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Our Voice: DHS ethics probe needs clearing up

City Council should issue public explanation

The Desert Sun
August 8th, 2003

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The political spectacle that is Desert Hot Springs continues apace, and it is clear that its citizens deserve a whole lot better.

With barely disguised arrogance, a special review committee of the City Council on Tuesday said no further investigation of conflict-of-interest allegations against City Manager Jerry Hanson was needed, but gave nary a public explanation except to blame the media for the brouhaha.

Sorry, folks, but that's not good enough.

Silence does not wipe out the allegations, nor conversations behind closed doors enlighten us.

We'd like to have confidence that your actions were grounded on solid, non-partisan evidence and not cronyism or we-know-better-than-you-do decisions.

One of the allegations against Hanson was that he had helped steer an \$8,600 contract to a Riverside firm for whom his son was employed. It was also alleged that Hanson, a state licensed civil engineer, prepared a report for a private business while he was the city's public works director.

We certainly don't begrudge Hanson the opportunity to earn extra income. But being an employee of a city in bankruptcy facing a myriad of nearly intractable problems would seem to leave scant free time to do outside jobs. If he wants to do so — especially if it is business with the city — he should immediately resign as city manager.

The city's ethics code and the state's conflict-of-interest laws are vibrantly clear on each of the issues, and the citizens of Desert Hot Springs and, indeed Hanson himself, deserve nothing less than a public explanation of what led the review committee to end its review.

It was this same council, at the city manager's behest, after all, that voted to extend its term by a year and only acquiesced after being confronted by an angry outcry by residents.

And then, as now, Mayor Matt Weyuker led the it's-the-media's fault,

they're-making-mountains-out-of-molehills chorus. If mountains are indeed being built, the shovels are being wielded by Weyuker and Council members Mary Stephens and Greg Ruppert, and, on occasion, Will Pieper.

To be sure, Hanson and the council do enjoy the support of many in the city, but with elections coming this November, we urge residents of Desert Hot Springs to take back their city and either run themselves or vote for people to replace those on the council who are not

representing their interests.

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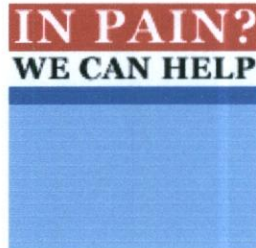
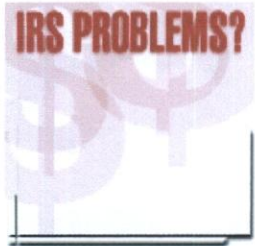
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