

Primal Scream--Corbett on Henke & The Times Herald--7/29/09

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The following was written in response to an article in The Vallejo Times Herald

By David Corbett

7/29/09

The piece in today's Vallejo Times-Herald concerning the lawsuit filed by Mr. Guiliani against Kurt Henke for malicious prosecution was shamelessly irresponsible.

Only the already fully informed could make from that article what was really at issue, and the glaring omissions are an outrage since they reflect on the very heart of the problems facing this cash-strapped city.

First, the headline, with its anonymous "Others," is misleading to the point of dishonesty. The so-called others are the firefighters local and their lawyer, a fact you bury at the bottom of the piece. Obviously, those facts are relevant. Why obscure them?

Second, Kurt Henke filed a frivolous and malicious lawsuit against Mr. Guiliani and the other defendants that was found entirely without merit both at the trial court level and upon appeal. The rulings were scathing in their rejection of Mr. Henke's arguments. You make no mention of that. You do not state what the underlying action concerned, and why it was found so baseless. Why? Who are you trying to protect?

Third, you make no mention of the single most crucial fact of all: Mr. Henke's legal fees were paid for by the union, whose members are city employees, which means the ultimate source of those fees was taxpayer dollars. The citizens of Vallejo were on the hook for the whole pointless, poisonous, self-serving mess.

The piece claims Mr. Cassidy does not know the source of those funds. Mr. Henke certainly does. Mr. Davis certainly does. I would imagine some of the union membership does, and they're none too happy about it. No mention of your reporter even putting the question to any of these individuals appears anywhere in your article. What were you scared of, that you might stumble across the obvious?

Anyone who followed that lawsuit knows that the union membership was obliged to pay Mr. Henke's fees and costs. Your attempt to keep a lid on that fact is shameless, dishonest and corrupt.

Mr. Henke's use of public funds to bankroll his own malicious agenda is an egregious abuse of the public trust. I defy you to explain to your readers why you failed to pursue this issue responsibly and fully in your article.

Newspapers are not just private companies responsible to shareholders or other economic stakeholders. They serve the public. The fourth estate is a crucial part of representative democracy and has been since this country's inception. The Times-Herald shames itself and the profession of journalism by such biased, shoddy, incomplete and irresponsible reportage.

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