

County reacts to audit approval

By **Thelma Grimes, The Explorer** | Posted: **Wednesday, April 4, 2012 4:00 am**

Pima County Administrator Chuck Huckelberry was disappointed in the Arizona Legislature's approval to audit county bond practices. After passing both the House and Senate, Gov. Jan Brewer signed House Bill 2408 into law on March 29.

Huckelberry said, "It is a sad day when the State Legislature can be maneuvered into a political vendetta orchestrated by Marana. This same Legislature took assets of all County wastewater ratepayers and gave them to Marana at substantially less than actual cost. It is the same Marana that has not even complied with their own law by paying the County what they now owe. We will fully comply with, and cooperate with the Auditor General. The County makes available on our web page thousands of documents related to the Bond program. Anyone can review them as ask any question they want. We have absolutely nothing to hide from a legitimate audit."

Marana Town Manager Gilbert Davidson said the wastewater dispute, and the bond issues facing the two entities are completely separate.

"I think being able to understand the numbers from an independent third party could be very valuable for the entire region," he said. "The bond issue, and how money is being allocated is entirely different than wastewater."

Huckelberry blames the ongoing battle that started in 2008 where Marana has been fighting to gain control of wastewater rights. A law passed by the Stat Legislatue last year allowed Marana to take control of the north-side wastewater treatment facility for a cost of \$18 million. Huckelberry said taxpayers are getting ripped off in the agreement because the wastewater treatment facility, is worth \$27 million.

Marana Mayor Ed Honea said while the wastewater issues continue to be a sore point, the Town did not seek help from the State Legislature on the bond issue to settle some vendetta.

When it comes to county bond funds that have been designated for specific projects over the years, Honea said, "We are getting shafted by the county, and so is the City of Tucson. We want our money, and it has nothing to do with wastewater."

In Marana, some projects in question include the \$600,000 Honea Heights Housing project in 2009.

While Huckelberry disputes the claims, Honea said it's because of the county's actions that they lost a grant, and the project remains unfinished.

HB 2408 directs the state's auditor general to complete a special audit of the 1997, 2004 and 2006

Pima County general obligation bonds program.

When asked if it was a good idea to bring state lawmakers in to address matters between Marana and Pima County, Honea said at this point they need help.

“You do what you have to do,” he said. “We went to the county many times, many times. It’s just sad that they won’t work with us. We don’t want to lose these projects, and the county does not deal with us in a fair and equitable manner.”

In past interviews, Huckelberry has disputed the claims, saying it’s Marana who refuses to compromise.