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## OPINION COLUMNISTS

# LUAF offers salvation for embattled landowners

**Jeff Rice**

*Journal-Advocate columnist*

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If you believe that government should be held accountable to the people it governs, and that injustice should be redressed, you should write a check to the Landowners United Advocacy Foundation. I'd suggest a nice, round \$100. That's not much, considering its members are being asked for upwards of \$500 each.

LUAF is forming in southern Colorado for the purpose of bringing to heel the attack dogs of the Colorado Attorney General. AG Cynthia Coffman's minions are persecuting and bullying hundreds beleaguered farmers and ranchers across Colorado to help the Department of Revenue collect more than \$220 million in revenue the DOR foolishly lost by granting outrageous conservation easement tax credits to its wealthy chums in the Big City. When farm and ranch families tried to use those same tax credits to keep their operations afloat amid one of the worst droughts in history, DOR cried "Foul!" and manufactured cause to deny the tax credits.



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Coffman's office has hounded those families mercilessly (while keeping its mitts off of the tax credits of bigwigs like Gov. John Hickenlooper, but more about that in a moment) to try

to get the DOR's money back. Families have suffered lost farms, shattered marriages, and ill health because of the persecutions, and the AG shows no sign of letting up.

Now the ag families are banding together to fight back on a united front instead of remaining divided. Under the umbrella of LUAF, they are launching a two-phase attack on the state in federal court, first to show that Colorado has broken the law, and then to recover at least most of what the families have lost.

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While the DOR is squarely in LUAF's legal crosshairs, the suit also targets Coffman for illegal prosecution under a legal concept called *ex post facto* law. That means prosecuting someone for something that was legal when it was done but was later made illegal by a new law. Imagine, for instance, that you legally bought a bottle of gin on Sunday of last week, but are arrested next week for it because a new law makes Sunday liquor sales illegal. The U.S. Constitution expressly prohibits *ex post facto* prosecution but the AG's office is going ahead with the actions and basically daring the victims to do something about it.

Now the farmers and ranchers are calling the state's bluff and you can help them do it. Put your \$100 check into an envelope and mail it to Landowners United Advocacy Foundation, 15462 County Lane 1, Olney Springs, CO, 81062. Your contribution is tax deductible because LUAF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. Do it today.

Oh, and the \$1.1 million in conservation easement tax credits our governor has claimed? That doesn't seem to come up on AG Coffman's radar. That's probably why Hick is tolerating Coffman's defiance as she drags us into a hopeless crusade against the proposed Clean Power Plan, even though Hickenlooper's endorses it. Coffman clearly has higher political ambition and joining the fight against CPP makes her more attractive to GOP hardliners. I'm just spitballing here, but it looks like granting a pass on conservation easement tax credits buys a whole lot of gubernatorial silence.

*Jeff Rice is a former newspaper reporter and editor.*