

Opinion: S. Tahoe officials stonewalling the truth

By Steve Kubby

Despite the official denials by the city manager and city attorney, criminal wrongdoing by the South Lake Tahoe City Council has already been documented by the grand jury. In its previous investigation into the conduct of the South Lake Tahoe City Council, the El Dorado Grand Jury concluded its report with a stern warning: "This Grand Jury is of the opinion that an accusation for malfeasance or nonfeasance by this City Council may be appropriate ... The Grand Jury only touched the 'tip of the iceberg' in its investigation and recommends that the citizens of South Lake Tahoe get involved with their City government. It is up to the citizens to establish the kind of governance they desire, to exercise their democratic right to vote, and get a City government that works for the common good and in an efficient manner for its citizens."



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The grand jury was also quite clear about Councilman Bruce Grego. Here is what the grand jury had to say about Mr. Grego and the \$935.50 that was paid to him: "A member of the City Council requested reimbursement for legal fees paid to an outside law firm. The legal advice consisted of a legal opinion and preparation of a letter to the Fair Political

Practices Commission. No contract had been signed and the City Council had not approved the expenditure in advance.”

The grand jury then concluded that the payment to Mr. Grego was a violation of California state law, yet Mr. Grego continues to insist he did nothing wrong and refuses to return the money.

Unfortunately those warnings have gone ignored. In an editorial dated July 28, 2010, the *Tahoe Daily Tribune* said, “The City Council’s response to the critical and scathing El Dorado Grand Jury report is embarrassing and disheartening.”

The editorial then went on to point out that instead of accepting responsibility, the City Council adopted a response that was peppered with the phrases: “the city does not agree in part with the finding,” “the city agrees and does not agree in part,” and “the city does not completely agree with the statement,” among others. That didn’t fly with the *Tribune*, which reminded the City Council and the citizens of South Lake Tahoe, “The first step to solving a problem is admitting to having one.”

More recently, Tony O’Rourke, the city manager, seems determined to continue this policy of stonewalling the past crimes and culpability of the South Lake Tahoe City Council. For example, Mr. O’Rourke assured the community in a recent column published in the *Lake Tahoe News* that, “In 2003, the city conducted an audit of the Redevelopment Agency’s financial performance to complete the redevelopment projects in the Stateline area. Following this comprehensive audit, the City Council authorized a loan in the amount of \$7 million to the Redevelopment Agency for costs and revenue shortages related to the redevelopment project.”

If this audit was so “comprehensive,” then why is there still no explanation of who raided the general fund for \$7 million or who authorized the raid? Furthermore, no one can explain

how the city can create a loan to be repaid by funds already allocated to the general fund. This hardly seems like the "comprehensive audit" claimed by city officials.

Mr. O'Rourke, who until now has impressed me with his dedicated and professional performance, claims in the aforementioned column, "Neither Mayor Hal Cole, nor any city councilmembers, are responsible for the collapse of the (convention) project or the economy." However, neither Mr. O'Rourke, or any other city official, can ignore the failure of Mayor Hal Cole to require a performance bond, which makes the entire City Council totally responsible for the nearly 12-acre crater of rotting concrete, rusting iron and graffiti they created.

It's time for Mr. O'Rourke and other city officials to stop the stonewalling, end the coverups and heed the advice: "The first step to solving a problem is admitting to having one."

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