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The Circus Remains in Reno

Guest column

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INCLINE VILLAGE, Nev. — Reno is known for its Rodeo, Air Show, Hot August Nights and casino entertainment, but the most deceitful and preposterous show in town is the Circus. No, not Barnum and Bailey or Ringling Brothers, but rather the Washoe County officials involved in the Incline Village/Crystal Bay tax fiasco.

This circus began in 2002 when the County Assessor saw an opportunity to strike up the band of appraisers and direct an effort to levy illegal and unconstitutional appraisal methods on a segment of the County. While the band played on, the Tax Revolt effort up the hill won 6 Supreme Court decisions to the delight of its supporters. County legal maneuvering fell off the trapeze time after time, stubbornly climbed back up the rope, fell off again and again and was dealt the final blow on July 7, 2011, when the Supreme Court said “pay them back with interest.” What was once a \$100,000 liability became a \$43,000,000+ fiasco. Can you spell ineptitude and fiscal irresponsibility?

Yet, the show goes on. Unbelievably, all 3 rings of the circus are still performing. In the outer ring is the County Treasurer's Office. Rather than horses prancing and elephants marching, we see snails and turtles processing refund and interest checks. From an audience perspective it's like watching grass grow or paint dry. In fact, the process was so slow the

audience had to leave the tent and go to court for the judge to give them a “finish-by” date or be subject to contempt of court. With a 6% interest rate costing \$6,000 per day, one might think that they would want to polish their act, complete their performance and get this whole mess behind them.

But no, in ring No. 2 we have the County Administrator and County Commissioners. They perform as mimes — “Hear no evil, See no evil and Speak no evil.” The County Treasurer publishes a one-page report once a month and no one in authority asks any questions or gives any direction. It would appear that some of the animals in this ring are too busy either jumping off the ship or looking for opportunities to get off the ship. I looked up “incompetence” in the Dictionary and guess what I found? (No, you guess). I looked up “conniving” and found the same thing. Maybe a better description of these folks is “jugglers.” The only problem is they can't keep the balls in the air, as they constantly drop them.

But, the best entertainment of all is in the Center Ring. The legal beagles become the ringmasters. Their counsel and maneuvering has cost the County \$43 million. One might think that 6 Supreme Court losses would stop them, but no, they march ahead trying every trick in their arsenal to avoid the inevitable. Now, they have provided counsel to stop all interest payments while they claim the 6% should be 3%. This, after they have already paid over 1,000 refunds at the mandated 6%.

So, this brain trust will either have 1,000+ people paid off at one interest rate and 7,000+ paid off at another (can you say “unequal”) or they'll try to recover 3% interest from the original 1,000. (Good Luck). Of course they know the audience won't stand for this but they figure they can buy another couple of years in the legal system (spending your tax dollars in doing so) to stall. Hopefully, the Judge will see this maneuver for what it is — another shell game.

Ineptitude abounds in this circus. Besides interest payments being stopped, 2011-12 tax bills were incorrect. Fourth quarter payments made were over-stated because the refund

was not included. Of course, they won't pay interest when they get around to issuing a check for the over-payment just like they won't pay interest on the interest they are withholding for the previous 5 years of sin.

As the song says, “Send in the Clowns.” Well, our circus already has them. Now all we need are the folks with the shovels that usually follow the elephants, to come in and clean up after the incredible mess some of our County Officials and elected Officials have created.

Chuck Otto is a part-time Incline resident and board member of the Village League to Save Incline Assets.

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