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Subject Agenda Item # 58

Dear Supervisor,

I was disappointed when I read the Agenda Item #58 amending the classification specification for the position of Chief Administrative Officer.

Many community volunteers have spent so much time in meetings, from the BOS to the Taxpayers Association, from County Commissions to Community Coalitions, talking and talking about how our County government is broken and how it needs to be run more like a business. About how we need the efficiencies of the private sector applied from the Top, down. How we need a superior "Manager" with proven "Leadership" skills rather than a bureaucratically indoctrinated analyst that has succeeded in change-avoidance.

That is why I am very troubled and disappointed to read the job announcement for the CAO position. This job announcement is heavily weighted in favor of preserving the status quo, and we all know that what we want is a new county culture of efficiency, accountability, and service orientation. This cultural change can only come from the top and you now have a chance to shape that change.

The Section on KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge of County Practices vs. Results? The announcement asks candidates to show knowledge in certain areas. Knowledge of county processes, county rules, county standards, county guidelines, county practices. We say we want the county run more like a business, and in the private sector, job seekers are asked to show their ability to produce results in similar contexts. Why are we not asking candidates to show accomplishments instead? What we should be asked for is a candidate to show accomplishments in leading change, providing transparency, reforming government operations, making government agencies accountable to the public through the Board of Supervisors.

There is in this proposed text the idea that somehow expertise in County rules and practices is pre-eminent in this announcement. The emphasis on mastery of arcane technical knowledge instead of results is typical of a government bureaucrat. Don't get me wrong, it is beneficial to know things about how a County runs, but knowing these things in detail is most likely to be the result of working in County government for a long time, and so by emphasizing knowledge of County this and County that, you are really narrowing your field of candidates to a group of people who are the least likely to be able to change the way Counties do things. Knowledge of County operations should be included as something to be considered in a candidate, but it should

NOT be written to exclude consideration by the BOS of the full range of executive level candidates that could help this county change.

The Section on SKILLS

My comments here are similar... why is it so important that a person show ability in "...planning, organizing, administering and coordinating a variety of large and complex County governmental services and programs" when what we say we want is a person who has the ability to plan, organize, administer, and coordinate the complex operations of our County more like a business? The ideal candidate will know enough about County rules and programs to engage the bureaucracy and move it where it needs to go. The only reason you would want a super expert on how County operations are done the County way is if you want a County Conformist.

The whole education/experience thing should be separated out into two separate, clear paragraphs.

LOWBALLING EDUCATION. On the education piece, why are we aiming so low? For our ACAO position, the job class says, "a Masters Degree in business administration is desirable.." We've got department directors with PhDs and Masters degrees. For this job, a BA is enough? What we should be doing is stating a preference that our CAO be someone with a graduate degree in business administration, law, public administration-- something that shows an ability to be a critical thinker and results oriented leader. What we should stay away from are the followers and reporters. We need an executive manager to lead change as directed by the BOS, not an ingrained bureaucrat that only took formal education to the minimum then spent the remainder of their time becoming steeped in the "risk avoidance" culture of middle management.

EXPERIENCE. On the experience side, the announcement calls for "Two years of the required experience in a Chief Administrative Office setting, City Manager Office, or comparable public agency dealing with major public policy issues is preferable." Again, do we really want this to be limited to PUBLIC agencies?

There are many private sector jobs that involve working with public agencies that could be just as beneficial. We should look for people with experience in leading and managing change, working in high pressure and highly political situations, and producing results. The Wall Street Journal recently surveyed 1,150 successful CEOs recently, and asked them what skills do company chiefs consider vital to their organizations? For 88%, the answer is a tie between the ability to quickly adjust to internal and external changes, and expertise in leading and developing others. Also highly valued are collaboration skills, creativity and informativeness, and proficiency in anticipating and managing risk. That is what we should be looking for here.

I'm going to close with something Ronald Reagan said: "Status quo, you know, is Latin for 'the mess we're in'". He is right. I wish there was more time to discuss this issue, but there isn't. We've been talking about changing the County for so long. We have a golden opportunity here. Lets not blow it with a weak job announcement largely produced by the very County culture we are trying to change.

Cris Alarcon, a Resident of El Dorado County.

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