

City backpedals on a joint panel

BY P.J. LASSEK
World Staff Writer

The City Council announced Thursday that it will not vote on a resolution that would create a joint city-county committee to search for ways of becoming more efficient by combining some services.

Instead, city and county officials will meet to discuss the possibility of creating a Collaborative Government

Advisory Committee.

City Councilor G.T. Bynum, who introduced the resolution last week, said Thursday that the joint meeting may find itself to be more valuable as a first step.

The council was set to approve the resolution last week, but action was delayed after a couple of councilors said they didn't understand the goal of the committee.

Bynum initiated the measure as a way to find effi-

ciencies and cost savings by combining duplicate services through interlocal agreements.

In other business, the council approved an ordinance that allows oil and gas drilling within the city limits.

Nearly two years ago, the council began looking into whether drilling for oil and gas on city-owned property could help increase revenues. The idea surfaced during discussions on how to fund re-

pairs to the crumbling street system.

The ordinance, patterned after Oklahoma City's oil and gas ordinance, has a comprehensive approach that addresses regulatory requirements, public safety and public welfare.

The ordinance will allow drilling on both private and public land.

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Chicagoans face terrorism charges

CHICAGO (AP) — Two Chicago men were indicted Thursday on charges they planned a violent attack on a Danish newspaper and helped lay the groundwork for the November 2008 terrorist rampage killed 166 people in the Indian city of Mumbai.

Businessman Tahawwur Rana and his associate David Coleman Headley already had been charged with assistance to terrorism but the 12-count indictment expanded allegations against Rana to include the Mumbai attacks. Both are in federal custody in Chicago.

Retired Pakistani military officer Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed and reputed terrorist leader Ilyas Kashmiri — described as having been in regular contact with al-Qaida's No. 3, Sheikh Mustafa Abu al-Yazid — also were charged in the new indictment.

Abdur Rehman and Kashmiri are accused of being involved with the plans to attack the Danish newspaper Jyllands Posten, which in 2005 printed 12 cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad that sparked out-

rage in the Muslim world.

Officials say the defendants were linked to the terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba, translated as Army of the Pure, which has long been involved in violent conflict with India over the disputed Kashmir territory. The Indian government has blamed the group for the Mumbai attacks and the U.S. government has designated it as a foreign terrorist organization.

Headley is charged with 12 counts. Six charge a conspiracy to murder and maim people in India and provide material support to a foreign terrorist organization. The maximum punishment is the death penalty.

Rana is charged with three counts of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization, with a maximum sentence of life in prison.

Kashmiri and Abdur Rehman are charged with conspiracy to murder and maim people in Denmark.

They would face a possible death penalty if they were to be brought to the United States and convicted.

B'ville begins half-day furloughs to reduce budget

BY LAURA SUMMERS
World Correspondent

BARTLESVILLE — Area residents wanting to check out library books or visit City Hall will be out of luck Friday afternoon, the first of four half-day furloughs instituted by the city because of budget problems.

The Bartlesville City Council on Monday gave its permission for city administrators to begin making deeper cuts in the budget due to a projected \$1.4 million shortfall. Administration decided to begin immediate furloughs.

City Finance Director Mike

Bailey in a memo to city officials said Bartlesville has seen a decline in sales-tax revenues for 12 straight months now, and the amount the community received for January is the lowest level tallied for that month since 2006. Sales tax levels dropped 15 percent from January 2009 to 2010.

"This decline is particularly worrisome since the months from November to January usually produce the highest sales of the year," Bailey said. "In light of the severity of this latest decline, it is more obvious than ever that additional, immediate actions are required."

Among the immediate actions chosen by department heads are furloughs without pay for two full days, which affect all municipal employees.

Officials are implementing the furloughs in half-day increments that mesh with holidays so workers end up getting a longer weekend off.

City offices, including the library, close by 12:30 p.m. Friday and will remain closed through Martin Luther King Day, re-opening their doors on Tuesday morning. The other half-day furloughs will be in February, April and May.

Department heads, including City Manager Ed Gordon, began taking furlough days themselves in December with five full days to be taken by 26 department heads in addition to the half-day furloughs.

City administrators say municipalities are required by law to operate within a balanced budget and the revenue shortfalls in Bartlesville had become so large that immediate action was required.

Bartlesville already has made cuts including closing an RV park, shutting off lights to tennis courts and softballs fields and slashing department budgets by 2 percent.

UNION:

The AFSCME vote is being organized although it's seen as having no force.

FROM A1

But AFSCME does not have the same bargaining and contract power that the police and firefighters unions enjoy, Roland said. Bartlett can impose the cuts on the nonsworn employees without their approval.

Still, the union is scrambling to set up a vote for 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Wednesday at its headquarters, 1285 S. Detroit Ave. Roland said he didn't have enough people to open more polling places.

The roughly 300 or so nonsworn employees who are not under the AFSCME umbrella can participate, Roland said.

"It will be the first time we've ever done that, but we want to be fair since everyone heard (the mayor's statement) in the meeting," he said. "To me, it looks like a political ploy to make the choice look like ours."

'Wait and see': Bartlett said Thursday that he didn't mean to put Roland and the union on the spot.

"Maybe I'm still showing my newness on this job," he said.

He is interested in hearing the vote totals, he said, adding that he doesn't know what he would do if the majority oppose his plan.

"I don't want to speculate now or prejudge an event," he said. "Let's wait and see what happens."

Bartlett said his goal throughout the budget-cutting process has been to avoid layoffs if possible. He is trying to cut \$10.4 million in general fund expenses.

Some city sources said that an AFSCME vote actually might be needed because it would be an amendment to the union's contract, but no one would go on the record to clarify the issue.

Roland said that in order to change the contract, a memorandum of understanding would have to be negotiated and then voted on by the union's members. Without a memorandum of understanding to consider, a vote is meaningless, he said.

Police and fire decisions: Meanwhile, the leaders of the police and firefighters unions are weighing whether to accept the salary cuts and benefit concessions that Bartlett has told them would be needed for their members to avoid layoffs.

Police would have to take a 7.5 percent pay cut, a reduction in their longevity pay and give up concessions including education, trainer and bilingual pay to save the jobs of 135 officers.

Firefighters would have to take an 8.6 percent pay cut, a reduction in their longevity pay and lose concessions including education, emergency medical technician and hazmat response team and bilingual pay to save 130 jobs. The mayor needs the police

and firefighters unions' approval on the cuts, otherwise, under their contracts, his only avenue is layoffs. Those unions have criticized him for not opening formal negotiations with them.

Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 93 President Phil Evans said he planned for FOP members to meet at their headquarters Wednesday.

They could take a vote there or move forward with a station-house vote, which would take place over a 24-hour period so all three shifts of officers can participate, he said.

Tulsa Firefighters Local 176 President Stan May said the union's executive board had been meeting to decide what to do. The union's voting process takes longer than that of the FOP — at least six days.

Firefighters work on three 24-hour shifts. They would hear the specifics of Bartlett's plan over the first three days, and then actually vote over the following three days, May said.

Both Evans and May said it would be difficult if not impossible to have answers by the mayor's Wednesday deadline.

Budget documents show that the calculations are based on savings from Feb. 1 to June 30, which is the end of the fiscal year. City workers are paid twice a month.

No cuts could take effect without the City Council's approval of the mayor's budget amendments.

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CUTS:

In-home care will be unavailable in some areas, one provider warns.

FROM A1

The nursing home is usually the second-largest employer in town behind the school district.

Steve Gorforth, president of Oxford HealthCare in Tulsa, provides services to the Advantage Waiver program, which receives Medicaid funding through the Oklahoma Health Care Authority. The program provides care for people in their homes in lieu of nursing home care.

The cut will result in ser-

'Our business is heavily dependent on Medicaid. If you removed Medicaid, there would not be a nursing home in this state.'

Brett Lessley

Past president and current board member of the Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers

vice not being available in many parts of the state, he said. Gorforth said it costs the state less to provide care in the home than it does to send someone to a nursing home.

"In the end, it ends up costing the state three times as much money," he said.

In December, the author-

ity's board cut about \$17 million in state funds from its budget, which equaled a reduction of \$69.6 million when federal matching dollars were included.

Those cuts included reducing administrative costs, changes to durable medical equipment and prescription benefits, and changes in payments to providers for certain services.

"This is frustrating to say the least," said Mike Fogarty, the authority's CEO. "Our board and agency have been on a mission with state leaders for the past seven years to bring provider rates up to a responsible level. Three years ago, we reached that goal and we do not want to lose momentum."

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