

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Keeping costs in check

Keeping a check on administrative costs is a healthy move for any agency or business.

But it's even more important when it comes to the state's premier public college, the University of Minnesota.

We're pleased U of M President Eric Kalar said last week the school will cut administrative costs by \$15 million per year over the next six years to assure taxpayers their dollars are well spent.

Kalar said in news reports the \$90 million in total cuts are part of a plan to work smarter when many people believe the university is bloated. He told the school's Board of Regents he will shift money toward teaching, research and other programs and away from administration.

We like his thinking. It was just a few years ago the Minnesota State Colleges and University System, or MnSCU, said it would reevaluate its administrative costs. At that time, MnSCU faced huge criticism for paying bonuses to staff. In 2009, MnSCU paid a total of \$287,500 in performance incentive compensation to 35 of the system's key employees, including college and university presidents, vice chancellors and the system's then Chancellor James McCormick.

Since then, changes have been made by MnSCU's Board of Trustees appear to retain top employees while still providing for reasonable compensation.

A 2012 Wall Street report claimed the U of M's Twin Cities campus had the largest share of management and administrative employees of 72 major public research universities.

U officials said the numbers in the report were misleading. Gov. Mark Dayton tied funding for the last session to the U to an analysis of administrative costs and legislators asked for reports on spending and how the U compares to other research universities.

A new report released last week now finds the university appears within reasonable levels of administration.

That's good, and combined with Kalar's idea that cutting administrative costs should be a high priority makes for good management of the U.

As tuition costs and student debt rises in our nation, we should be pleased the University of Minnesota appears to be doing all it can to keep administrative costs in check.

The change in thinking will go a long way with elected officials and taxpayers as the school lobbies for its share of the state budget in the future.



GUEST COLUMN

Why Duck Dynasty viewers flock

Like millions of Americans, I've become a "Duck Dynasty" fan.

"Duck Dynasty," as you surely are aware, is an A&E reality show that presents the Robertson clan, the long-bearded owners and operators of Duck Commander in West Monroe, La. Duck Commander hand-makes duck calls.

The story is a rags-to-riches one.

Phil Robertson, the patriarch of the family, started his duck-call business some 25 years ago. The avid outdoorsman was dissatisfied with the duck calls that were then available, so he made his own.

He did about \$8,000 in revenue his first year, but slowly built up the business over the next few decades, hiring a lot of relatives along the way.

His son, Willie, took over the company and has grown it to a \$45 million annual business — one that has made the Robertson family mighty wealthy. They were wealthy before "Duck Dynasty" became a hit cable show that draws record-breaking numbers of viewers.

Many media critics have been speculating as to why the show is so popular — and some, such as Rolling Stone, say the show and the characters are nothing but a big con. As usual, so many in the media are getting it exactly wrong.

It's true that each episode is scripted and staged with fairly typical sitcom plots. But what is also true is that the Robertsons are totally authentic characters.

There are Phil and Kay's three bearded sons, who all



Tom
PURCELL

work at Duck Commander, their wives and kids and, of course, Uncle Si, a gray-bearded Army veteran who is daggone colorful and funny.

These people are unapologetically religious. They believe that when you marry, you really do become one flesh. Their families are intact and functional, and the show celebrates these simple values.

The characters are politically incorrect and unapologetic about that, too. They happily go into the woods to shoot, skin and cook their dinner.

Unlike most sitcoms on TV these days, the fathers are not dribbling idiots. They are respected by their kids. And grandfather Phil is respected by his grandkids.

The characters are all self-deprecating and don't mind being the butt of the joke — because it is clear they are all in on the joke and having a grand time creating the show.

It is orderliness that draws us in — the orderliness that is missing in too many American homes that are broken up by divorce or headed by single parents. In the case of the

Robertsons, order is made possible by their faith.

And nobody understands that better than Phil.

He explains in his autobiography that he was not a good man in his 20s. He quit teaching — he has a master's degree in education — and ran a bar. He frequently got drunk and into trouble and was not very nice to his wife and young kids.

But he eventually found his way to church and his Christian faith transformed him. He became a changed man and has since tried to live his life according to the Bible.

Media critics compare "Duck Dynasty" to typical sitcoms, but if there is any one show it should be compared to, it is "The Waltons," another fine show about a functional, intact family.

Much like "The Waltons," most "Duck Dynasty" episodes show the entire Robertson clan sitting around the dinner table and saying grace before they break bread together.

It is their togetherness that draws in viewers. We like the way they celebrate simple, traditional values with humor and self-deprecation. We like the way orderliness guides their lives and brings order to their families.

You have to be a cynic to miss the obvious reason so many viewers are tuning in. And most big-city media critics are too cynical to understand what "Duck Dynasty" is really about.

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