
Opinion: The Consolation Prize Has a New Tale to Tell

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It has been a year now since the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors decided 3-2, Supervisors Short, Starkey, and Borges in the affirmative, Del Norte Ambulance, serving Del Norte County for nearly four decades was not fit to receive an exclusive right to provide the county with ambulance service going forward. Seems Fire Chief Kevin Carey and local fire departments, Crescent Fire and Rescue and the Crescent Fire Protection District found Del Norte Ambulance to be an inadequate service provider.

This unfortunate action was taken following the report by an ad hoc committee consisting of Supervisors Short, the complainant, Supervisor Starkey and a representative from our oversight group, Northcoast EMS. With Short's thumb on the scale, the results of the report of the ad hoc committee were hardly something to be confident objectivity had been served.

The curious part of the whole mismanaged affair was no one on the Board of Supervisors questioned the fact all other members of the emergency services community, the hospital, the sheriff, the city's police chief, the school district, members of the community at large, and even our EMS watch dog North Coast EMS found Del Norte Ambulance's service to be anything but MORE THAN ADEQUATE! So, what's up with Crescent Fire and Rescue and the Crescent Fire Protection District?

While the Triplicate may choose not to speculate as to why this very expensive decision, could be as much as \$300,000 to the taxpayer wallet, was made, there isn't much doubt Supervisor "I didn't get the memo" Short was operating on the behalf of the appalling lack of professional leadership in the form of Fire Chief Kevin Carey, the City and CFPD's quarter of a million-dollar man.

As fire departments across the country are finding structure fires fewer and fewer due to less dependence on open flame sources, it's no longer the 1850's after all, new fire resistance building materials, and fire safety codes being enacted, fire departments are finding an increasing lack of being the primary source at emergencies. Local volunteer departments, Crescent Fire and Rescue and Crescent Fire Protection District, found reporting response to over 2,000 incidents per year only yielded fire being about 10% of the 2,000 calls (about 200 calls), most of that 10% not even being structure fires.

So, what's a testosterone-fueled bunch of frustrated heroes supposed to do to remain relevant in the community? Enter the new phase of joining the health emergency portion of emergency services. Precisely what the local fire departments have done. Yet, even once the fire departments had begun to insert themselves into the health rescue scene, other than basic first aid, the fire team is quickly shuttled aside when the ambulance service shows up. Not good for the ego.

Fast forward a year, and Supervisor Starkey's recent comments at the March 11th meeting of the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, has "bad press" and the failure of the fire department complaints to resonate with the public, so what's a politician saddled with a tall tale supposed to do?

Enter Starkey's "New" reason why last year's decision to throw Del Norte Ambulance under the bus was the correct one. Gone are the fire department complaints; enter the slippery world of the politician and the next reason up for her last year's decision to surface, an outdated contract. Now the consolation prize was secure in her decision a year ago, in spite of the fact an outdated contract wasn't even mentioned as a concern by anyone.... An outdated contract! How convenient.

Faster than the sinking of the Titanic, Starkey is no longer talking about fire department complaints, validating her vote to seek a new ambulance provider a year previous. Suddenly it's an "an outdated contract" and metrics. Waving paperwork from Lassen County in the recent March 11th County Board meeting, Starkey announces this will be Del Norte County's ambulance provider contract going forward. No vote necessary. A Starkey decree apparently is all that is necessary. Further the "consolation prize" states, after hours of exhaustive work by the Board, when this was supposed to have happened no one is quite sure and something not in evidence before the previous year's vote, Starkey doubles down and insists she is now comfortable with her dubious vote.

While ultimately the issue will likely be resolved in Del Norte Ambulance's favor, the unnecessary expense to the taxpayer, the loss of trust by Del Norte Ambulance in county government, and likely no effort by the local fire departments to mend their respective ways, will remain as another clear instance of inferior government on display by three of Del Norte County's board members, Supervisors Short and Starkey,

followed by the silent one Chair Joey Borges. A truly stark example of “the old boy network” calling the shots, not our clueless local Board.

The local citizens deserve better decisions from our county’s board of supervisors which is becoming hard to find. Impulsive decision making by our consolation prize, Valerie Starkey based on poor or fraudulent information is costing taxpayers thousands if not millions of dollars, just in the local jurisdiction. We must in the near future, elect leadership who can sift through the complexities of modern government and make decisions based on what is best for the community. We do not have that currently in the form of Supervisors Valerie Starkey, Darren Short, Chris Howard, Dean Wilson, and Chair of the Board Joey Borges.