

Groups seeks audit of Leavitt foundation

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Questionable tax filings by the Southern Utah Foundation and the Leavitt family have drawn the attention of the Internal Revenue Service, and tax watchdogs believe a pending audit will expose "ethical violations."

Rick Cohen of the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy said even though the two foundations may be in the clear legally, he believes the audit will bring to light ethical abuses of public money. In particular, Cohen said the Southern Utah Foundation has funneled money back to the Leavitt family either directly or through scholarship schemes that actually benefited Leavitt family businesses.

Cohen said this particular case of questionable contributions needs special attention because of ties to U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary and former Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt.

"Every taxpayer has a stake in what the Leavitt Foundation and the Southern Utah Foundation does," Cohen said. "Once it becomes tax-exempt money, that is money the public has entrusted to the Leavitts for their stewardship for the best possible public benefit."

Leaders of the Southern Utah Foundation said Tuesday that they're not worried about the IRS audit.

"There's nothing illegal here. The Southern Utah Foundation never gave money back to the Leavitts," said Scott Truman, president of the foundation, which is affiliated with Southern Utah University and located on its campus. "We look at it as one of those unfortunate things where people are trying to find a story that isn't really there."

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