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Columnist

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COUNCILMAN SUBJECT Of INVESTIGATION

NOTE: See Jan. 10 updates to this story below the column.

January 9, 2006

According to numerous sources, just before Christmas Burbank Police were called to a home across the street from the home of Burbank City Councilman Todd Campbell because his fiancé had fled there after a dispute with Campbell.



Burbank Councilman Todd Campbell - Not Talking.

Law enforcement and city hall sources on the story declined to be named because Chief of Police Tom Hoefel has declared the episode and the aftermath remain under investigation. When I spoke to Hoefel, he would only say only that, “If there were a matter under investigation, I could not comment on it because it would be the subject of an ongoing investigation.” When I asked Hoefel if that didn’t serve in itself as a confirmation that there was an investigation underway, he said, “I cannot confirm or deny that.”

Campbell has not returned several messages left for him over several days, and when I visited his home twice over the weekend he did not answer the door. On Sunday evening Campbell’s car was parked in front of the house, loud music blared from inside and the lights were on, but no one answered the door.

According to multiple sources, when Burbank detectives began investigating the Dec. report they found similar reports in Campbell’s background with previous girlfriends, including one that allegedly resulted in an order that he attend an anger management class.

The sources also reported that police found damage in and around Campbell’s home when they answered the initial call, but that the councilman had left the scene before they arrived. The sources say Campbell did return home to find detectives waiting for him the following day, and he was interviewed at that time.

When Chief Hoefel would not provide details of the initial request for police assistance, I asked if the incident was being handled differently for a councilman than it might be for another citizen. He said, "It's definitely not, and everything will be clear further down the line."

Campbell was elected in 2003, a virtual unknown in the community before his campaign began. His term ends in 2007.

Campbell changed jobs on Dec. 15, just a week before the Dec. 21 incident at his home. Campbell, who had worked for the Coalition for Clean Air, became the Director of Public Policy for Clean Energy. The Seal Beach firm provides natural gas supplies for vehicles, and has made proposals to both the city of Burbank and the Airport Authority at the Bob Hope Airport. It could not be determined immediately whether either entity has done business with the firm.

The episode is likely to provide yet another storm of controversy in Burbank's City Hall, coming close on the heels of the July arrest and later guilty pleas by councilwoman Stacey Murphy. Arrested in July, Murphy resigned in August and entered guilty pleas to drug possession and child endangerment charges in November. Campaigns and a special election period are now underway to fill the seat vacated by Murphy.

JAN 10 UPDATE # 1: In the process of working on this story I filed a records request with the city. Under provisions of the California Public Records Act (CPRA), I asked for records and information related to the initial call to police, and any related materials that could be released.

In response to that request, on Jan. 10 the Burbank's City Attorney's office declined to release the materials.

Citing California law that dictates police departments disclose information related to requests for assistance, Chief Asst. City Attorney Juli Scott noted the law includes an exception if "disclosure would endanger the safety of a person involved in the investigation or would endanger the successful completion of the investigation or related investigation."

For many years it has been the norm for Burbank's City Attorney, and especially for Scott in particular, to employ interpretations of mind-boggling breadth to defend withholding records. In the case at hand, for example, the parties involved already know the date, time and the immediate police response to a call for help, and so only the public is being denied that information.

It should be possible to release some details without revealing the content of witness statements, the current whereabouts of an alleged victim, and so forth. Moreover, there are countless examples of incidents wherein the release of information such as that I requested has ultimately aided investigations, including the discovery of new witnesses who have information about similar accusations against the subject of an investigation, or a record of an accuser having made false claims.

I once considered making a CPRA request for copies of every letter issued by Scott over a 10 year period wherein she agreed the public was entitled to see a requested record on any matter and passionately insisted on its release. It would have been the only time that her office's standard answer of "we have no materials responsive to your request" might be credible.

Alas, there are enough frivolous requests for records that I chose not to add one more to the pile just to make a point that's already well known to those in a position to have an effect on Burbank's defacto policy.

Until more is released officially, for information about an incident and a police investigation surrounding an elected public official, we will have to rely on the information of credible sources who insist on anonymity, an unpleasant and much less than ideal circumstance. It's a circumstance that, when employed by the media to inform the public, is especially despised by police departments. When employed by police departments weighing whether someone might be denied their liberty, of course, it's routine.

UPDATE # 2: With regard to Campbell's new employer noted in the column above, City Manager Mary Alvord has confirmed the company, Clean Energy, operates the city's natural gas facility. It's used by city vehicles that run on the fuel, and is also open to the public. According to Alvord, the company's contract has "a number of years" to run.

Alvord also told me that Councilman Campbell is aware of the potential for conflicts of interest, and that he's been briefed by the city attorney as to when he will have to recuse himself in council discussions that involve the firm.
