

Editorial: El Dorado County CAO playing games

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Multiplication ... that's the name of the game!

And every generation ... you know they play the same!

– Bobby Darin, from the 1960 Movie “Come September”

The 2013-14 El Dorado County Grand Jury must have been watching Turner Classic Movies when they wrote in their report about the “proliferation of elected officials in El Dorado County.”

There are seven persons elected countywide for their special expertise to run county departments: the sheriff, district attorney, assessor, auditor-controller, recorder-clerk, surveyor and treasurer-tax collector. Despite criticizing the “proliferation of elected officials” three times in its report, there is no evidence that any new elected positions have been created. More's the pity.



Terri Daly

All offices but the recorder-clerk have specific qualifications outlined in state law. The grand jury didn't inquire about this, only noting the “specialized and sometimes esoteric duties of these offices.” Esoteric? None of these

officials has esoteric duties. The duties are all contained in California Codes, embellished by county ordinances.

Besides "proliferation" what is the grand jury's beef? It seems to be the chief administrative officer's beef. The CAO doesn't like democracy, doesn't like independent analysis, doesn't want any officials who are not under the CAO's fickle finger of fate (Urban Dictionary: "An unseen and unforeseeable force that controls the direction of all living things").

We should note here that the grand jury also criticized members of the Board of Supervisors for interfering with the CAO's running of the county.

But the real aim is to eliminate as many elected department heads as possible. Here is the CAO's gripe as expressed by the grand jury: "When a department head, elected or appointed tells the board it should ignore the budget and augment that department's programs, the board is being told that its policies are meaningless and its role as policy maker is meaningless."

In other words, the CAO wants the Board of Supervisors to rubber-stamp her budget and dispense with any budget hearings. This is providing the board a tunnel vision.

The grand jury continues the orchestrated attacks on the auditor-controller. Admitting that the grand jury did not look even at the Workplace Climate Assessment Survey, it joins the Sacramento Bee, which in its May 25 editorial made clear that it did not read the survey, but relied on the hearsay of CAO Terri Daly and board Chairman Norma Santiago, who visited the Bee's editorial board.

After all but calling El Dorado County voters a bunch of hicks, the Bee said El Dorado County "government is still stuck in Hangtown." To prove their point the Bee ran a photo of the hanging dummy from the old Hangman's Tree Bar in Placerville.

Anybody who has read the survey as released to the board and the public can see: 1) Auditor-Controller Joe Harn received a 92 percent positive rating from his employees. 2) This doesn't qualify as a survey, because it interviewed past employees as well as current employees, but doesn't distinguish between them. 3) The quotes, such as the one the Bee used, are taken out of context and are meaningless. 4) The consequences of this hack survey are to turn over management of the departments to the minority of whiners.

What happens if, as the Bee suggested, the surveyor and recorder-clerk are eliminated as elected positions? A board member can pressure an appointed surveyor to pass through a developer's subdivision map or a friend's four-by-four split without proper review. An appointed recorder could be pressured to backdate a recording or worse. When the clerk was combined with the recorder three elected officials ago, the clerk no longer ran the court staff and provided a check on the administration of the judges. Now two appointed administrators are paid much more than the County Clerk Billie Mitchel ever earned, and she ran elections also.

What happens if the treasurer-tax collector is eliminated as an elected position? Experience has shown individual supervisors will want county treasury money invested in banks they favor and financial planners that are friends of theirs. One supervisor pressed to sell the delinquent tax roll to a lawyer that could lead to the county running short of cash and making payroll. The grand jury complained the current treasurer-tax collector, a certified public accountant, has been in office since 1985. In that time the incumbent has won four contested elections. The voters have chosen.

Eliminate the auditor-controller and there will be no one to stop the CAO from breaking the rules, sneaking raises through and ignoring the charter.

The grand jury may be confused, but the CAO isn't. She has

attacked elected officials in a four-pronged assault: 1) Cut their pay and deny them the 15 percent raise the CAO kept for herself. 2) Sic the grand jury on them. 3) Hustle up a Charter Commission to eliminate the elected positions. 4) Attack the voters as too ignorant to decide who is qualified to be "esoteric."

Grand jurors generally have more ego than expertise, which allowed the CAO to play them in her reach for total, absolute power.