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## The Elephant in the Room and the Golden Rule -- Tim Heimstra

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The Elephant in the Room  
and the Golden Rule

By Tim Heimstra  
6/19/14

I had the privilege of attending the City Council meeting recently with my Vallejo Heights neighbors and friends who want to save participatory budgeting (PB). My personal motivation for attending is that our neighborhood has several roads with potholes that need filling and repaved.

Mayor Davis allowed for an open forum inviting anyone to step up to the podium and share concerns within the community. My heart became heavy with sorrow when a homeless man (Mr. Smith) humbly went to the podium to share his frustration with an unsafe van he purchased on March 27th of this year at a lien sale from a local towing company for a few hundred dollars. According to his statement, he was stopped by the Police, who called the towing company he bought it from to have it towed away because it was not DMV and safety compliant.

This homeless man said he was not allowed to get his things out of the van, which included his identification unless he paid a \$500 fine to get his van back. Dan Keen, our City Manager, politely instructed him to meet him at his office at City Hall the next morning at 9:30 to receive documentation enabling him to get his personal belongings out of the van.

At the request of two of my neighbors who do a lot of volunteer work in our community, I picked this gentleman up at City Hall that morning and drove him to this local tow yard. When we got there, a couple men sitting behind bullet proof glass were readily available to accept this homeless man's documentation allowing him limited access to get his personal belongings.

What a humbling experience! The homeless man (Mr. Smith) asked the manager of the towing company whether he could get some of his money back on the van they had sold him. The answer was not only "NO," but that he owed them \$500. When I asked for a resolution now to forgive the fine and give some of his money back, we were told they only do what the police tell them. My neighbor and I were also told that if they showed mercy to this homeless man, then

everyone would ask for a break. After I offered to pay a one year gym membership fee to this gentleman to help him stay clean and healthy, my other neighbor showed up with his truck to help transport his belonging to his homeless camp. My neighbor advised me that the Mr. Smith asked the manager for the new battery he had just installed in the van that cost him \$100 he was told they would not oblige this request.

I shared my concerns in this matter with both the Assistant City Manager and the Mayor's office, both of whom genuinely apprised me they would look into this. I like the positive direction Vallejo is experiencing along with our outstanding Police Department and certainly do not want to fight City Hall. Recognizing that nobody should get in trouble because all did their job in a legal manner, I do have concerns though:

- 1) Why is a vehicle that is not DMV and safety compliant allowed to be transferred to any person or entity that does not have a physical address and means to make the vehicle safe?
- 2) Does a politician who fights for auto recalls need to get severely hurt in an auto accident from one of these dangerous vehicles that are not compliant in order to change this broken system?
- 3) Why do we not have a law in place requiring tow companies to mandatorily sell their lien sale unsafe old vehicles at authorized auto auctions like Manheim, where they are required to disclose DMV penalties and safety / mechanical flaws to authorized buyers who are required to safety and smog these cars?
- 4) Are we exhausting all means to ensure the poor are not exploited and are treated with dignity and respect?
- 5) Are police officers, hospitals saving the lives of accident victims and traffic courts overburdened with a law that should be amended?

When I left the tow yard, I asked the owner of this towing company to consider showing mercy. Perhaps mercy / the Golden Rule will be exercised with a new law that punishes conduct that could be construed as unethical and protects our paved streets from unsafe vehicles.....

Note: All opinions expressed in the "Primal Scream" column are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Vallejo Independent Bulletin.

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