

Opinion: DHHS to the rescue to squander money on a Phony Ambulance matter

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It has been nearly a year since the County's Board of Supervisors started the process of finding a new ambulance service. What you say? A new ambulance service? What's wrong with the old one? Nothing! Still surprised?

It seems Del Norte Ambulance came before the Board of Supervisors after thirty-seven years of more than adequate service in Del Norte County to request an Exclusive Operating Area (EOA) permit. This simply was to formalized a nearly four-decade long authorization to be Del Norte County's sole ambulance service. Then, Supervisor Darrin Short happened along.

In order to understand the nature of Supervisor Short's embarrassing politicization of a rather innocuous request by Del Norte Ambulance, here's the background: First and foremost, there has been a long-standing feud between fire department leadership and Del Norte Ambulance dating back decades.

It would appear as the fire department became less of a fire department and more of a second-string attendant at the County's growing number of health-related emergencies, certain feathers were ruffled at Crescent Fire and Rescue and the Crescent Fire Protection District. Nothing like a testosterone-filled fire house with less and less to feel heroic about and wanting to feel more relevant and important.

Enter our new quarter of a million-dollar man, Fire Chief Kevin Carey, who has made no secret of his disdain for Del Norte Ambulance. Carrying the water for the new Chief, Supervisor Short initiated a complaint claiming the ambulance service didn't measure up to be an EOA. Short, who is a long-standing member of Crescent Fire and Rescue, is hardly a person who can be trusted to be objective regarding the ambulance service, yet the Board allowed Short, Supervisor Starkey, and a North Coast Emergency Powers representative to form an ad hoc committee to evaluate Short's feeble complaint. Nice thing to be appointed to a committee whose task it is to evaluate your own complaint. Nothing but the smartest of decisions by the Board.

In spite of no findings of fault by Del Norte Ambulance from North Coast EMS, the CHP, the Sheriff's Office, the City Police, Sutter Health, the School District and any other service related to emergency services, Supervisor Short insisted that the fire department had conclusive information Del Norte Ambulance has failed to live up to its responsibilities as ambulance provider for the County. We are still waiting for Short's proof. Are you seeing a dubious pattern here? Short, probably not the brightest bulb on the Board, by a 3-2 vote set the County's course on funding the search for a new ambulance service provider. Estimates for the search are likely to be at least \$150,000, remember "poor county", up to a possible high of \$300,000, all to generate a much poorer working relationship with the current ambulance service provider which will likely be the very same DNAMB going forward. Well done Supervisors Short, Starkey, and Borges.

And you, the public, thought the story was at end. No, it gets better (or worse) with the appearance of Director, eager for more accolades, Ranell Brown, who revealed the Department of Health and Human Services has squirreled away a nest egg of \$243,000 for emergencies and is more than willing to part with the nest egg to further Supervisor Short's political machinations. Remember Del Norte Ambulance's contract does not end until 2027. So, where and what is the emergency for Director Brown?

So far, \$97,000 has been squandered on a consultant, thanks a lot Mr. Short. The obvious path forward is to back up, pay the consultant to stand down, take fire department and Supervisor Short out of the equation and continue to have Del Norte Ambulance service the County. With damage to the County's financial health minimized, Del Norte Ambulance placated but no longer trusting, and possible legal action averted, all that is left is for the fire department to get over itself and act in a cooperative and non-political fashion. Perhaps, Fire Chief Carey should be moved along as well.

While this may be sound advice, I will let Supervisors Short, Starkey, and Borges ponder the error of their collective ways and not hold my breath corrective and timely action will follow. It has become almost a regular pattern for Del Norte County's Board members to try and spend their way out of trouble when the simplest course of action to avoid trouble in the first place is to keep taxpayer money in the County's coffers. This remains a skill set which is clearly outside of their collective abilities as our governing board. After all, the Department of Health and Human Services may have an actual real emergency to deal with.