



From the Opinion Desk of the APA Executive Director

When Politics Interferes.....

It is indeed a rare occurrence when the Arizona Police Association Executive Director involves himself directly into a local association issue. However, the recent incident involving Phoenix City Councilman Michael Johnson and the subsequent public sideshow orchestrated by Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon demands such a response.

Let me clearly state that Councilman Johnson is and will always remain a close friend of the Arizona Police Association. Councilman Johnson has always spoken in a most positive manner when it comes to any matter related to the health, safety and welfare of Phoenix police officers. He can always be counted on when good counsel is needed or when an officer needs support for himself or his family. City of Phoenix citizens chose well when they placed him in elected office and he in turn has proven himself worthy of the public trust given to him by his constituents.

The incident last week involving Councilman Johnson and the Phoenix Police Officer Brian Authement is going to receive an extensive review by the Phoenix Police Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the general public. Actions taken by police officers should be subject to such reviews and they commonly bring updated training and methodology to current police practices. Rarely do such reviews cause an officer to lose their job or cause a public official embarrassment. Even though the stress related to these reviews is intense most police officers welcome such reviews of their actions.

However in this matter a unique element (at least for the City of Phoenix) entered into the fray, politics. Mayor Phil Gordon, who by all accounts has seen his political life sun setting, decided to use this incident to resurrect his name and public image before the investigation in the matter was even concluded. We have now all seen the public spectacle, hidden behind the disguise of an open public meeting or forum on race relations between the police department and the city's minority community, where Phil tried, pathetically I might add, to portray a leader who truly cares about incidents involving race, sexual harassment and EEOC violations committed by the city's police officers.

We should never forget that gaining television exposure is a politicians' most desired goal and Mayor Gordon was obviously intending to reach that goal without regard to the facts regarding the incident. The fact that the Mayor even allowed public discussion to take place before the investigation was concluded stinks of direct political intervention into an ongoing police investigation. Mayor Gordon's public reason for holding this "open meeting" was to address community concerns about the incident but I believe his real reason for intervention was straight out of the manual on how to resurrect a public persona.

Incidents related to race, sexual harassment and EEOC Violations are not new to any police department, including the Phoenix Police Department, but isn't it strange that these have never been deemed worthy enough for such a massive and televised community forum to be called. Why is it when so many cases of prior improprieties were alleged, as was well stated by the Rev. Oscar Tillman, that public forums were not conducted to highlight and eradicate these issues?

Many citizens at this “open forum” exclaimed that Phoenix Police Management was indifferent to managerial misconduct complaints on racial, sexual harassment and EEOC issues and one (Rev. Tillman) even raised the fact that the department’s own officers, through their labor organization (the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association), had brought such issues forward seeking a remedy to alleviate and correct current and potential future problems as well. However their requests were apparently ignored, diminished or simply rebuffed simply because many of their complaints were directly related to police management officials. Mayor Gordon the question must be asked, “Where were you when these complaints and concerns were presented to your police command officials?”

Complimenting these statements were several speakers who spoke of the lack of communication between the minority community and the police department since Public Safety Manager Jack Harris reassumed his position as “police chief”. So the question has to be asked, Mayor Gordon where were you when these issues were first brought forward to you by these citizens? Where was your public outcry and your demand for review of current police department policies and procedures? Where was your concern for the citizens and your city employees when these issues were raised? The facts clearly illustrate what really transpired at this “open forum” was a vetting on police management indifference.

Whether the actions of the officer were lawful and in accordance with department policy has yet to be decided but whatever the outcome, police management officials need to come to grip with the fact that their policies have failed their officers, their elected officials and their community. Finally, Mayor Gordon you need to remember that a political endorsed lynching of any citizen, police officer or not, is bad public policy and does nothing but leave a bad taste in the mouths of our citizens.

By

Brian Livingston, APA Executive Director