

Lingering questions after City Attorney exposes Bonusgate

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Fresno City Hall's top lawyer said he asked the city manager to bless proposed bonuses in the City Attorney Office because he wanted to be viewed as a "team player."

One problem: Bonus policy in the City Attorney's Office is none of the city manager's business.

That's how Bonusgate, the unusual controversy over Mayor Ashley Swearingin's bonus-paying habits, was born.

In a phone interview with me on Saturday, City Attorney Doug Sloan said he had talked to City Manager Bruce Rudd on and off for weeks about the possibility of paying bonuses or giving raises to selected people in the City Attorney's Office.

Rudd repeatedly said no. Sloan said he wasn't satisfied with the answer, so he asked Rudd and Personnel Services Director Jeff Cardell for information about the compensation of the city's top executives.

These are employees not represented by a union – for example, the mayor's top staffers, department heads and Rudd himself.

Sloan said he essentially was filing a state Public Records Act request.

Sloan said he put in much effort and was met with many rebuffs – "frequent difficulties" were his words. He said he

finally got a list of executive salaries.

Sloan said he asked about the absence of data on executive bonuses and deferred compensation (money for personally-controlled retirement accounts). Again, Sloan said, the Administration rebuffed him.

Finally, Sloan said, he met with Rudd and other Administration officials at City Hall on Oct. 29. Sloan said he asked for data on bonuses. At the same time, Sloan said, he said the information was supposed to be public record as stated in the city's Transparency Act.

Sloan said it was then that Administration officials took a two-page spreadsheet from the bottom of a stack of papers and "slid it across the table."

Sloan looked at the names, job titles and numbers.

"I was a little surprised," Sloan said.

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