

Summary of 9-25-12 interview of Roy Stearns

Interview and summary by Thomas M. Patton, Deputy Attorney General

Roy Stearns has continuously served as deputy director for communications and press liaison for the California Department of Parks and Recreation since his initial appointment to the position in June 2000 by then-Governor Gray Davis. Stearns was previously a reporter at KCRA channel 3 in Sacramento. (Roy Stearns transcript (RStr), pp. 2-3.)

Stearns indicated he first learned about funding disparities in reports submitted by the Parks Department to the State Controller's Office and the Department of Finance upon his return from vacation in July 2012. Stearns believes he heard the news following his return to the office on July 11, and believes it was closer to July 18. (RStr, pp. 4-5.)

Stearns stated he learned of the matter when then-director Ruth Coleman came to his office and made a comment to the effect of: "Okay, you know about the vacation buyout, something else is going to hit." Stearns recalls that Coleman explained that "we've learned that there's a surplus." Stearns indicated Coleman did not explain how she knew or where she found out or how long she had known. She simply informed Stearns that there was a surplus that could be as much as \$70 million. Stearns recalled feeling dumb-struck and aghast that a surplus could exist when the Department had been talking about closing 70 parks. (RStr, pp. 5-6.) Stearns promptly reported the information to Richard Stapler, the communications liaison and Stearns' counterpart at the Natural Resources Agency. (RStr, p. 7.)

When asked what Coleman's affect, demeanor, and condition were as she explained this to Stearns, Stearns stated that Coleman looked like someone had just punched her in the stomach and she had the worst facial expression he'd ever seen on her. Stearns also stated that he has no idea what Ruth Coleman knew or when she knew it, as she did not specifically indicate if it was something she had just then learned. His gut feeling was that Coleman probably did not know about it. (RStr, pp 8-9.)

Stearns recalled that there had been occasions during his years at Parks when people had commented they would like to have a prudent reserve to help in those years when weather negatively affected park attendance and revenues, amounting to millions of dollars. Stearns stated that while he recalled people commenting about the desirability of maintaining a reserve, he had no idea any sort of reserve actually existed. (RStr, pp. 11-12.)