



**Name of Author(s):** Mark Gregory

**Author's Title (editor, columnist, etc.):** Editor

**Newspaper:** The Sentinel-Record

**Address:** 300 Spring St.

**City:** Hot Springs

**State:** Arkansas

**ZIP:** 71901

**Phone:** 501-781-3689

**Fax:**

**E-Mail:** [mark@hotsr.com](mailto:mark@hotsr.com)

**Submitted by:** Mark Gregory

**Title of Person Submitting:** Editor

**Phone Number:** 501-781-3689

**E-mail Address:** mark@hotsr.com

**What is the subject/title of the entry?** City's lack of transparency leaves citizens in the dark

**Date(s) of publication?** Dec. 7, 2018

**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.)**

The Hot Springs Board of Directors requested the resignation of the Hot Springs city manager in June after he allegedly shouted a racially charged remark at an African-American neighbor. Despite its promises to find a replacement in a transparent fashion, the board did exactly the opposite in December, when it selected a new city manager without prior notice to the public. The newspaper objected vigorously to the shroud of secrecy that surrounded the selection, and the absolute lack of public discourse on the choice.

As a result of the newspaper's scrutiny, the employment agreement for the new city manager exempts the city from paying severance if he's terminated for cause.



In our view

## City's lack of transparency leaves citizens in the dark

The *Sentinel-Record* vigorously objects to the lack of transparency shown by the Hot Springs Board of Directors Tuesday night when it hired, or promoted, depending on your point of view, Bill Burrough as the new city manager.

This criticism is not directly aimed at Burrough, who was interim city manager; his qualifications or lack thereof were not debated in a public forum, as they should have been Tuesday night, and will not be debated here.

No, these objections come from the shroud of secrecy surrounding Tuesday night's action.

Specifically, we object to the process because:

- The board of directors failed to state on its public agenda that it would be considering hiring or promoting, depending on your viewpoint, Burrough. The agenda simply stated it would be performing an annual review of Burrough and the city attorney. It is also worthy of note that the city attorney, Brian Albright, received a \$5,000 "bonus" from the board, also without input from the public.

- The board of directors failed to release Burrough's employment contract prior to Tuesday's meeting.

The agreement was not included in the regular board of directors packet; the newspaper did not receive a copy of the contract until *requesting one* the following day.

Even if the board makes the argument that the details of the contract needed to be worked out in the two-hour executive session it held Tuesday, a copy of the contract could have been distributed to the public at the meeting prior to the contract being voted upon. Fortunately, the Legislature, which has gutted Arkansas' Freedom of Information Act over the years, has not taken away the requirement that public officials must reconvene and vote in public on actions debated in secret in executive sessions.

Considering the board's track record on employment contracts with city managers, it should be a given that the public would be given an advance copy of the agreement, so that it can exercise its right, as citizens, to serve as a check and balance on elected officials who have shown poor judgment in this area in the past.

As a reminder, the city board paid the former city manager, David Frasher, \$223,312 in severance after it requested his resignation in June. Burrough can be terminated for cause at any time and without advance notice, whereas Frasher's agreement required giving him 45 days' notice.

"We felt that was necessary to insulate the city and citizens of Hot Springs from paying a severance package for what would be considered a for-cause act," McCabe told a reporter on Wednesday. "Residents expressed concerns at what we had done with the previous city manager. Certainly, all the candidates running for city board positions were sensitive to those concerns."

Apparently, they didn't feel it was necessary to voice those sentiments on Tuesday, which brings us to the final point:

- No public input whatsoever was sought on the hiring decision on Tuesday.

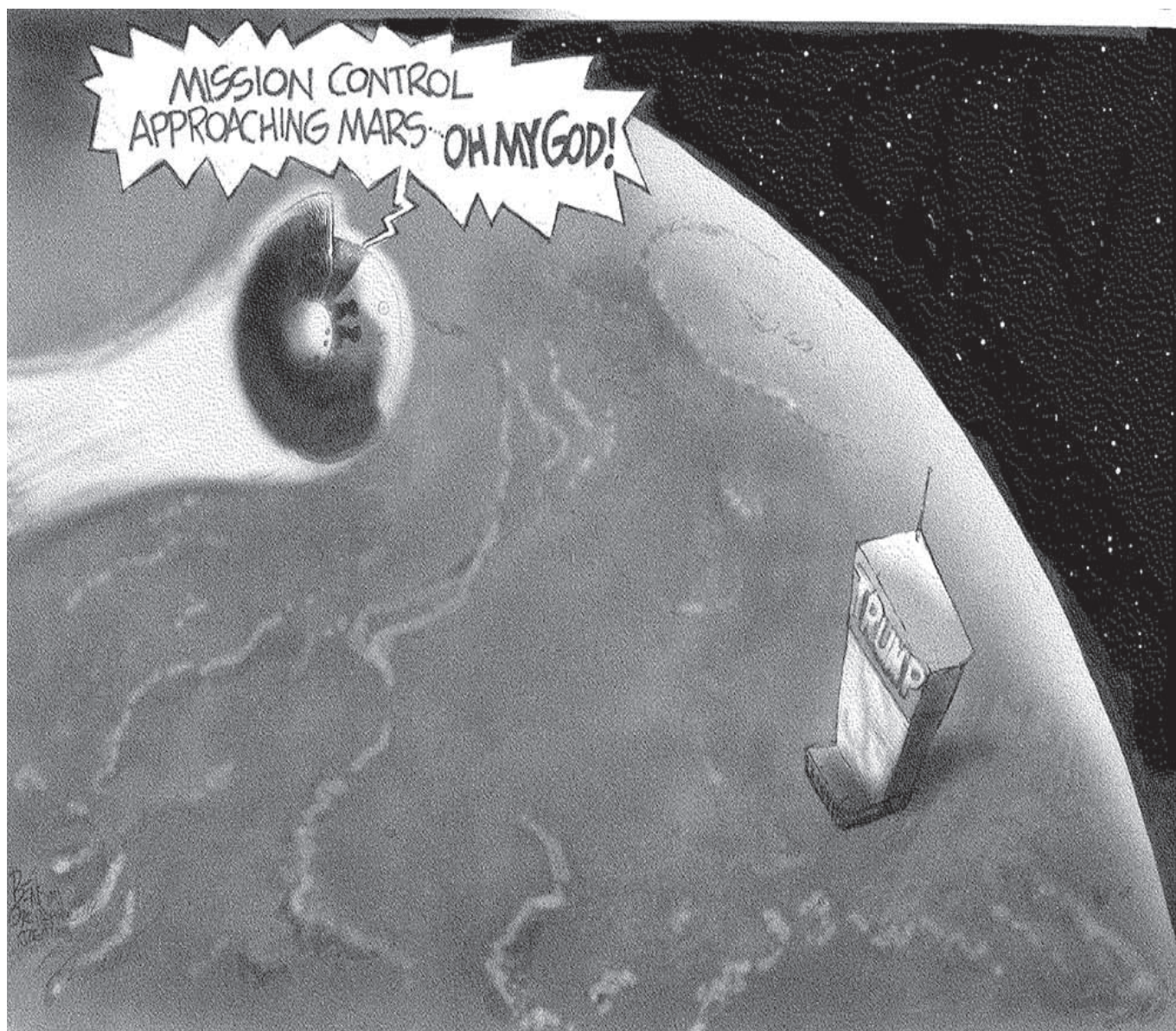
This lack of public involvement is simply unacceptable, given the city officials' track record with the previous city manager. Saying "residents expressed concerns" regarding the previous city manager is putting it mildly.

Our public officials might recall the public's reaction after they convened an executive session in October 2017 to discuss the \$46,737 in general fund transfers Frasher approved to remodel the administrative suite at City Hall and purchase new office furniture.

After meeting behind closed doors, the board took no action but adopted a resolution the following month that limited the city manager's authority on budget transfers related to City Hall — a constraint the new city manager must now accept.

We're willing to give the new city manager the benefit of a doubt; Burrough has certainly done an admirable job of keeping the city's ship on course over the past few months.

But the elected city officials need to show more regard for the citizens they represent before making such hiring decisions in the future.



## Politics in America feels like Groundhog Day

SAN DIEGO — At lunch the other day, a friend — an old Marine who will soon turn 80 — informed me that originality is dead.

"Nothing is new," he said. "Everything that's happening now has happened before."

At the intersection of politics and media, he has a point. The alarmist anti-Trump media likes to say that things have never been this bad.

You know what's bad? People's memories. It's Groundhog Day in America. It feels like we've been here before — even if neither party admits it. When a politician on your team comes up with an idea, we declare that no one has ever come up with anything this good. When a politician on the rival team does anything, we insist that no one has ever been this bad.

You know what else is bad? The media's reputation. In the Trump era, not many folks in my line of work are known for their fairness and objectivity. The media could restore much of the public's trust by admitting that much of what they find shocking is actually quite familiar.

For example, when reporting on a new trade deal with Canada and Mexico that looks a lot like the old trade deal with Canada and Mexico, why can't reporters make that point — but then follow up by pointing out that repackaging policy initiatives is hardly new. They could mention that President Barack Obama did the same thing when he essentially Xeroxed many of President George W. Bush's policies for combating terrorism? In fact, federal judges would scratch their heads over the fact that — in defending domestic surveillance — the briefs from the Obama Justice Department so closely resembled those of the Bush Justice Department.

And, if the claim is that Trump simply re-branded the North American Free Trade Agreement without changing much of the content, then why not mention that Obama did much the same thing when he scuttled the educational law, "No Child Left Behind" — and replaced it with his own educational initiative, "Race to the Top"? There wasn't much of a difference. The former pushed accountability by threatening to close underperforming schools, while the latter pushed accountability by offering financial initiatives to over-performing ones.

Putting all this on the table provides context. In the bygone

days of what we used to call journalism, it was considered telling the whole story. It was fair. But it was also closer to the only thing journalists are meant to chase: the truth.

Context changes a minor story from what one president is doing wrong into a major story about what's wrong with our political system.

In a more recent example, anti-Trump forces heaped criticism on the Fox News morning show "Fox & Friends" after it emerged that the show's producers choreographed interviews with former Environmental Protection Agency administrator Scott Pruitt. Pruitt was often given the questions ahead of time, allowed to choose the topics, and even given script approval.

We learned all this from emails revealed in a Freedom of Information Act request by the Sierra Club and confirmed by The Daily Beast.

It was an egregious breach of journalistic ethics. Thankfully, Pruitt is now out of office. But still, all those interviews are now tainted.

Yet the stunt was not exactly original. We've seen this movie before, where journalists get too cozy and give away the store to folks they're interviewing. They go from doing the public good to doing public relations.

If the media is really bothered by what the Fox producers did with regard to Pruitt, then they should have been just as bothered at what came out from WikiLeaks, in October 2016, about how Glenn Thrush — then a reporter for Politico — likewise broke the rules in cozying up to John Podesta. According to emails between the two men, Thrush shared a story pre-publication with Podesta and then begged the campaign chairman for Hillary Clinton not to tell anyone about it. He even called himself a "hack."

There wasn't much of an outcry over that earlier sin against journalism. Why not? You know why not.

Fox News Channel says that it is "disciplining" the producers who coddled Pruitt. Thrush wasn't disciplined for coddling Podesta; he went on to a prestigious reporting job at The New York Times, which was jeopardized when female reporters claimed he had acted improperly at different points in his career.

No wonder the public has so little faith in us. What have we done to earn it?



**Ruben Navarrette**

Copyright 2018, Washington Post Writers group

## Letter to the editor

### History repeats itself

Dear editor:

Regarding the letter of dear editor entitled "Trump doesn't get it": neither do most people blaming Trump for it. When we forget history we are doomed to repeat it. The Bible is the best history book in the world. It's the most accurate and doesn't change.

Read the prophets when God sent them to warn God's people. Judgment would come if the people didn't repent of their greed, corruption and turning away from God's laws. Isa. 1:3; The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Isa. 1:7; Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers. Also, read verses 4-6.

There's nothing we can do about it

with all the money in the world. God can't be bought. It's all His. And science won't solve the problem unless they turn to God and get the people to repent and turn.

The prophets tried to get the people to turn but they rejected the prophets and even killed some of them and said to tell us something good; we don't like the bad things. God said he was in control of the plagues, the drought, the fire, the seas, the wind.

God called Ezekiel to give warning to the people and if he refused, their blood would be required at his hands and if they wouldn't repent their blood would be on their own heads. Man hasn't changed.

Amos 5:6; God will break out like fire and there be none to quench it. (droughts, fire) Amos 4:8; He called for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth. I The Lord is His name. (tsunamis, floods, hurricanes) Seek the

Lord and you shall live. But since many don't believe in God, they won't believe in His laws and regulations. So face His judgment and don't complain because you were warned.

The reason for the judgments is because of the wickedness of man, not burning fossil fuels. It is greed, corruption, immorality, dishonesty; If you will be merciful, God will have mercy on you.

The kingdom is promised to those who will be willing to suffer for the cause of Christ. Let's quit playing church and get converted and strengthen the brethren, and proclaim the truth of his word. Spending more money to stop fires, floods, drought, storms, will not stop God's judgment. People getting their hearts right with God will. History repeats itself.

Clyde Edds, minister  
Jessieville

**The Sentinel-Record**  
P.O. Box 580  
Hot Springs, AR 71902

**Clyde E. Palmer (1876-1957)**  
**Walter E. Hussman (1906-1988)**  
**Walter E. Hussman Jr. Publisher**

**Harry Porter**  
General Manager

**Mark Gregory** Editor  
**Jimmy Robertson** Production Manager

**Debe Johnson** Advertising Director  
**Larry Graham** Circulation Director

### Policies

**Write our columnists:** Susan Estrich, Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045; Eugene Robinson, George Will, Charles Krauthammer, Michael Gerson and Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post* Writers Group, 1150 15th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20071; Rich Lowry, King Features Syndicate, 200 W. 57th Street, New York, NY, 10019; Jim Davidson, 2 Bentley Drive, Conway, AR 72032; or Byron York, 1130 Walnut St. Kansas City, MO 64106.

**Write our cartoonists:** Steve Benson and Steve Breen, Creators Syndicate, 5777 W. Century Blvd., Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90045; Glenn McCoy and Garry Trudeau, Universal Press Syndicate, Ninth Floor, 4520 Main St., Kansas City, MO 64111; Bruce Tinsley, King Features Syndicate, 888 7th Ave., New York, NY, 10019.

**Write us:** Letters to the editor run daily as space allows and are subject to the editing requirements of the newspaper.

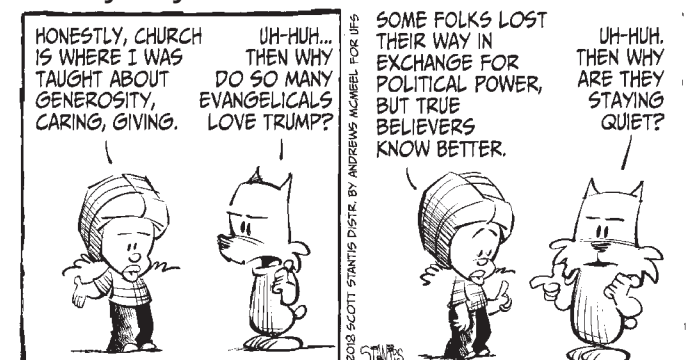
All letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number and no unsigned or "Names Withheld" letters will be published.

Letters to the editor become the property of the newspaper. By submitting a letter, writers grant the newspaper the non-exclusive, royalty-free, right to make unrestricted use of the contents of the letter, including publication and republication, in both print and all electronic or digital media. 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@hotsr.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.

### Prickly City



### Scott Stantis



### Mallard Fillmore



### Bruce Tinsley