

Opinion: Transparency missing in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

It's been about three months since the CAO Pamela Knorr, obligated the taxpayers to a contract for legal services, except it appears the contract was for investigatory services. The contract, executed by Knorr and County Counsel Robyn Drivon had a spending limit of \$50,000. A bill for services has already been received by the CAO for \$15,627. It's not her money that Knorr is spending, but your money. While you may not pay property tax, almost everyone who lives in the county contributes to the approximately \$40 million in annual sales tax revenue.

It's appears to be a simple contract. To understand its purpose, structure, need, who is involved and what's being done is shrouded in mystery. County government has turned into a wall of opaqueness. Everyone connected to this contract has circled the wagons to prevent any information as to how it came about, its purpose, need, billing, and real parties in interest. This is like a private deal paid for by public money, but the public is to butt out.



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On June 12 a *Mountain Democrat* reporter, the capable Dawn Hodson, attempted to inquire as to the nature of the contract and got stonewalled by everyone she talked to or attempted to

talk to. Even when the questions had obvious answers, they were spun like a top. And remember, these people work for us, the taxpayers and get paid nearly \$200,000 a year in base pay alone.

According to the story, the CAO wouldn't discuss anything about the contract when asked about allegations regarding a contract for investigative services to be rendered or have been rendered by the law firm of Prentice, Long and Epperson, LLC. Instead, Knorr wouldn't talk and referred Hodson to the county counsel.

In reading Hudson's story it doesn't look like Drivon was talking all that much and, in fact, was misleading when Drivon said, "The contract was authorized by the Board of Supervisors and the investigation was ongoing." When asked about the nature of the investigative services, Drivon wouldn't answer. Drivon later affirmed that the contract was within the \$50,000 authority of the CAO, meaning it didn't have to go to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

Drivon intentionally tried to mislead the *Mountain Democrat*. Drivon obviously knew this contract was not submitted to the BOS for approval in either a consent calendar matter or regular agenda item and yet said, "It was approved by the BOS." The BOS knew nothing of this contract. Drivon knew it but tried to imply because CAO Knorr had jurisdiction on her own to sign it that the BOS approved it. That wasn't just shady; it was plain pettifoggery. News readers are smarter than that.

County Counsel Drivon also would not answer questions as to the first billing statement of \$15,627 as to what it was spent on. Drivon said that the money would come from county funds. Drivon needs to be reminded and Pam Knorr too that county funds are not their personal funds but the money belongs to the residents and taxpayers of El Dorado County. But now they won't even tell us how they are spending OUR money.

Instead they are lying to us as to how they are spending this money as Knorr and Drivon wanted to bill this \$15,627 encumbering Facility Accumulated Capital Outlay projects and charge it off to "Fixed Asset: Project Management for the New Courthouse."

But the investigator, Ken MacHold, who is suppose to be working for the Prentice et al law firm did confirm in his phone interview with Hodson he is interviewing people in the county but he could not comment or disclose any other information regarding the nature of the interviews. According to Hodson, the Prentice et al law firm wouldn't' t even return phone calls.

We need a thorough investigation. I know it's spending more money, but hiding contracts from the public, lying to the public about contracts, lying to the public about how money was spent or identified inappropriately by two of the highest officials in the county cannot be tolerated. This is not their private bank account, it's our public money for public uses, not secret investigations done with a contractual subterfuge.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.