

Image Problem

August 14, 2004

It's obvious to many observers that Glendale's City Hall has circled the wagons recently, and gone a bit wacky. That wackiness could be amusing if only the symptoms weren't so serious. But they are, and appalling examples of an imperious and oppressive administration seem to be popping up everywhere. The menacing seriousness of the latest episode cannot be understated.

A few weeks ago Randy Adams, Glendale's Chief of Police, offered an endorsement to one side battling over ballot measures coming before voters in a special election next month. I've been writing about the unique endorsement in several forums. Among those is "G," a new, twice-monthly, local newspaper I write for once a month. For the issue, due out August 15, I wrote about Adams' entry into politics. ([See PREVIOUS COLUMN for a similar piece on the same subject.](#))



G - Glendale's now-defunct newspaper.

After receiving the copy for my column, a G editor, Margaret Arnold, contacted the Glendale Police Department's Public Information Office (PIO) with a routine request. She asked for a picture of the chief, a photo to be used in conjunction with an article about him. This is a request made of government offices countless times every day, from Glendale City Hall, to the White House. Like other public agencies, Glendale has used public funds to arrange for portraits of virtually every city official, including Chief Adams. Such photos are typically sent via E-mail to whomever asks.

The GPD's PIO said they'd have to get back to Arnold.

Hearing nothing over the next two days, Arnold called the PIO's office again. That's when she says she got a big surprise. According to Arnold, the police department's Public Information Office announced that chief Adams has instituted a new policy. Henceforth, the police department will no longer release photos unless the chief is first allowed to read and approve any article the photo is intended to accompany. No approval, no photos.

Gee, why would it be a bad idea to give a government official the final say over what appears in a newspaper? I thought this was one of the issues we recently explained to Sadaam Hussein, but apparently that message hasn't been understood closer to home. It's almost beside the point that giving an advance copy of an article to someone who is a subject of that article is considered by most journalists and publishers to be grossly unethical.

I suppose Adams' new policy would be merely petty if we were asking for a copy of someone's personal photo, perhaps an officer smiling at a retirement party, or the chief sitting on Santa's lap. But Adams is holding hostage photos created



at taxpayer expense specifically for public dissemination. But as offensive and improper as it is that the chief thinks he can control who gets access, that outrage is dwarfed by the chief believing he has a right to compel a newspaper to print only that which is pleasing to him. His policy is all the more ironic when one remembers that just a few weeks ago Adams allowed a developer to use his badge and office address in campaign literature promoting the chief's ballot measure endorsement.



GPD Chief Randy Adams. Blurry portrait lifted from the city's web site.



Last week Mayor Bob Yousefian lashed out during a council meeting, and decreed that he's temporarily changing a longstanding policy with regard to public speakers. From now on, those members of the public wishing to address the council on a certain set of issues will have to wait until the bulk of the meeting has ended, often at 10pm, 11pm and later. At the same time, city employees are moving against those citizens who, by posting more than one election sign on their property, violate a once-obscure ordinance.

In 1999, during debate over signs posted by an influential homeowner association, City Manager Jim Starbird publicly ordered city staff not to enforce the sign ordinance the group was violating. He declared an "overriding community interest is served" by allowing the violation, and city employees obeyed the directive. Now, in cracking down on those who post campaign signs advocating a position not favored by City Hall, Starbird and other city officials are saying sign laws must be fully enforced at all times and without exceptions. To do anything else, they say now, would be improper. Well, except for that homeowner association, which is still allowed to post its signs illegally.

These and other similar episodes are part of an emerging and obvious pattern in Glendale City Hall, and each by itself is cause for profound concern.