

Carmage Walls
Commentary Prize

2018 Entry Form

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What is the subject/title of the entry? The right to know, right now, not later

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Is your newspaper under 50,000 circulation or above 50,000 circulation? Under 50,000

Please give a brief explanation of issues discussed and the results achieved. (This space will expand as you type in your comments.)

This editorial was published the morning of Oct. 20; the documents in question were released by that afternoon. The newspaper spent weeks making FOIA requests for the information, but the tipping point came when the Hot Springs Board of Directors set a date for making a decision on a new radio system, which had not been fully explained to the public.

Our View

The right to know, right now, not later

The citizens of Hot Springs should not have to wait until Nov. 7 to find out the cost, the vendors and the parameters of a new public safety communication system.

City Manager David Frasher told the Hot Springs Board of Directors Tuesday night that it should be prepared to take action at its Nov. 7 meeting on the acquisition of the system, which should cost less than expected.

The city has steadfastly refused to disclose the identity of the two vendors that responded to the city's request for proposals, saying that they haven't submitted bids that are subject to disclosure under the state's Freedom of Information Act — this in spite of the fact that Frasher mistakenly referred to the proposals several times on Tuesday as "bids."

The city attorney maintains the proposals are exempt from disclosure under the provision in the FOIA statute that shields materials that would give an advantage to "competitors or bidders."

The selection comes from a ranking committee that includes Hot Springs Fire Chief Ed Davis, Police Chief Jason Stachey, Assistant Police Chief Chris Chapmond, Fire Marshal Tom Braughton, Solid Waste Director Randy Atkinson, Utilities Director Monty Ledbetter and Fleet Service Director Greg Speas.

The city has not made their deliberations public, either. Unfortunately, that puts the citizenry at a definite disadvantage. In fact, the citizens of Hot Springs have been put at a disadvantage in this process from the get-go, ever since the board adopted a resolution at its Oct. 3 meeting to levy 2.6 General Fund mills in support of the communication upgrade.

The tax was first levied during the 2016 tax year — without a public vote — and is expected to raise more than \$3 million over two years. The city's 2017 budget also allocated \$1.59 million from its solid waste, water and wastewater funds to pay for the project.

As a result of all this secrecy, it is unclear if the board will take action on a proprietary system the city would be responsible for maintaining or an Arkansas Wireless Information Network system that would make the city a full-time user on the state communication network used by more than 900 federal, state and local agencies.

We had some faint hope earlier this month when District 5 Director Karen Garcia raised legitimate questions at an agenda meeting about the system prior to the board's vote on renewing the millage.

"I've gotten some questions from citizens about what's the estimated cost, what's included in the project, why we need this, what's the difference between the county and city systems," Garcia said. "A lot of citizens don't have all the information. They don't understand it, and I don't have the information to answer their questions."

Then, lo and behold, Garcia's tone changed at the following board meeting, after she assured her constituents that the city's staff had answered her questions.

"In my opinion, this is critical for public safety in our community," Garcia said.

With all due respect, we don't understand how any director can expect us to vet such a claim without the proper amount of information. And excuse us, but is this not the same board that failed to rein in a more than \$50,000 renovation/refurnishing of the City Hall administrative suite? And yet, your constituents are expected to sit back and trust that you, and you alone, are qualified to decide on a multi-million dollar radio system without their input.

Have a little faith in the public, city officials, and pull back the veil.



In California, 'sanctuary' a Hollywood illusion

SAN DIEGO — Thanks to a bill recently signed into law by Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown, California is now officially a "sanctuary state."

Big deal. If you take a close look at the actual language of SB 54, also known as the California Values Act, you'll see it for what it is: a symbolic and worthless gesture intended to inflame both sides of the immigration debate without upsetting the apple cart.

This law is about politics, not police work. Democrats get to fool Latinos and immigration advocates into thinking they have their back, when — the truth is — that's where they often stick the knife. Republicans get to advance the narrative that the opposing party is soft on immigration enforcement, when — the truth is — it's the GOP that goes soft when that enforcement is aimed at the employers who are the root of the problem.

The California measure preserves the law enforcement status quo. Although it originally intended to limit cooperation between local law enforcement agencies and the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), there will be plenty of room for partnerships.

For instance, ICE still has access to county jails, and it can still get a heads-up from local officials when someone is released from custody — if that person has committed certain crimes or if ICE has a warrant.

This was predictable. After all, local police chiefs and county sheriffs have to contend with something that their federal brethren get to avoid — public accountability. They have no interest in allowing dangerous people to roam their streets in search of new victims. People get fired over things like that.

Meanwhile, ICE is tied up in political double-talk. Acting Director Thomas Homan says the new law will keep his agents from doing their jobs. Of course, Homan is also at the moment launching a crackdown on illegal immigrants in California, a state that allows his agents to do their jobs.

So it's certainly not the case that illegal immigrants should try to seek refuge in the Golden State, unless they intend to spend their golden years back in their home country after they get deported. Think of it this way. In California, the word "sanctuary" is Latin for "Your bus is waiting."

The few modifications under the law merely roll back

some of the encroachments that federal immigration agents have made on local police and sheriff's departments since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. These opposing jurisdictions are supposed to operate separately, and they have been way too cozy for way too long.

Incidentally, the relationship is dysfunctional and rife with inconsistencies.

On the one hand, federal agents have never respected local cops, or seen them as their equals. On the other, that doesn't stop them from letting lowly local cops do their work for them, so the G-Men (and G-Women) can sit around, drink coffee and brag about their pensions.

The sheriff's deputies who run the jails complained that they'll alert ICE when they're releasing a prisoner who might be in the country illegally, and that — if he's a low-level offender — they won't get a response. And then if that person commits a crime that gets media attention, ICE — which specializes in

CYA — will blame the local officials.

So will the California sanctuary law make things better or worse? It's not likely to have much of an effect either way.

The media says that this is because fierce opposition from police and sheriff's groups forced lawmakers to negotiate and add a series of amendments that allow for some cooperation.

Could be. The author of the bill is state Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, a Democrat who recently announced that he is running for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by fellow Democrat Dianne Feinstein. I'm sure that de Leon didn't want to kick off his campaign by alienating law enforcement.

But the real reason for the amendments goes back to Gov. Brown, who is pure politics and who — like Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama before him — has no interest in being caricatured as a Democrat who is soft on immigration. He threatened to veto the bill if he didn't get the amendments, and he won that showdown.

Emphasis on "show." After all, California — home to Hollywood — is the grand factory of make-believe. So naturally, in the sanctuary debate, the focus is on theater. And nothing is what it seems.



Ruben Navarrette

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A local guest column called "In My Opinion" will appear at random on this page and submissions are subject to the newspaper's editing requirements. Letters and local guest columns should be sent in care of the editor, *The Sentinel-Record*, P.O. Box 580, Hot Springs, AR 71902, e-mailed to editor@hotspr.com, or faxed to (501) 623-8465.

Expressing their views: The viewpoints expressed on this page do not reflect the opinions of *The Sentinel-Record*. Views expressed by columnists, cartoonists and letter writers are their own.

Letters to the editor

Time for change

Dear editor:

Now I know why Hot Springs City Manager David Frasher wanted the city to stop funding the Health Department and the Greyhound Bus stop and trying to start charging Garland County a ridiculous fee for animal services and imposing 160-percent rate increase for water and sewer.

Thanks to your newspaper report on Oct. 18, "Office remodel raises eyebrows," Mr. Frasher needed the extra cash to pay for his new office space. Mr. Frasher has already spent about \$55,000 for his \$6,000 glass door, \$14,000 carpeting and tile work. That price includes about \$25,000 for furniture that was purchased in Little Rock.

I guess Mr. Frasher traveled to Little Rock to avoid the high sales tax in Hot Springs. I wonder if he got a mileage reimbursement for the trip.

Let's consider what \$55,000 will buy in Hot Springs. There are numerous homes for sale in Hot Springs between \$20,000 and \$50,000. You can buy a new pickup truck. And you can fund the city's portion of the Health Depart-

ment expenses for a whole year. And how about funding the bus stop for people to visit the city.

You could also cover the annual payroll costs for at least one city employee.

All of this money was spent behind closed doors and the reason was the city Board of Directors gave Mr. Frasher \$60,000 in blank checks to build his Taj Mahal.

It's no wonder that Hot Springs is the only medium-sized city in the area that has had less than a 2-percent increase in population since 2010. It's because Hot Springs is forcing people to leave. They can't afford any more of this incompetence.

It's time for a change. First the city Board of Directors needs to get rid of the ridiculous spending level to prevent future abuses of taxpayers' money by Mr. Frasher. If that's not done, then maybe it's time for the voters of Hot Springs to find a new board.

W.R. Cowan
Hot Springs

We're all in trouble

Dear editor:

We are in serious trouble as a nation

and as a people. There are people starving and drinking contaminated water from a condemned Superfund site in Puerto Rico because there is no one in charge to take control and distribute needed supplies.

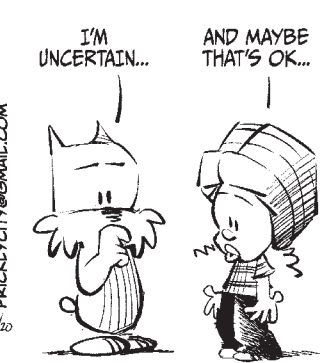
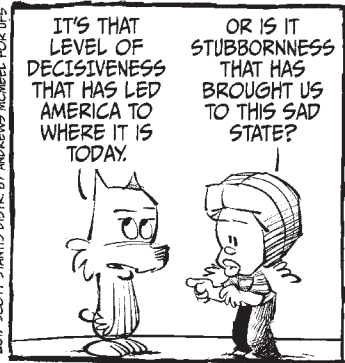
Food and water have been discarded to a dump because no one will see to it that it gets to the people it was sent to help. It sits rotting and undistributed to those it was designated to feed and serve.

Trump went there and threw rolls of paper towels to the ones in the least effected areas because they were more like "him." The Navy hospital ship sits in the harbor capable of serving thousands of injured with the latest health and surgical procedures available. At last count, it was serving nine. Local hospitals are desperate for assistance.

If this is an example of how our government deals with its citizens, we're all in trouble. If you're not one of "them," you are disposable and of value to only those that have been given free access to the money to be made from bleeding you dry.

Judy Ladd
Hot Springs

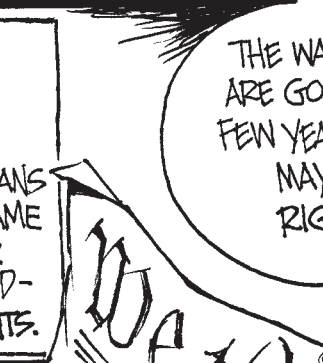
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