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By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader

The Liberal City Commissioners decided Tuesday who would be named the official paper of Liberal, The Leader or The Times. By a vote of three to two, The Leader prevailed.

Commissioner Dave Harrison and Mayor Joe Denoyer were the first of the five to give their opinion as to which paper should actually receive official paper status, thus revealing their vote. Both felt they must give credibility to the bid process by voting in favor of The Times, which entered a bid of 1 cent per column inch for legal notices. The Leader entered a bid of \$3.90 and 35 cents per line – 22 percent lower than what the city had been paying.

“This was a bid process, there is a difference in the bid amount,”

Harrison said. “Unfortunately, I am here to do the business of the people who elected me to do what is supposed to be in the best interest of the tax payer.

“My vote tonight is not going to be based on who necessarily has the best newspaper – that is not for me to judge,” he continued. “This is a business decision about spending tax dollars wisely, therefore I vote that we go with The Times. However, I will support whatever decision this commission makes.”

Mayor Joe Denoyer echoed Harrison’s sentiments stating it was not an easy process. However, he felt a vote for The Times would give credibility to the bid process.

“As an elected official, I, too, am elected to do what is in the best interest of the taxpayer. This is a bid process,” he said. “Both newspapers that submitted bids are qualified and meet all the requirements. It comes down to my personal opinion and black and white interest.

“I have put my personal opinion aside,” he added. “Since we did solicit bids and one came in significantly higher than the other, I think to give credibility and validity to the bid process I, too, would have to go with The Times.”

Commissioner Larry Koochel felt the community deserved a daily news source rather than a three-day-a-week paper. His vote went to The Leader stating having a daily paper out weighs a low bid.

“I think this is about more than just a low bid,” he said. “We are not required by statute of law to take the lowest bid. I, too, am interested in doing best for the community, and I feel that local and daily overweigh what we would save in expenditures which would not be all that much.

“I have always supported the local business,” he continued. “I think a daily paper carries more weight than what two or three thousand dollars would carry.”

After much consideration, commissioner Tim Long came to the same conclusion. He added that after researching both entities, he felt the daily publication of The Leader was best for the community in order to communicate city government. He also believed The Leader was the right choice for the community due to the fact that they use carriers to deliver to rural areas.

“I have spent probably the last four working days on this, non-stop,”

he said. “I have been polling the community asking them what they liked about the papers and what they disliked.

“Being a daily paper I was told is very important to a lot of people,” he added. “Communication from our city government to our community is very important. The more times we have the opportunity to do so, the better. In the end, we need the news delivered to our community fair and unbiased.”

Commissioner Bob Carlile questioned Times Publisher James Gutzmer as to why they were offering such a low bid price now. He was concerned that they were paying a much higher cost all along but in order to win a bid, The Times lowered their cost to one penny.

“I see the bid prices here, a penny a line and things like that,” he said to Gutzmer. “What were you charging us before?”

Gutzmer replied that the Times had been charging the city \$6 per inch.

“Now you come to a bid deal and you go to a penny?” Carlile asked. “I will tell you something, if people do that to me in my business, I quit doing business with them. That is what I am doing, I am going with The Leader tonight.”

Gutzmer stated he made the decision to bid one penny because he simply did not know what to bid.

“When it came down to it, in the best interest of the City of Liberal, which you all talked about,” he said to the commission.

“This is the city’s newspaper, this is the one that is the voice for the city government, the voice for the people.

“I could not figure out what we should do,” he added. “So in the end I thought we would just put a penny on the bid to simplify the process.”

Leader Publisher Earl Watt explained that as a business, he simply could not give newspaper services away. However, he felt that the bid of \$3.90 per column inch was a fair bid considering it was 22 percent less than what the City of Liberal has been paying the Times for legal services prior to the bid process.

“I just want to share that our bid was a little bit higher,” he said.

“Our intent is to be a business that makes financial decisions that are in the best interest of the paper long-term. If we were to bid zero or a penny and that was a consistent issue, then we wouldn’t be in business.

“If we bid low on the city side,” he continued. “There is only one way we could make that up, that is to charge other businesses more or charge the customers who read the paper more. There is no free lunch, we have to get it from somewhere if we are going to stay in business.”

Harrison was proud to explain that Tuesday’s city commission meeting was city government at work. He reiterated that no decision was predetermined prior to the meeting Monday evening.

“I might just point out one other thing, too,” Harrison said. “What people are witnessing tonight is how your government is supposed to work.

“The other thing is that you hear out in the community that the decision has already been made,” he concluded. “I think that this should be proof tonight that is not the case and I think that everybody needs to understand just because you heard someone say it, that is not what transpired.”

The High Plains Daily Leader was chosen as the official paper of the City of Liberal. The Leader will be the official newspaper beginning June 1 and through May 31, 2010.

“We have a great responsibility to our city to be their official newspaper,” Watt said. “We appreciate the support that we received, that the commission felt that we should be the official newspaper.

“This past year, we have worked our tails off to prove to the community that you can have a daily newspaper,” he continued. “We are going to prove to our community over the next year that we will live up to our responsibilities to be the official newspaper, as well.

“I was born in this town, raised in this town, several others that work here were also,” he concluded. “It means more than just a business decision to us. It is a point of pride and of responsibility to our community. Next to seeing my children born and getting married, that decision last night and the faith and trust that is placed in us to serve them as official newspaper, is probably the biggest moment to me.”

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