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A No Standing News Special Edition

Fast reading for busy people

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Gyovai has a Hearing – or was it a Silencing? Rolla Building Codes Administrator, Mike Gyovai, and his secretary finally got their public hearing before the city hearing board. The hearing date, set and cancelled several times, still drew a large crowd. The Personnel Board upheld a reprimand for Gyovai but overturned the one for his secretary. The crime was forgetting, losing or failing to produce some trivial minutes at the demand of his department head, John Petersen. Oh my! There were two really big lies in this bit of political theater.

Lie #1. Gyovai was not really being disciplined because of some insignificant minutes, but because he refused to go along with the recreation gang. He unreasonably insisted that the recreation center meet the same city safety codes that he enforces on all other construction. They can deny it all they want, but we have the tape. **Lie #2.** Petersen claimed that Gyovai had "undermined" his authority but Petersen legally has no authority to undermine. Neither Petersen nor Murphy have jobs legally established and described by ordinance as state law requires for every salaried officer of the city. The hearing board would not permit these facts to be discussed at the "Silencing," so they made their flawed decision based on the official fiction that Petersen had the authority to order people around. Shame on the hearing board for playing footsy with the city administration. Gyovai dared to do his job without fear or favoritism and that just doesn't fit the "team playing"

culture in city hall. He saw the handwriting on the wall and quit. Now someone will be hired or promoted who will obediently round off the corners on building and safety codes. The lesson will not be lost on other city employees. The Personnel Hearing Board works for the "suits," not for the public.

Rolla School District PAC MAN. Larry Ewing, Superintendent of the Rolla School System, has a second job. Ewing is President of the MSAPAC, the Missouri School Alliance Political Action Committee, a collection of education associations that support themselves with dues paid with our tax money. They then lobby for things we don't necessarily agree with and raise money for candidates we may not want to vote for. Last year, at the same time he was pushing the school board into putting an 80-cent tax levy on the April ballot for "teachers' salaries," he was also raising PAC money for Jim Talent, Republican candidate for governor. Question: Is that some of our tax money their handpicked candidates pocketed? Ewing's PAC supported Talent because he… **Strongly opposes collective bargaining for public employees. All of the associations that**

comprise this political action committee are opposed to this operating model for professional educators and have worked diligently in the past to defeat efforts to impose collective bargaining on local school districts. You can read Ewing's press release at:
<http://www.msbanet.org/news/msapac%5Fendorse.htm>
One of the several organizational members of the MSAPAC is the Missouri School Boards' (sic) Association. Our school board members just voted again to use $5,279 of our taxes to pay annual dues to the MSBA, an anti-collective bargaining association. How much of our tax money went into Jim Talent's campaign thanks to our non-partisan school board and their not exactly non-partisan employee, Superintendent Larry Ewing? (And you thought soft money only corrupted national politics!) What is it about "non-partisan school district" that Ewing and the board don't understand?

No wonder our teachers' salaries are allegedly so stagnant. Every year Ewing decides how much will be budgeted for their salaries - if anything - but he works behind their backs to make sure the only bits they get are those the "Massa" doles out to them. No collective bargaining for those folks. No sir! If the 80-cent levy does pass, every teacher (the good, the bad and the ho-hum) will get three raises over the next three years as the levy phases in. Administrators, if the usual practice is followed, will get a whole lot more every year as the levy phases in. Teachers and school employees had better wise up or after year number three they'll be right back on the plantation again.

Dividing the County Pie. The Phelps County Commissioners have their problems, but they do have a budget process better than any other public body in the county because it's all done in full view of the public. This weeks long process is probably not so much the Commissioners' choice as it is the budget-crunching custom imposed by former County Clerk Lucie Smith, and wisely continued by her successor Carol Bennett. With the smallest operating tax levy of all, they have to make a little go a long way. This examination of how every county tax dollar is spent involves many daylong, open-to-the-public budget meetings. Each official in the county system has to justify their use of our tax money.

It's not that there isn't fat and waste in the county budget and it's not that there aren't politics and some bad spending decisions - this is, after all, a human political system. But a budget is finally hammered out that the county can actually afford and everyone has had a shot at making a case for what they think they need. On occasion this involves shouting, pouting and tears by various elected county officers and department heads. In short, it is an arduous, nitty-gritty process that should warm the hearts of taxpayers everywhere. Anyone can go and watch. You won't be treated as if you're crashing a General Motors board meeting. The county folk haven't yet taken to cultivating a fancy corporate boardroom image for themselves. Taxpayers can even join in the process with a discreet comment or two on how their money is being spent.

The Lord High Sheriff. With practical budget limits in mind, the Commissioners belatedly put their foot down on Blankenship. A year ago the Sheriff threatened to sue them for trying to control his expense accounts (outrageous idea indeed!). But the Sheriff, who has been getting much too big for his britches, forgot about the annual budget - the mother's milk of political control. This year when Blankenship, after twelve years of empty promises, again claimed to need more budget money for the county patrols, he was informed that in order to get more salary money out of the county budget he would have to turn over his drug profits to the general fund and not keep it for himself - like the federal bribe it so obviously is. The news that he would have to share his drug money with others did not go down easily with the

Prince of Sugar Tree Road. He does not play well with anyone but the DEA.

While the school board was whining about needing more money last year, the Sheriff was on a shopping spree with money that should have gone to education. He spent over $114,000 of his drug loot on law enforcement toys instead of turning it over to the education fund as the state constitution requires. He bought enough night vision gear, camos and other swat toys to invade Laclede County. Included in his spending binge was a car, digital cameras (to make sure the Sheriff's drug exploits are clearly recorded on the county web site), custom patches, gun locks, personalized pens, bookmarks and other freebies that he passed out while fighting to keep his job. You can see a partial list of how he used his drug profits at: http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/Sheriff_Drug_Money.pdf
Take a look and see if you think what he bought was more valuable than classroom teachers.

Chucky's Back! RCDC wants to be on the city payroll. After years of sucking millions from our utility bills to improve their private property, the visionaries of RCDC now want the same "social security" that the city gives the Chamber of Commerce: an annual salary and a big fat budget of only about a quarter of a million dollars. H. Dain Ward, Chairman of RCDC and RMU is once again being promoted as the Moses who will lead us to the Land of Economic Development Milk and Honey. We hope he finds it this time because the city has wasted millions looking for it. The last great economic development idea H. Dain had was to give away coffee cups and have a Webb (sic) site - as he calls it. If the city falls for this waste of money again, could they please spend it on someone who has a few ideas from….say the '80s? Someone who can both spell "web site" and find one?

The suggestion that the Chamber share some of THEIR ill-gotten tourist tax gains with the needy RCDC to pay for another economic development mirage was allegedly met with a cool refusal. They will be "supportive," but they won't share.

Another recreation center? Before the ground is broken for the $11.7 million Recreation Center "for everyone," Rolla's Senior Citizens - again with the help of the Recreation Dentist Moorkamp - want donations (and later maybe a sales tax) to build another recreation center. Welcome, Rolla Seniors, to the large club of people who are paying taxes for a recreation center and not getting anything they want. The kids wanted a skate park and aren't getting one, the parents and kids wanted a 6-lane pool and aren't getting one, people with flood problems aren't getting flood control, interest groups wanted a place to meet, play cards or share hobbies and they aren't getting those things either. Before the sales tax passed wasn't the $11.7 million Recreation Center hyped by dentist Moorkamp and others as a facility for senior citizens? How many recreation centers do we need? How many more sales taxes can we bear?

We warned everyone two years ago that this center was being turned into Country Club West and so it has. A combination of narrowly focused recreation combined with user fees will keep out the riff-raff. It's no coincidence that Oak Meadow Country Club is on its last legs and about to fold after decades of indifferent management. Their new taxpayer subsidized country club in Ber Juan Park will open just in the nick of time.

The Bond Rip-off. State Auditor Claire McCaskill has released a report revealing how the good ole boy practices of local officials have wasted money in higher bond agent fees and higher interest rates because bond agents are hired to sell our school and city bond issues without competitive bidding. Rolla's Recreation bond issue and the School Board's 1997 bond refinancing issue were two of those analyzed in the audit. The audit report says, **"Local officials such as school**

superintendents and city administrators have too often relied upon the advice of familiar bond negotiators instead of seeking open bids assuring the most competitive rate of return for taxpayers." The loss to taxpayers statewide since 1997 is estimated at $83.2 million. Not only did we get reamed on bond interest rates but we also paid higher fees due to the practice of hiring one bond agent to perform three separate and conflicting functions. The report is an excellent bond primer and should be required reading for everyone holding public office and every person thinking about running for any public office. There are only three reasons for not using competitive bids when purchasing goods or services with public money: incompetence, stupidity or someone is getting some benefit in eliminating the competition. Which of the three, we wonder, would school and city officials plead guilty to?

You can read a summary of the report or the entire report on the state auditor's site or they will mail you a free copy.

http://www.auditor.state.mo.us/press/2001-04.htm

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