

Meeting with assessor disappointing

Opinion

Last Wednesday evening turned into a very good night for Incline Village/Crystal Bay and its Citizens Advisory Board. What might have been an ugly scene occasioned by the visit of Washoe County Assessor Josh Wilson instead showcased both the evenhanded, professional skill of the CAB in Gene Brockman's chairmanship of the meeting, and the community's thoughtful and mature questioning of Mr. Wilson.

Make no mistake about it, the occasion was potentially explosive. Because of advance notice of Mr. Wilson's visit, some 100 citizens packed the chambers, overflowing into the hallways and out onto the sidewalks.

To recapitulate the reason for this community outpouring, the state Supreme Court ruled the prior Thursday, for a second time, that the methods used by the Washoe County Assessors office in assessing Incline Village/Crystal Bay properties violated the state constitution's requirement for uniform and equal taxation.

Now, in my four years of residing in Paradise, there are two things that bring out Incliners: money and food. In this case it was money. Maryanne Ingemanson described the Supreme Court decision as "monstrous," namely it could mean that the county will have to refund \$70 million in property taxes to property owners here.

You could say the local folks wanted to ask Mr. Wilson, up close and personal, "When do we get our money?" In fact, several people did ask that question in one form or another, but the inquiries were

invariably polite, constructive, probing and levelheaded.

OK. Maybe that's a minor mischaracterization. There were several indignant aside, an occasional sarcastic laugh and a silent chorus of eye rolls, but not once was Sheriff's Commander Steven Kelly called on to restore order. And Mr. Brockman, an imposing and dignified meeting chair that night, never lost his cool.

Given the not unreasonable conclusion drawn by many that the county has been using every tactic it can to thwart the sense of the Supreme Court in its now two crucial rulings, the fair hearing accorded Mr. Wilson by our citizen's was rather remarkable.

Unhappily, it was less clear just what Mr. Wilson hoped to accomplish by presenting himself to Incline residents. Ostensibly, the good fellow was at the CAB to "meet and greet," chat with the locals, and make a presentation on the upcoming fiscal year (2008-2009) reappraisal of Incline Village/Crystal Bay properties.

I'll say this for Mr. Wilson; he did his best. He presented himself as a newly elected earnest servant of the people, beholden only to the rules and to the good people whose properties he assesses. Implored Mr. Wilson, "I'm not a bad person. I took this job to do what was right. I'm not trying to hide anything. I want the answers just like you."

Unfortunately, many in attendance, including me, were left with the impression that Mr. Wilson was hiding a great deal, that there are enormous political pressures on

him he chose not to reveal and that he may represent part of the problem rather than a solution to the problem. Mr. Wilson was asked, in the context of the Supreme Court ruling in December 2006 if he had met with his counterparts around the state to explore the meaning of the court's decision for the county's assessment methods. Mr. Wilson said that other counties wouldn't talk with Washoe.

Mr. Wilson was asked, given the court's decision, if bureaucrats, legislators, or politicians had been meeting to find a way forward. He suggested that might be the case, but he was not at liberty to say anything about it.

By evening's end, many Incliners' were shaking their heads, some in disgust, and some in sadness. The county was awarded a grand opportunity to renew the people's faith

in their government by honoring the sense of the Supreme Court rulings and they flunked.

It's time for people in our political class, be they courageous and creative legislators, or the Governor himself to step forward and move the agenda in a positive direction. When citizens lose faith in their government, both citizens and government are diminished. Sure, this imbroglio will come to an end, money will change hands in the process and government will not perish, but unless government acknowledges the incompetence and/or corruption at the heart of this mess, and takes corrective action, we all lose.

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