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de la Guerra, Sheila **Public Comment-**

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Our county supervisors, along with many of the city councils in this area, are quite simply oblivious to the obvious! That is, the county is facing protests from the contract cities of Goleta, Carpinteria, Solvang and Buellton, who are balking at the cost of renewing their contracts with the county to provide law enforcement services within the boundaries of their cities. Not to be deterred, the county and many of the cities within the county, are conspiring to take over the county-wide ambulance service from American Medical Response (AMR) in order to ostensibly transfer these duties to the county fire department.

Why would cities balk at paying the full cost of law enforcement services with the county and then turn around and ask the county to take over ambulance services? Whereas, the cities themselves are footing the bill for law enforcement, perhaps the cities don't care what it costs to provide ambulance services since the people and their insurance companies are going to be on hook for this subsequent contract?

Currently, AMR is the sole source ambulance provider for the entire county. It is a private corporation that has had the contract for decades. I have no doubt that county fire or some other private sector company could provide the services. The question is, at what cost to consumers, er read that, taxpayers?

County fire believes they can create economies of scale if they win the contract. This has to do with the fact that fire departments throughout the county respond to virtually every ambulance call as it is and they maintain that they usually get there before AMR. Hence, if the county ran the ambulance services they could eliminate what they characterize as redundant and slower services.

I doubt the county can provide ambulance services to the entire county at a more affordable rate than AMR, unless there is some serious outside-the-box thinking on this plan, something county supervisors are not known for. That is, the county and the cities would need to create some sort of joint powers contract agency that had the ability to control costs and limit taxpayer liabilities.

Why so?

The county doesn't do anything cheaper than the private sector. The exorbitant salaries, benefits, and retirement packages average \$161,000 per employee! Moreover, it is the retirement benefits that make this proposal extremely suspect. This has to do with the fact that all county employees enjoy what is known as a defined benefit retirement plan. In a defined benefit retirement plan, government employees are guaranteed a certain percentage of their final and highest average salary for the rest of their life. The ability of government, read that taxpayers, to make good on this type of retirement plan is entirely dependent on stock market returns, fees, and higher and higher taxes!

Hence, the county will never be able to confirm and control the cost of providing ambulance services because one of their biggest cost drivers is beyond their control. A lesson the entire county should be learning via the dispute with the contract cities for law enforcement services.

Conversely, whatever retirement benefit a private sector company such as AMR pays out, that is on the company not the taxpayers.

In order to deal with the ongoing crisis of pension obligations, government routinely raises fees and cuts services. When that doesn't work, they simply raise taxes under threat of cutting vital services the public can't do without. How are these three strategies going to work with regard to the ability to pay for ambulance services? Because, certainly, no patient will be denied care and transport sans the ability to pay (a second cost factor beyond the county's control), thereby leaving taxpayers on the hook, rather than AMR, or some other private sector provider.

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