

EDITORIAL: Fresno city manager now says public scrutiny is 'welcome'



Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin, right, listens as City Manager Bruce Rudd, left, speaks during a news conference addressing the arrest of Fresno police Deputy Chief Keith Foster at Fresno City Hall on March 27.

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Until Monday morning, Fresno City Manager Bruce Rudd wanted to limit inquiries into how a deputy police chief could be dealing drugs right under the noses of the Fresno Police Department.

In a news conference Friday, Rudd said it wasn't "appropriate" for media representatives to dig into the history of the police department's management structure and personnel.

Rudd's message was clear: Don't be poking around in police business. The public will be told what City Hall wants to tell them about the department.

But Rudd's position changed after The Bee published an online editorial Sunday criticizing his effort to limit questions that the media might ask about the arrest of Fresno Deputy Chief Keith Foster on federal drug trafficking charges.

Many Fresno area residents reacted to the editorial on social media sites by expressing outrage at Rudd's remark.

Be assured that our reporters will continue to pursue all aspects of this story — as they have a First Amendment right to do and an obligation to our readers to carry out with the utmost diligence.

In a letter to the editor that you can read on fresnobee.com, Rudd apologized Monday for his response to reporter George Hostetter's question about the four deputy chiefs who work closely with Chief Jerry Dyer.

As Hostetter prefaced in his question Friday, two of those deputy chiefs have sued Dyer. A third deputy chief, Foster, is accused of conspiring to distribute oxycodone, heroin and marijuana. Didn't this trouble in the highest ranks suggest a problem for Dyer and the department, Hostetter asked.

Rudd cut the reporter off, saying the question was out of bounds. Even worse, Mayor Ashley Swearingin backed up Rudd's position with silence.

We understand any desire Swearingin might have had to not embarrass the city manager but, in the least, she should have stepped in and answered the question.

The question was on target. It was the kind of question that readers expect us to ask of public leaders.

The next day, The Bee published reporter Marc Benjamin's story detailing how Foster testified in front of a state medical board last year in support of a Fresno doctor known for writing medical marijuana prescriptions and acknowledged that he was one of the doctor's patients. In addition, a Fresno police detective also testified in the doctor's behalf, admitting in his testimony that he was one of the doctor's patients.

Amazingly, no one at City Hall seemed to know of such testimony, not Dyer nor any of his officers. In fact, the public would not have known about this testimony on behalf of the doctor if The Bee did not ask "inappropriate" questions.

The arrest of a deputy police chief shook City Hall to its foundation. City leaders should have welcomed transparency. But in a news conference aimed at damage control, Fresno's leaders only raised more questions by the closed-door tone of their remarks.

Rudd and Swearingin finally understand that. Said Rudd in his letter of apology: "The city of Fresno prides itself on accountability and transparency, and we welcome public scrutiny."

Based on the allegations made by federal authorities against Foster and what has been discovered about him thus far by Bee reporters, City Hall can expect much public scrutiny.