



El Paso's Priorities Are Put On ... Hold

By John D. Davis III \ Guest columnist

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Yes, did you know that when you call 911 with an emergency, there is a very high chance your call will be placed on hold these days? City Manager Joyce Wilson and Fire Chief Otto Drozd have decided to cut costs, have fewer people to take and dispatch your call, and take as much time as they need to do it, all under the new I CAD system.

It is a pleasant recording. Don't hang up, your call is important ... the next available operator will answer.

I guess that's OK if your house isn't on fire, your car accident isn't critical ... a heart attack can wait, drowning, not breathing etc. Well, you get the idea.

I know this because I've had three experiences with call waiting at 911. A pickup truck fully engulfed in flames on a major city street, please hold ... my wife falling on ice and being knocked unconscious, please hold ... and a terrible auto accident I saw on Interstate 10 as it happened, but I was on hold for almost four minutes.

The other calls were less than four minutes, but my point is this: When seconds count, and they do, being placed on hold could be the difference between life or death. What if you're being raped or robbed, carjacked or kidnapped, and you call 911 with only a few seconds of opportunity—only to be placed on hold? You're in deep trouble.

I am a retired fire captain (26 years) with the city of El Paso Fire Department so I know this. Also, the amount of help that is sent is screened. So don't count on an ambulance rightaway, either.

OK what is the point?

I/we, pay our taxes for certain expected essential city services, like police, firefighters and medical help. The rest of the stuff, like libraries, city pools and concert halls are great, but they come second to emergencies and basic needs. So why are the city manager and City Council spending tax dollars to tear down that Northeast mall for \$10 million -- and you know it will end up being a lot more than that? That should be a private-equity deal like Paul Foster did at Farah. New pet projects, out-of-town legal advice and who knows what else, is all wasted spending. Why aren't they spending our tax money on essential, life-saving services?

I also found out that the Fire Department is short on essential supplies, equipment and maintenance for its vehicles, but I guess when you have an out-of-town chief who is referred to by his troops as "a businessman," and a "bottom-line guy," well this is what you get. I went by several stations to confirm these things and found out the firefighters are bringing in personal supplies to keep things going. They even buy surgical protective gloves for medical calls when the department runs out.

Time to get back to the real priorities.

I tried calling City Hall to speak to our reps about this, but I got put on hold!

John D. Davis III is a retired El Paso Fire Department captain living in East El Paso.