

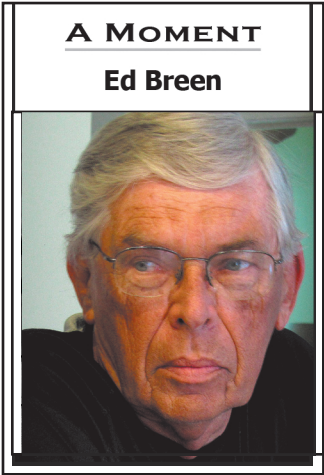
Marion city council has become embarrassment to voters

By Ed Breen

To begin with, this unseemly squabble at the Marion City Council over the spending of what one councilman incorrectly called “free money” has almost nothing to do with doing the right thing for Marion’s first responders – the police and fire fighters who have worked through the COVID pandemic.

Instead, it has everything to do with a power struggle within the council and within City Hall. It has to do with a power grab by the president of the City Council and with posturing by at least four members of the council for mayoral races that they believe are in their futures.

First things first: The city of Marion has received almost a million dollars in Coronavirus Relief Funds from the federal government to cover COVID costs. That’s what Councilman Brad Luzadder called “free money,” – his words — which, of course, it is not. It is a small slice of the trillions being spent by the fed-



eral government, which is a redistribution of our money, yours and mine. Secondly, the control of how that money is spent is clearly and entirely in the hands of the Mayor of Marion. It says so right there in the Indiana Finance Authority Coronavirus guidelines of Sept. 25, Page 5, Item 14: “Who is the Authorized Representative” entitled to distribute the funds? Right there. Line two: In an Indiana city, the “mayor.” Nobody else. Not the City Council or Board of Works or anyone else. In the county, it’s the president of the County Commissioners and in a town, the President of the Town Council.

“...that’s when they all go to court and you have the messy business of people on one side of city hall suing people on the other side of city hall and we – taxpayers of Marion – paying for all the lawyers for everyone.”

The Marion City Council, in a special session last Tuesday, hustled through three extraordinary and likely illegal ordinances which presume to spend a little less than \$600,000 on bonuses – what they are calling “hazard pay” – to be paid to 56 fire fighters, 61 police officers and two maintenance workers for their effort during the first months of the pandemic.

A couple of points on the ordinances. First, they were given no public scrutiny. Rules were suspended and they had first reading, second reading, third and final reading, all in less than 10 minutes. The vote: “Yes” from council members Deborah Cain, Brian

Cowgill, Robin Fouce, Steve Henderson, Don Batchelor, and Brad Luzadder. “No” from councilmen Mike Cline, Jim Brunner and Gary Fordyce. Three times, same deal, same language, same vote. Less than half an hour.

In these one-page revisions of the salary ordinances it says: “The Controller shall pay these funds from any source available, including remaining funds from 2020, federal funds from the CARES Act, or by additional appropriation in 2021.”

But I thought we were just taking about money from the CARES Act, the COVID “free money,” Apparently not. “Any source available,” it says.

What if there is no source? Oh, I get it! That’s where they want to start talking about the money to pay the lawyers in the Old YMCA lawsuit. It’s never far away.

So the fast-track ordinances are off to the mayor, to Jess Alumbaugh, who has been very clear on this: He will veto them. Send them back to the council, which will vote to override the veto, then back to the mayor, who will say no.

And that’s when they all go to court and you have the messy business of people on one side of city hall suing people on the other side of city hall and we – taxpayers of Marion – paying for all the lawyers for everyone.

And a couple of other stops along the way here.

Among the council members voting for the pay bonuses are two with family members in the fire department and one with a father who was a policeman. What does “conflict of interest” mean? Apparently not very much. Wouldn’t you think they would at least acknowledge the conflict, if not recuse themselves

from voting? Apparently not. And this is simply the latest in a year of shenanigans from the council.

There was the business of firing one City Council lawyer to hire another. Stephenson out, Harker in.

Then there was the business of stripping one councilman of his committee assignments because he didn’t play nice with the others. Beg your pardon, but I voted for that councilman; they didn’t.

Then there was the foolishness of the council issuing subpoenas to get the mayor to come to a meeting.

Then they wanted to see every bill paid over the last four years.

Now they are going to name a City Council parliamentarian.

And a police officer may be taken off the street because the Council president believes she needs a sergeant-at-arms to subdue the Mayor when he wants to talk at a council meeting.

This is an embarrassment to all of us who put these people there.





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