

Don't ballix up charter

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So far the most confused suggested change to the El Dorado County Charter comes from the Charter Committee vice chairman. The Charter repeats what is general law that the Board of Supervisors is the governing body of the county. This is common sense and as it should be, since its members are elected to oversee the county and make ordinances governing the county.

However, the committee VP, while noting that the county chief administrative officer is "the chief executive officer of the county," as stated in the charter concludes, "There is a conflict here and the role of the CAO must be clarified."

Au contraire, the Charter clearly defines the CAO's role:

"Coordinate the work of all offices and departments, both elective and appointive, and devise ways and means to achieve efficiency and economy in county operations.

"Recommend an annual budget after reviewing requests of all departments and agencies for which the board is responsible or request county funds.

"Have responsibility for administration of the budget after its adoption by the board.

"On at least an annual basis, review and appraise the performance of all appointed department heads, except the county counsel, and submit the appraisal to the Board of Supervisors."

There are five other specific duties, plus a general charge and job description.

The actual powers of CAO will not change by calling it the chief executive officer as some have suggested. The powers will not change if it is called "assistant to the board." It will not change by giving the CAO power to appoint all department heads.

The real power of the CAO comes with budgetary control over all departments, including those overseen by elected officials. It comes with the power to conduct annual reviews of all department heads except the county counsel and elected officials. A CAO acquires power through longevity, through earned respect, through fair dealing with all departments, and employees and through even-handed interaction with the Board of Supervisors. No amount of charter jiggering will change these intangible aspects.

Totally insane is the committee VP's suggestion that a commission be appointed from which the Board of Supervisors would have to obtain "consent" before it could hire a CAO, and likewise fire the CAO only with the consent of this commission "and only for just cause according to the California Labor Code."

Applying the Labor Code to someone who is paid close to 200 grand a year is inane. The position is an "at will" executive. This is an "at will" state. Save the Labor Code for all the regular 9-5 county employees who are already protected by Civil Service rules.

A commission to control who the Board of Supervisors hires and who it fires is a gross infringement on the right of the people to elect their representatives. Arrogating the people's power to an unelected commission is bureaucratic and antidemocratic.

For these reasons we agree with the committee VP that the Board of Supervisors should put on the ballot a revision to the charter that will remove the term limits of the board. The term limits restrict the right of the people to choose the representative they deem the best. In two districts voters have returned previous officer holders to the board after a hiatus. Term limits limit the power of the board. Let the voters choose on this issue. Keep it simple and put only this one charter change on the ballot. This way the arguments for and against will not be diluted by other charter minutiae that the voters could care less about.