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THE STAR NEWS

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LOCAL NEWS

TAKING ITS TOLL

CHECKING IN ON
STATE ROUTE 125, p. 3



Councilman clarifies cooked books remark

By Tawny Maya McCray

STAFF WRITER

Early Wednesday morning Councilman John McCann released a statement to *The Star-News* in response to comments he made to the *voiceofsandiego* about a former city manager "cooking the books."

The one paragraph statement read:

"During the June 2007 budget meeting I was on record as being concerned about the city's revenue forecasts being too rosy. After the budget was passed, which

was supposed to be balanced, we found out that we had a \$7 million shortfall in revenue. That was my concern."

Asked to elaborate, McCann said, "I don't comment on confidential, off-the-record comments."

On Dec. 20, 2007, McCann was quoted in an article by *voiceofsandiego* columnist Scott Lewis saying, "I don't know how I can eloquently say this but, off the record, the former city manager was cooking the books."

When Lewis informed the councilman that he hadn't agreed to go off the record and was quot-

ing him, McCann said he had to get to a meeting and hung up the phone, Lewis reported.

Former Chula Vista City Manager Dave Rowlands was asked at the time what he thought of McCann's comments.

"It's not true, number one," he said. "People who know me and people who know McCann know the truth. It's really simple. His allegations are totally false."

In the Jan. 4 issue of *The Star-News*, Councilman Rudy Ramirez said he felt McCann should ad-

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Katz, asked U.S. District Court Judge John Houston for a lesser sentence, saying this was his first offense. Katz said Wisda had no interest in children and was not a pedophile, something the prosecutor agreed with. There were no allegations he had ever acted on any fantasy involving children.

Perry said in court documents that Wisda was addicted to child pornography. Both she and the probation department recommended a 46-month term. The maximum was 10 years.

Wisda pleaded guilty to possession of a child pornography and was sentenced Nov. 13. The judge allowed him to remain free over the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's holidays and he ordered him to surrender Jan. 4. "The sentence imposed needs to be significant enough so that Mr. Wisda will not be ever again tempted," said Perry.

MCCANN

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dress the comment one way or another, whether it was to retract his statement or defend it.

"He shouldn't make an inflammatory statement unless he can back it up," Ramirez said then. "If there was something improper or illegal going on we need to get to the bottom of it."

In the same issue Mayor Cheryl Cox was quoted as saying, "If he has information that needs to be shared then he'll share it."

The councilman recently wrote a letter to *The Star-News* demanding a retraction of inaccurate statements.

Editor Carlos Davalos said that in absence of any evidence of inaccuracies, the newspaper would not retract the story.

"We're happy Councilman McCann has chosen to finally address the issue and are always happy to address any concerns he has with our reporting," Davalos said.

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Perspective & Opinion

It depends on how you define things

Funny how you can have one glass of water, two people and two extremely different perspectives. One person might see a tall sparkling glass filled with a refreshing beverage while another might see a glass that's probably stolen, about to splinter into jagged pieces and is teeming with bacteria-laden sewage. Which scenario presents reality? I guess it depends on who you ask and what is their definition of accuracy.

Nearly a month ago, Chula Vista Councilman John McCann was quoted by news website *voicofsanidiego* as saying a former city manager was "cooking the books." *The Star-News* picked up on the story. It's at that point that reality and perception seemed to start diverging for a handful of people.

Recently, McCann sent a letter to *The Star-News* seeking a retraction. The letter is reprinted in our Letters from Readers section at the right.

Asking for a retraction is a serious matter. In essence, it's saying, "You blew the story, you got it wrong and your entire story needs to be withdrawn from the public record." Some requests for retractions also demand an apology.

We asked the councilman which statements published in *The Star-News* were inaccurate. After all, without its credibility, a newspaper or any news organization is worthless.

The councilman, to his credit, agreed to meet with *The Star-*



CARLOS R. DAVALOS
FROM THE EDITOR

News Tuesday night, after the council meeting. So, after a marathon closed-session council meeting, McCann, reporter Tawny McCray and I met at approximately 11:50 p.m. in a conference room near council chambers.

The councilman wanted the meeting off the record. I think I sighed audibly when he made that remark.

One of the primary reasons for the conference was for the editorial staff to learn what it was that McCann felt was inaccurate and needed correcting. But he didn't feel comfortable telling us, on the record, what it was that needed fixing.

And so the three of us found ourselves sitting in a conference room after midnight stuck at an impasse.

Certainly there was discussion about people's feelings but when it came to talking about facts, well, we're still wondering what it was that the councilman believed was inaccurate because McCann wouldn't speak for the record.

Which brings us back to the question of reality and perception.

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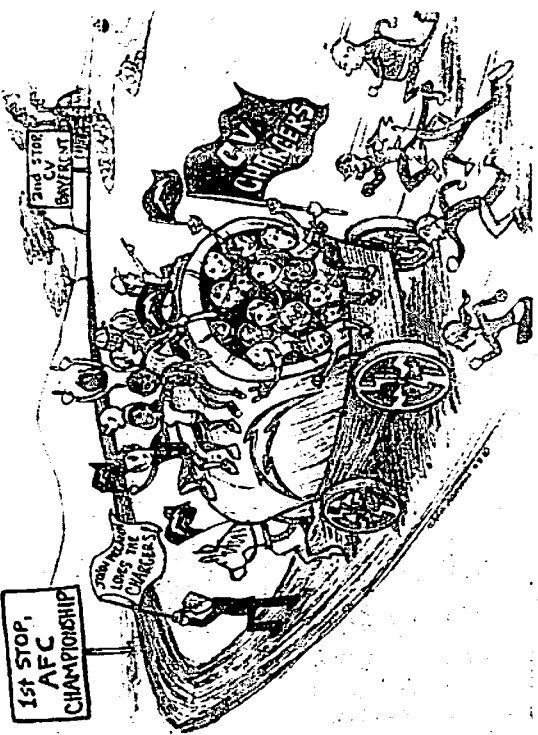
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LETTERS FROM READERS

Chula Vista councilman wants apology

I am requesting a complete and full retraction of your article Tawny McCray's inaccurate statements that I have not been available to be interviewed. The facts are that two times I have made myself available for this matter, including an apology to interview me and both times Tawny has failed to show.

On Wednesday, January 2nd Tawny called me at work. I specifically took her call during a business meeting so we could set up a time for an interview. We both agreed that we would speak in the late afternoon on Thursday, January 3rd. On Thursday, January 3rd in the early afternoon Tawny left a message for me stating that she needed to leave work early and we could talk next Monday or Tuesday.

On Tuesday, January 8th Tawny and I spoke just prior to the City Council meeting. We both agreed that we would talk after the City Council meeting that evening. Early during the City Council meeting I saw Tawny leave. At the end of the City Council meeting I went to the press box looking for her, but she was not there. I even looked for her in the lobby, but she was nowhere to be found.

In addition, I would have been happy to talk to *The Star News* about the first article. If you would have given me the opportunity after the Christmas holiday, but you ran the article without a comment. During the first week in January, I spoke with the

The public was never notified that a discussion between the June and the November elections would be contemplated and considered.

How much did the Council spend on these outside attorneys to answer questions the public didn't know were going to be asked? Just one more argument in favor of having an elected City Attorney who will represent the people.

JERRY SCOTT
Chula Vista

Delays by council

The Chula Vista City Council is at it again! Last night the City Council delayed and rescheduled the vote on the Elected City Attorney Initiative from the June election to the November election. This is yet another delay tactic that continues a pattern by the Mayor and City Council to thwart more representative government.

As usual, the Mayor had a laundry list of excuses for the delay. The fact of the matter is that the June ballot will also include two Chula Vista Council seats that are up. Therefore, placement of the initiative on the same ballot as when we choose our Council members makes perfect sense. Secondly, there is plenty of time between now and June for a number of public forums to be held, by either side, on the issue.

More nonsense

The nonsense continues at City Hall, despite a so-called "change in leadership." With budget deficits as far as the eye can see, Mayor Cox and the City Council hired outside lawyers to find another loophole to disenfranchise the voters of Chula Vista and delay the vote on the Elected City Attorney Initiative. This will deny the residents of Chula Vista the opportunity to elect their City Attorney until 2010.

It played out in a way that reeked of Brown Act violations and deception on the part of City Officials. The Agenda Statement clearly spelled out that the Council would be voting to place the initiative, which has twice received 20,000 signatures of Chula Vista residents, on the June 2008 Municipal General Election ballot. After Public Comment, the Mayor then proceeded to inform the audience that she wants it on the November ballot bypassing the appro-

JOHN MCCANN,
COUNCILMEMBER
City of Chula Vista

EDITOR

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tion and who sees what.

In his letter the councilman writes that McCray and I made inaccurate statements. But when pressed he wouldn't tell us what those statements were. At least, not on the record.

In his letter, the councilman also contends that McCray "failed to show" for scheduled meetings. This is an area that quickly escalates into rounds of "he said, she said" and very little can be resolved when people have two absolutely conflicting views of what happened.

However, on the record, I stand

behind McCray and her reporting. In the time that she's been here I've had no reason to doubt her integrity, accuracy or her ability to keep her appointments.

The councilman's letter put this paper in the awkward position of having to defend itself and presented, for me, an extraordinary circumstance.

Like everyone in this community, Councilman McCann is entitled to his opinion. He has a right to voice his displeasure and he, like everyone else in this community, is encouraged to hold this newspaper accountable.

But at the same time a journalist or newspaper should be allowed an opportunity to defend

itself against those sorts of assertions. Especially when credibility is at issue.

As a rule of thumb, journalists, at least the reporters who work at this paper and with me, are told to not become a part of the story. Sometimes, however, there are exceptions. This is one of those exceptions.

McCann writes that in early January he spoke with *The Union-Tribune* and "gave them the opportunity to write the story." Granted, I don't read the U-T cover-to-cover every day but I do pay special attention to the stories that U-T staffer *Tanya Mannes* writes about Chula Vista. To date, I don't recall seeing anything with regard to McCann's December comments on *voiceofsandiego*. Maybe she didn't think the story was important. But we did. And here's why our perception of why this story mattered.

A current Chula Vista councilman was quoted by a news organization saying he believed Chula Vista's books were cooked.

One of the first questions to come to mind was, "Wow, did he really say that?" followed by, "Well, what did he mean and to whom was he referring?"

That same councilman, John McCann, is in the middle of a campaign for State Assembly. He wants to continue his career in public office. He wants the public to trust him enough that they will vote for him and put him in Sacramento.

Given the current state of Chula Vista's ailing economy, and the fact the city services have been reduced or cut and that people may lose their jobs and their livelihoods, a remark about city finances deserves looking into.

It's not as if McCann said he saw Elvis Presley singing karaoke at a Third Avenue bar. The councilman told columnist *Scott Lewis* that Chula Vista's books were cooked.

What does that mean?

Well, we've been trying to find out and until early Wednesday morning McCann hadn't commented.

To his credit, and true to his word that he gave us Tuesday afternoon, McCann presented *The Star-News* with a prepared statement that he said had been ready for a week. He wrote:

"During the June 2007 budget meeting, I was on record as being concerned about the city's revenue forecasts being too rosy. Af-

ter the budget was passed, which was supposed to be balanced, we found out that we had a \$7 million shortfall in revenue. That was my concern."

So there you go.

After weeks of seeking clarification, that's McCann's explanation to *The Star-News* of what he meant when he said the city's books were cooked. He called McCray Wednesday afternoon and elaborated some more. Those additional remarks are in her story today.

Our perception is that public officials, especially those in elected office, are supposed to be accountable for their comments and actions. They have campaigned and won the public's trust and that's a bond that needs to be revered.

Our perception is that a news organization has an obligation to the people it serves, be they readers of *The Star-News*, *voiceofsandiego* or *The Union-Tribune*.

Our perception is that sometimes you become a part of the story even though you don't want to be, but when it comes to earning and keeping the public's trust, sometimes you have to bend the rules.

Our perception may not be everyone's reality.



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MORE LETTERS

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Apalling behavior

I was appalled by Cheryl Cox's actions at last night's City Council meeting. When she