

THE PLAIN DEALER

Dimora's detonation

Making reporters go away was illegal as well as pointless, because the questions they were asking won't go away

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Elected officials know full well that obeying the law is part of the job description. That's especially true of an officeholder who has received his paychecks from the public for a third of a century.

But County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora acts as if he's exempt from the parts of the job that irritate him -- including answering valid questions from the press and keeping public meetings open.

At a public meeting of the commissioners Thursday, Plain Dealer reporters Henry J. Gomez and Mark Puente tried to ask Dimora about county employee Rosemary Vinci.

Vinci, 50, is on the payroll of Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo and supposedly splits her 35-hour workweek between working for Russo and the commissioners, according to the auditor's staff. However, Commissioners Peter Lawson Jones and Tim Hagan said last week that they didn't know her and had never met her. Vinci is active in the local Democratic Party, which Dimora chairs. According to her county job application, her work experience consists of managing a strip club in the Flats.

That combination of facts provided the basis for a news story, as well as a bevy of questions as yet unanswered. But when Gomez and Puente tried to ask them, Dimora exploded at them and had security officers remove them from the public meeting. (They had tried to reach Dimora by phone, but he wouldn't take or return their calls.)

"I'm just unhappy with the way you report your news," Dimora bellowed, calling them knuckleheads. "Throw my number away. Don't call me. . . . I'm not getting into witch hunts on individual employees."

He added, "I'm not a stool pigeon or a snitch."

Dimora's immature, insecure, six-minute diatribe undoubtedly prompted many county residents to wonder how the \$89,900-a-year commissioner could get so worked up over a couple of reasonable questions. Why would he lose control when a prompt and professional response would have sufficed? Even if the response was, "No comment."

Dimora displayed not only an utter disregard for the open-meetings law, but a disturbing lack of accountability.

Since he has so clearly forgotten who his boss is, we'll remind him: every taxpayer in this county. And behavior like his hardly improves their confidence in county government.

The commissioner must comply with the legal and moral obligations of his public office. If he cannot follow through on that duty, he should not wait another second to make good on the threat he dramatically proclaimed Thursday: "That's why I'm getting the hell out of this business."

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