature is not the best way to get funding for your state agency. We wouldn't recommend it for, say, the Lufkin State School or the Texas State Railroad, or any other state-level governmental agency in East Texas.

We would not have recommended it to the Texas Youth Commission, either, but it's too late to provide that advice now.

Officials with the TYC, which had an awful 2007, have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars meant for hiring new correction officers on renovating and relocating their offices — even though the Legislature had turned down their request for such spending, according to a story in Sunday's edition of The Dallas Morning News.

Not a good idea. The agency defends itself by saying it used money left over when they couldn't find enough applicants to hire as many new guards as the budget allowed, but it appears TYC officials didn't even bother to let their new boss, the conservator appointed by Gov. Rick Perry, know about their purchases.

The amount the TYC spent on its shopping spree — which included the purchases of furniture, renovations and telecommunications equipment — totaled \$550,000, a staggering figure. But some of the items, in particular, don't pass the smell test — like new carpeting and furniture in the TYC executive office, at a cost of more than \$25,000.

Dimitria Pope, the agency's acting executive director, told the Morning News that the expenditures were necessary to restructure the TYC office, accommodate dozens of new employees, and improve operations in the aftermath of the agency's prison abuse scandal last year. "Given the serious circumstances surrounding existing operations, the agency was expected to act swiftly," she said in a written statement.

We understand that Texas Youth Commission needs to be changing the way it works, for all the reasons that have come up in the past year. We understand that it takes money to make those changes. And we certainly understand how good state lawmakers are at passing down mandates without providing the funding to accomplish them.

At the same time, we understand how important it is not to bite the hand that feeds you, and that's exactly what the TYC has done in this case. Lawmakers are right to be rankled about it.

We hope the youth commission hasn't taken a step backward in its effort to reform itself.

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