

# Opinion: More El Dorado County shenanigans

By Larry Weitzman

Item No. 3 on the consent calendar at the Aug. 26 El Dorado County Board of Supervisors meeting demonstrates why the county needs new top management. It was a small item asking for three \$20,000 checks, one to the city of Placerville, one to the Cameron Park CSD and a third to the El Dorado Hills CSD – all for operational costs in running their public pools or in the case of EDHCSD for a shade structure.

There were a couple problems with the CAO Terri Daly's request. The budget from June 12 that approved the Placerville appropriation was absent for the CPCSD and the EDHCSD. Without a budget appropriation, you can't ask for the check.



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On top of that problem Daly didn't follow the appropriate process of going to the Recreation Committee for approval. But, notwithstanding the problems that Daly thought she could slide through by using the consent calendar, there were constituents who spoke up for Daly (benefactors of her largess) who thought what she was doing for them was wonderful. Hey, if someone wanted to give me a new \$20,000 car, I would sing his or her praises, too. We have "procedures, policies and processes" in operating a government (thank you BOS member Norma Santiago for those words) and they

are to be followed as so strongly pointed out by Supervisor Brian Veerkamp, saying that the county is looking at a \$12 million to \$17 million short fall next year and the county's No. 1 priority is public safety (not recreation).

When she was CAO of Amador County, Daly used the consent calendar for approval of a lease modification that cost Amador County \$20 million in an unnecessary grossly expensive lease.

At the same BOS meeting during a closed session action, the acting IT director was removed because she lacked the minimum qualifications. Yes, you guessed it, she was a Terry Daly appointment to a job that pays about \$140,000 a year. In an interesting twist, Daly tries to turn this mistake of hers into a positive by an email sent by Daly that said the following. Daly didn't say the BOS fired the acting IT director because she wasn't qualified but said, "The BOS reported out last evening that the acting IT director is returning to the CAO's office as a principal analyst (a \$110,000 a year job) ... and thanked her for her work in IT ... I am excited to have her back with us ...."

Since she wasn't qualified, I wonder about the quality of her work. Is she even qualified as an analyst as it is questionable if she even has a four-year college degree.

But perhaps there is something more insidious going on. There is a rumor that Daly is wrangling for a long term, no cut contract. And the rumor comes from a reliable source, so the gist of it might very well be true. And the contract idea could have a quid pro quo. In other words, you get me a contract and I'll get you a job (with such a contract the BOS couldn't do anything about who Daly hires or fires). But it would take three supervisors to make such a contract happen. And this is where it gets dicey. Another supervisor will be elected on Sept. 9 to fill the vacant seat of District II and that vote could be critical.

I interviewed every candidate running for a supervisorial seat whether it is District II, IV or V to ask them one question, would they vote yes or no to a long term, no cut CAO contract at her \$200,000 plus salary? When explained the ramifications of abdicating most of their power to the CAO and perhaps their responsibility to their constituents, they all agreed they would not vote for such a thing, except for Sue Novasel who was non-committal and Jennifer Nutting as explained below.

Mike Rinalli, District IV candidate, in an interview perhaps said it best without recognizing the possible quid pro quo, "Why would I work so hard to be elected a supervisor and then abdicate most of my power to the CAO."

The CAO has the power to hire and fire most county employees and the only check on the CAO is the right to fire her at will. You could still fire her, but if there were three years left on a contract, it would cost the county over \$600,000 to do so. All of these conversations were long, 15 minutes or more to discuss the question and to distill their answers.

District II supervisorial candidates said the following among other things. Chris Amaral said "absolutely not, no long-term contracts." Shiva Frentzen also said essentially the same thing, "no, no long-term contracts."

Claire McNeal seems to understand the question the best, recognizing this could be a quid pro quo with shenanigans involved and just said two words "No way." Those two words were the first thing she said, no explanations as to such a contract's ramifications were necessary. She got it immediately.

George Turnboo said such a contract "is not gonna happen, the BOS are the elected and need control. The buck stops with them."

Dave Pratt wasn't quite as strong in his opinion, saying he would have to study such a contract in detail (most of the

candidates interviewed said the same thing about the potential contract described). In Pratt's words as to such a contract he said he "doubts he would agree to such a contract."

Jennifer Nutting was called twice with clear messages left on her voicemail, but she refused to return the calls. My message said I would like to ask just this one question, but her refusal to call back makes her unacceptable as a candidate. She also would not allow herself to be interviewed by the *Mountain Democrat* as well. Hiding from the press and refusing to answer questions (she also never appeared at any candidate forum) disqualifies her as a candidate. It is not the American way.

There are three other candidates, Howard Penn for District IV responded by saying, "Very unlikely and there would have to be compelling reasons for such a contract, but as to a yes or no, it would be no." Penn and I had the longest conversation, seemingly discussing everything under the sun for over 100 minutes, but only perhaps spending about 15 minutes on the subject question.

In District 5, the candidates showed a real dichotomy in that Kenny Curtzwiler said, "Certainly no action should be taken until after the election. They better not tie my hands."

Novasel was noncommittal, giving a political answer by saying, "I couldn't vote on something I don't know about." While I tried to explain the hypothetical details, Novasel was still noncommittal.

There are obvious problems in the administration of EDC. And they are located right at the top. Voters please look at and listen to all the supervisorial candidates carefully. It has never been more critical. Ask questions and demand straight answers. You are placing a lot of trust into three people. They will be lawmakers with the power to spend hundreds of millions of dollars.

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