

LAURIE ROBERTS' COLUMNS & BLOG

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Something smells over at Phoenix city hall

Call me cynical but I came out of this afternoon's press conference over at Phoenix city hall anything but confident in the people running that place.

After a day of wavering, City Manager David Cavazos stripped Public Safety Manager Jack Harris of the bulk of his responsibilities – namely being police chief – but left him with a few things to fill his time. He'll continue to oversee emergency management, criminal justice coordination, infrastructure and service security and public transit security.

And oh yeah, his salary will remain the same.

Cavazos said he didn't know how long it would be before Chief Double Dip vests for yet another pension, noting that he oversees a lot of employees. "I do not know the retirement eligibility of all 14,000 employees," he said.

Now, I wouldn't expect the city manager to know the date when each one of the guys who pick up the garbage will become eligible for their city pensions. But you might think he'd know the date (later this year? early next year?) when his police chief will be eligible to retire -- especially a chief who has been controversial since retiring in January 2007, collecting \$562,900 from the state's Deferred Retirement Option Plan, then promptly returning to work to draw both his \$90,000-a-year pension and a hefty salary in his new job as "public safety manager. Last time I checked, his base salary for the public safety gig was \$193,378.

That's pretty nice money for making sure no one hijacks a city bus.

And Mr. Cavazos: he'll vest sometime early next year, earning him another couple of thousand a month for the rest of his life, courtesy of taxpayers.

In other news, Assistant City Manager Ed Zuercher vowed a full independent investigation into the curious manner in which the police department keeps kidnapping statistics. This, after he promptly announced that he was confident no fraud was involved in tinkering with the inflated stats that allowed the p.d. to qualify for a federal grant. The only question is which secretary will be the fall guy.

As for Harris? He was there at the press conference but he's been muzzled by Cavazos, and the entire new acting chief, Joe Yahner, had to add was a rundown on his biography. Also gagged by Cavazos, it would seem.