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COP chief resigns under threat of dismissal

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Desert Hot Springs

One-time City Council candidate's political blog got under officials' skin

By Nelsy Rodriguez

The Desert Sun

A one-time Desert Hot Springs City Council candidate who runs a no-holds-barred political blog resigned from his volunteer position as president of Citizens On Patrol under threat of being fired for insubordination.

Gabriel King, who unsuccessfully ran for City Council in 2003, resigned from COP Wednesday, before Desert Hot Springs Police Chief Walter McKinney could fire him.

King, who runs a political blog where he regularly blasts city officials and employees as "corrupt clowns," said he was terminated for openly questioning the local government.

"Just because you become a volunteer or somehow involved in government doesn't mean that you leave your brains or the first amendment at the door," King said Wednesday. "You do what's right, not what's politically correct."

The COP program is a city-sponsored volunteer organization that calls on citizens to assist police with everything from traffic control to crime scene security.

McKinney said King falsely accused him in an e-mail addressed to city officials and media of siding with public officials for personal interest rather than investigating possible criminal activity. That type of insubordination is intolerable, McKinney said.

"I'm way too busy to worry about the political piece of this, which is why I wanted out from underneath it," McKinney said. "He thinks he can but I think he can't separate the political world from being a representative ambassador of this agency."

And those charged with defending the city say that, as a public representative, King is putting the city at risk of another expensive discrimination lawsuit.

"The city just got out of bankruptcy because of a lawsuit that was based on discrimination," said Deputy City Attorney Thomas Neumann. "The fact of the matter is that it's a liability to have (racial remarks) out there, especially when we know about it," referring to humor posted on King's Web site.

Attorney's letter

In a letter dated May 17 addressed to the members of COP, Deputy City Attorney Neumann wrote King was in violation of the COP mission statement and breached ethical standards.

Neumann wrote that anonymous citizens had approached city personnel accusing King of racial harassment. One account alleged King chased a car demanding the driver remove a Mexican flag from the rear window. In another account, King was