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people in the administration

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Church-held seminar a lobbying act

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The recent attendance by 26 Idaho Republican legislators at seminars conducted by a politically right-wing church raises the question of the type of influence brought to bear on Idaho legislators.

The lawmakers, including six from eastern Idaho, attended all-expense-paid trips to Los Angeles, Salt Lake City and Denver to attend the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church's anti-communism seminars.

Now there's nothing heinous about anti-communism seminars — in fact, they are likely commendable.

But Moon and his Unification Church are viewed by most as a cult and hardly in keeping with American political ideals.

Attending some of the seminars were the three legislators from District 30, which has the reputation at the Legislature as being one of the state's most conservative.

They are Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Lewisville, and Reps. JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, and Ray Infanger, R-Salmon. Also on hand were three lawmakers from Idaho Falls, Sens. Dane Watkins and Lee Staker and Rep. J. F. Chadband, all Republicans.

With the possible exception of Staker, all have the reputation of being among the right-wingers of the Republican Party. They are generally viewed as extremists who are against government spending, social service

programs, education and taxes. This could apply to nearly half of the Republicans. Staker, in his first term last session, has not yet established a firm record.

Mrs. Wood stoutly defended her attendance, saying, "I felt they (the seminars) were very worthwhile. I like learning new things, especially as they relate to government and history."

She went so far as to defend the Unitarian church, adding she was sure the church would be "get more positive treatment after this."

This indeed is an astonishing statement from Mrs. Wood, whose voting record is hardly the most progressive in the Legislature.

Chadband's explanation is just as astounding. He said the seminar was very educational. He added he owns property in Mexico and he is concerned about what is happening in Nicaragua. What connection there is between Mexico and Nicaragua is perplexing, except they are both located south of the U.S. border. Their political complexions are hardly similar.

Infanger's response were more to the point. He said the conference did not present anything new, that he had heard the same things from the John Birch Society and other anti-communist groups.

Infanger brings up another point that is of concern to most people of Idaho. He said he used to look unfavorably upon lobbyists but has

changed his views. Now, he is grateful for any lobby group and he doesn't care who they are.

Crystal defended the conference as very good, well-organized and well-presented. He defended the church for combatting communism.

Staker said he thought beforehand that the church was a cult, but since the seminar believes it to be a more viable sect.

Watkins said he thought the seminars to be worthwhile.

The lobbyists at Boise swirl about the Idaho Legislature for one purpose — and that is to push their own self-interest programs. Many of these are laudatory, but for the most part they are not exactly beneficial for bulk of the Idaho people.

At every legislative session, the lobbyists entertain at dinners, luncheons, receptions and other functions. Most legislators attend them without any compunction. For about the first two-thirds of the session, there are lobbyist-sponsored events almost daily and they are intended to influence legislators on legislation they are interested in — make no mistake about that.

The lawmakers like them because they reduce food and entertainment bills and in some cases liquor costs.

It does raise the question of the propriety of the state's lawmakers accepting gifts. It can't help but have some influence on their voting when these bills come up for action.

The latest report shows there were 236 registered lobbyists at the Legislature. They spend around \$70,000 a year to wine and dine the so-called representatives of the people. The amount has steadily increased each year.

If it weren't for newspapers and many non-profit lobbyists, such as the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women and others, the influence of lobbyists would be even greater.

Too many of the legislators represent special interests. They include businessmen, farmers, and others who represent education and other vocational segments of the state. All too few are wage-earners and it is the wage-earners who make up bulk of the Idaho people. Who speaks for them?

The North Idaho Chamber of Commerce, for example, sponsors biennial trips to north Idaho intended to promote mining and lumbering interests. These bills usually do very well indeed in most sessions.

They are many other similar events intended to influence the legislators and the Unification Church can be numbered among them.

The record of most Idaho legislators is indeed shoddy in protecting the rights of the common people and properly funding Idaho agencies. All too often, these legislators come down on the side of self-interest groups.