



Public Comment #2

County of El Dorado Clerk of the Board <edc.cob@edcgov.us>

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Budgetary consideration

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To: edc.cob@edcgov.us

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TO ALL BOARD MEMBERS

Until I looked at the proposed budget, I thought that The Sheriff's request for a helicopter would be rejected as outlandish and outrageous. As a close acquaintance of Sheriff De Agostini told me: "This is just an ego trip for him". Just like those \$50,000 sniper rifles the Sheriff bought some years ago.

As any independent source vaguely familiar with helicopter operations could tell the BOS, the cost estimates submitted by the Sheriff have little connection to reality. The cost of a new helicopter from Airbus or anyone else, will run \$9 to \$11 million, depending on optional bells and whistles. A good, used copter will run \$5 to \$6 million, or more depending on the equipment.

As a rule of thumb, helicopters require two hours of maintenance for every flying hour--more for older machines. Who will do the maintenance, and where will it take place? The cost will depend on the answers. If maintenance personnel will travel to Placerville airport, their per diem and travel expenses must be considered. Per hour cost for a qualified mechanic is o/a \$250 per hour.

Helicopters are complicated machines requiring constant attention as well as continuing education on the part of the pilot. Chief pilot is not a part-time job as the Sheriff suggests. He claims that a member of his staff is a military pilot certified for a military chopper different from the one being considered. Pilots, civilian or military, have to undergo periodic physicals, and training when equipment is upgraded. Who will do the pilot's other job while he's flying?

Assuming the helicopters under consideration for purchase do not require a co-pilot, then who will fly the machine when the pilot has reached his maximum flying time or he is not available. I assume that the fire and other emergencies cited by the Sheriff in his justification may require round the clock operation of the chopper for limited periods of time. The idea that one part-time pilot will suffice is a dishonest pipe dream. Sooner, rather than later, the BOS will have to fund two full-time pilots. It is also common for helicopters on any sort of life saving mission to have a crew member to help with everything except piloting. This crew member must train with the pilot so that they can operate as a well-oiled team during emergencies.

Putting tight controls on the use of an aircraft is very difficult and often impossible since the ones who make and enforce the rules are usually the main abusers. Of course, one person's "abuse" is another person's 'dire necessity'. In the military, abuse of an aircraft is usually disguised as "training mission", or "operational necessity". The list of CYA excuses is almost endless as I witnessed once: a chopper was dispatched to take a general's wife shopping because she was pressed for time and traffic was heavy. I have no doubt that the Sheriff will be just as imaginative as any general or colonel in justifying uses of a helicopter.

Before committing the County's taxpayers to the yearly outlandish expenses of a helicopter, the BOS ought to do due diligence through an independent third party outside California on the costs of operating a fixed-wing aircraft. But first, it ought to require the Sheriff to submit a detailed projection of the needs he envisaged that would require a helicopter. How much overlap would there be with the CHP? How would the two units coordinate their activities? Would the EDC chopper be allowed 'hot pursuit' beyond the county's borders? Would the EDC chopper be available to other counties, or to CalFire and other entities; if so, under what emergency circumstances? What about reimbursement? Would those reimbursements go back to whom?

The entire County helicopter enterprise is fraught with endless difficulties which must be worked out before any final budgetary commitment is made. The County invested \$50,000 = or-, on two sniper rifles., How much actual, justifiable use against bad guys have these rifles had? My guess is 'close to zero'.

The BOS must also keep in mind that the taxpayers are funding a \$24+ million building project for the Sheriff. I suggest we let the new Sheriff absorb the new responsibilities that his new headquarters will require, and the growing pains of the new facilities will be many, and costly. The helicopter matter can be revisited in a couple of years, after the BOS has done its due diligence. Are we about to reach the point where the Sheriff's budget will surpass that of education? Is this the way the County wants to go?

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