

El Dorado County spending taxpayer money on PR agency for grand jury damage control

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County has hired a public relations firm to primarily focus on getting out a positive message about the latest grand jury report.

The scope of work with Endicott Communications out of Roseville says the primary objectives are:

“1. County more favorably perceived by residents and other key regional stakeholders.

“2. Media coverage and other external communications regarding grand jury reports reflect county key messaging.”

Pamela Knorr, when she was acting CAO, signed the contract on June 15. *Lake Tahoe News* has been trying to get a copy of it since June 17 when the unfamiliar contact information appeared on a press release. Knorr never responded to the request. Auditor-Controller Joe Harn provided a copy of the public document on July 8, the same day he received it. As of Wednesday he had not received an invoice from the firm.

The \$40,000 contract is below the threshold in which the Board of Supervisors would have to approve the expenditure.

The contract goes on to say the flacks are to develop talking points for county staff to use in regards to the grand jury, write and distribute press releases, develop content about the grand jury report for the county's website and social media, and monitor and report on grand jury related media coverage.

One of the more highly charged grand jury reports was about the Human Resources Department, of which Knorr is head of. She was also acting CAO from December 2014 until June 29.

This isn't the first time the county has sought outside help instead of relying on staff which it had done up until about three years ago.

Then CAO Terri Daly hired Stephanie McCorkle on May 13, 2014, to do public relations work. The one-year contract was not to exceed \$25,000. She left before half the year's term was up, but billed for nearly the entire amount of the contract.

There was also Kittelson and Associates, which entered a \$516,995 three-year contract with the county in December to provide public outreach for a five-year capital improvement program and traffic impact mitigation fee program updates. In the document is a \$44,720 contract with Flint Strategies to be a subcontractor of Kittleson's for PR work.