

How absurd can a front page newspaper headline and article get? Just check out the *Sentinel Record* Thursday December 23 headline and ask yourself if this doesn't establish a new low in making news where no news exists. The headline reads, "Some new officials unaware of meeting at church" with a sub-title stating, "Conservative activist had get-together with soon-to-be office holders."

Authors Don Thomason and Jim Newsom apparently imagined this to be earth-shaking news but more likely, most readers were left scratching their head trying to determine just what was newsworthy in the article. For the sake of inquiring minds, let's examine the possibilities. 1) Was it newsworthy because some people were invited while others were left out? 2) Was it an issue of separation of church and state? 3) Was it an illegal meeting between elected officials because the press wasn't invited? 4) Was it an attempt to drive wedges between current officials and those newly-elected?

Okay, phenomenal amounts of in-depth research seem to indicate the following:

- 1) **Some invited while others were not:** The meeting (or meetings) consisted of a speaker, David Barton, who is an author, president of a national pro-family group called WallBuilders ([www.wallbuilders.com/ABTbioDB.asp](http://www.wallbuilders.com/ABTbioDB.asp)), a Fox News and Glenn Beck guest (plus others), and is a speaker who speaks to over 400 groups per year. The newspaper paints the guy as a conservative political activist, author, and amateur historian. Irrespective of who he is, what is wrong with inviting whoever the Tea Party or whatever group was the host wanted to invite?
- 2) **Separation of church and state:** Barton has been used as a consultant by state and federal officials for historical and constitutional issues. He is reported to have a library of "tens of thousands of original writings from the Founding Era." His library, research, and knowledge may or may not include religious writings or beliefs. Those in attendance may or may not choose to believe his message. Many people do believe that the constitution, family values, high morals, ethical behavior, honesty, and accountability should apply to government officials. The success of Tea Party candidates in the most recent elections proved this.
- 3) **Illegal meeting of elected government officials:** Although future officials attended the meeting, with the exception of two JP attendees, no current officials attended the meeting. The newspaper seems to suggest that officials cannot attend the same church or other event even to just listen to a speaker. Oaklawn Rotary club meets weekly and has had 4 or more city directors in attendance including a city manager who was president of the club. Many members of this club were and are elected officials who did much more than just listen to a speaker. The Garland Good Government Group recently hosted city directors, county officials, and several state officials at a forum where they interacted with the public but the *Sentinel Record* didn't think this meeting warranted sending a reporter. This is either a double standard or someone is selectively crying wolf.

- 4) **Attempt to drive wedges between elected officials:** It sounds a bit childish to be pointing out who was invited to a function and who was not, implying that some sort of exclusionary practice was imposed. Apparently, this was not the case but, even if it were, do we not have the right to invite like-minded individuals to any event we choose providing that the event is not a government sponsored public function requiring some kind of legal notification. The newspaper omits the fact that most of the people mentioned are not yet office holders until they have been officially sworn in. One must question the motivation of why anyone (other than one childlike city director) would even care.

In spite of the fact that Mr. McCabe's feelings appear to be badly hurt since he was not invited, the bottom line is that the article was NOT newsworthy at all.

In the interest of maintaining at least a low level of journalistic integrity, we suggest that next time the newspaper use a more accurate headline and byline such as:

**CITY DIRECTOR'S FEELINGS HURT FOR NOT BEING INVITED TO FUNCTION  
Complains to Newspaper**

or

**CITY DIRECTOR POUTS AFTER BEING EXCLUDED FROM SPEAKING EVENT  
Newspaper Forced to Provide Tissues**