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EDITORIALS

We want answers about mansion fire

The Texas Public Safety Commission is scheduled to take up today a subject of intense public concern: Just what did the Department of Public Safety do — or not do — to defend the Governor's Mansion, which almost burned to the ground on June 8 from an arsonist attack?

What we've heard so far doesn't sound good. Just one trooper was on duty. Not all security cameras were working. An infrared sensor system was not working. And there are unconfirmed reports that top brass at DPS had turned down requests from the governor's protective detail to bolster security at the mansion after Gov. Rick Perry and his wife, Anita, moved out because of a major renovation project.

Why only one trooper? Why wasn't security bolstered knowing that not all cameras or sensors were working? Did Col. Tommy Davis, director of DPS, or some other higher-up reject a request for more security?

Was the problem that DPS doesn't have enough troopers, as a recent legislative report suggested? What budget pressures were at work in guarding the mansion? The huge increase in fuel costs has hit DPS hard. A spokeswoman said Wednesday that the agency, which patrols thousands of miles of Texas highways every day, already has exceeded its \$7.1 million budget for gasoline in this fiscal year, which ends Aug. 31, having paid \$8.5 million just through the end of April. How did it make up for higher fuel costs? By letting job positions go unfilled, she said.

For now, at least, DPS isn't talking about what happened at the mansion. The spokeswoman said the internal investigation is not complete, that it isn't certain when it would be and that no decision had been made whether to release it when it is.

The Public Safety Commission, which oversees DPS, is scheduled today to address — probably behind closed doors — “discussion and possible action on investigations into and resulting from the fire at the Governor's Mansion.”

The commissioners, no doubt, are asking the same questions as most of the state about what happened and why.

Whatever the answers are to those questions, they must be made public. And let's hear no excuses about “ongoing criminal investigation” or “homeland security.” The arsonist already knows who did it and how, and the rest of the state already knows that security failed to stop the attack. Refusing to explain why security failed will smack of a bureaucratic coverup. Quiet retirements or sudden resignations will not substitute for answers.

Perry has said he will ask hard questions and that the fire would be thoroughly investigated.

Perhaps the investigation will show that all reasonable measures to protect the mansion had been taken. Maybe not.

But the subject is too important to Texans to settle for an explanation from state officials that says little more than, “Trust us, everything is under control.”

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