

OUR VIEW

Commissioners need to leave county employees out of their political fight

It appears Galveston County Commissioner Joe Giusti may be the only level-headed individual serving on the commission. Earlier this week, Giusti abstained from a vote that would eliminate several jobs significant to the judicial system. Those positions include completing paperwork to bond and charge defendants, processing court-appointed attorney payments and drug testing criminals.

Giusti's vote wasn't necessarily about preserving jobs, but about not allowing County Judge Mark Henry and his fellow commission members to use the livelihoods of five county employees as pawns in a political game of chess.

In a plan to eliminate the justice administration department, commissioners decided not to fund these five positions in the 2016 budget, but instead create five new positions to be filled by employees chosen by judges. Those new positions, however, cannot be filled because of an ongoing fight over Director of Justice Administration Bonnie Quiroga.

It's easy for laymen to get lost in all the legal wrangling going on here, but the most important thing to remember is that in July a visiting judge ordered Quiroga be rehired and blocked any relocation of justice admin-

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istration employees.

Henry appealed that ruling and argues the appeal has suspended the July order. There may be some legal technicality to justify that argument, or at least make it look credible for a time, but it's not the best approach for the county.

The best thing to do is follow the judge's July order, change nothing and allow the courts to decide the core conflict between the judges and commission.

Henry and his supporters act as if there's something sacred about the beginning of the new budget year — as if they must have this all sorted out by then.

But that simply isn't the case.

Anyone who has dealt with a budget knows the county could easily begin the fiscal year with one situ-

ation — one group of employees doing certain jobs at certain rates of pay — and end the budget year with a totally different situation.

That is what every organization does every budget year to some extent, whether it's involved in litigation or not.

In fact, commissioners themselves have been in a frenzy of very large budget adjustments to make what they anticipated last October work with the reality they were confronted with in September.

That's how budgeting works.

County commissioners are flirting with a sort of governmental shutdown, and they should take a minute to recall how badly that was received by the taxpayers when politicians did the same on the national level.

People want and have the right to expect the government they pay for to work efficiently.

The right thing for commissioners to do in this case is maintain the status quo until this case is finally litigated. Anything else is simply political posturing.

"We're taking a bad situation and making it worse," Giusti said. "The employees are really worried about their jobs and they should be. They should not be in the middle of this fight."

He is exactly right.

• Kimberly Worner and Michael A. Smith

If done correctly, each of us can live our entire lives unlocking the world around us. But it takes courage. To leave behind what you know — armed with only preconceived opinions and incomplete knowledge of the world — can be unsettling.

Road trip of self discovery rewarding

"I consider the fact I'm still alive a win."

Our son is traveling solo in an old SUV loaded down with a tent, a sleeping bag and a burning desire to see what he'll discover over the next horizon. With an agenda loosely based on visiting national parks — camping, hiking and biking — he's unknowingly finding himself with each new day.

Leonard Woolsey



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As trite as it sounds, life is indeed a journey. With each day comes an opportunity to peel away the mysteries of the life — visually as well as those hidden between our ears. Each experience, each interaction with stranger carries the potential to answer not only the questions we are seeking, but those we never knew to ask.

When roughly my son's current age, I read book with a similar goal. "My Travels With Charlie," written by American author George Steinbeck, helped me understand the power of self-discovery and the value of embracing the fear of not knowing what the future — let alone tomorrow — holds. Steinbeck was closer to my age now than that of my son when he and his dog drove nearly 10,000 miles discovering the American landscape and people he'd written about his entire career. Each day unveiled a new vision through the windshield, a new personal interaction and a new lens from which to examine the world he quickly realized he only thought he knew.

If done correctly, each of us can live our entire lives unlocking the world around us. But it takes courage. To leave behind what you know — armed with only preconceived opinions and incomplete knowledge of the world — can be unsettling. But it is just those experiences that make us who we will one day become.

Our son has spent many nights of his journey sleeping on the ground with only a blanket of bright stars to keep him company. Morning coffee requires building a fire instead of pushing a button on a machine. Beans, eaten from a can, he tells us, taste amazing.

His road is unplanned for the most part — anchored by a patchwork of national parks or a town he discovers on a road map.

He phoned one afternoon after a 17-mile, one-day solo hike in Yosemite National Park.

"Twelve hours alone with your thoughts is pretty amazing," he said.

"You really find out who you are when you're exhausted and realize you've 4 miles to go, you've no choice but to just keep walking."

Right there, on the mountainside, he's learning a life lesson — and one you generally need to acquire through experience. Circumstances in life will, at times, become difficult. And many times the best answer, just like on the mountainside, is to put your head down push through.

I'm not sure whom I'm going to meet when our son eventually finds his way back to our driveway. I know I'll recognize the SUV, the mountain bike, and the luggage. But beyond that, I'm going to be meeting a new person in a very familiar package.

Galveston Living Wage Conference set for Sept. 28

Three of us met around my kitchen table on the morning of Sept. 8, 2012, to have breakfast and a conversation about low-wage workers in Galveston. We talked for a long time and concluded we should act.

On the last Monday in September 2013, we held our first Galveston Living Wage Conference at Live Oak Missionary Baptist Church. There were presentations from lawyers, local officials, and the U.S. Department of Labor concerning voter registration, labor rights, registration for Obamacare, and obtaining free legal aid.

At our 2014 Living Wage Conference at St. Patrick Catholic Church there were presentations from lawyers, local officials, and the Galveston County District Attorney concerning Sec. 3 jobs program at Galveston Housing Authority and city of Galveston, J1 immigrant workers, prosecuting wage theft, and the demographics of

Guest column



Steve McIntyre lives in Galveston.

Galveston's low wage workers. And GISD Superintendent Larry Nichols announced a wage increase for almost 100 of GISD's lowest wage workers.

The upcoming 2015 conference on Sept. 28 at St. Patrick Catholic Church is sponsored by Gulf Coast Interfaith, Galveston Coalition for Justice, Galveston Northside Taskforce, NAACP Galveston Unit No. 6180, LULAC Council No. 151, Gulf Coast Homeless Coalition, The Children's Center Inc., Restaurant Opportunities Centers United, Galveston County Commissioner Stephen Holmes, the Rev. C. Andrew Doyle of Episcopal Church of Texas, Baptist Ministers' Association of Galveston, Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston

Catholic Diocese, United Way of Galveston, The Jesse Tree, St. Vincent's House, Galveston Ministerial Alliance, Galveston Catholic Charities, National Employment Law Project, Students Together for Service, and Galveston County Labor Council-AFL/CIO.

At our 2015 Conference there will be presentations on religious teachings concerning workers' rights, living wage ordinances, Obamacare, rights of union and nonunion workers, wage enforcement, Galveston demographics, and enforcement of federal Sec. 3 obligations.

You can obtain more information about the conference at www.GulfCoastInterfaith.org.

There have been many small quiet conversations in Galveston since that first meeting around my kitchen table. Letters have been sent to different employers concerning the wages and benefits of low-wage workers. Information has been provided and

conversations held or scheduled with GISD, city of Galveston, UTMB, Texas A&M, COM, Galveston College, Galveston Park Board, Galveston Port Authority, Galveston Housing Authority, and others. An employment survey is being circulated to help quantify the treatment of low-wage workers by their employers.

All of these quiet conversations between people of goodwill have been helpful in gaining a better understanding of the working lives of our friends and neighbors in Galveston.

Similar conversations have been happening more and more frequently around our country. Some of those conversations have evolved into debate and action and has changed the lives of workers and their families.

Join us at our third annual Galveston Living Wage Conference at 6:30 p.m. Sept. 28 in the St. Patrick Catholic Church auditorium.