

Letter: EDC supes, CAO not dealing with budget

To the community,

On Sept. 30, 2014, the [El Dorado County] Ad Hoc Budget Committee was formed to address a serious budget shortfall of about \$18 million. The committee had two open volunteer positions from outside the government. In the hope of learning how the system works, I applied and was accepted as a committee member. The first meeting was in December. Joe Harn outlined the seriousness of the task and Larry Weitzman offered the most likely solution. Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Pamela Knorr directed the meetings and she and Laura Schwartz gave a capsule look at the budget process.

The next meeting Pamela and [Supervisor] Brian Veerkamp directed the group into first developing an "Eldorado County Budget Policies" paper. This took four months (four meetings). No attempt was made with this committee to determine what cuts needed to be made to get to a balanced budget, in spite of the concerns of Joe and Larry.

At the recent Board of Supervisors (BOS) meeting on April 28 [Supervisor] Ron Mikulaco expressed concern that the Ad Hoc Budget Committee did not get to the cuts necessary to balance the budget that he thought was its expressed purpose. I, too, thought the purpose of the committee was to deal with the problem, but unfortunately I did not fully understand how the process works and had even less control of county activities.

The CAO working with staff appears to dictate what the budget will be. Per the CAO, the elected BOS only deals with policy issues, not the specific issues that deal with the budget crisis. Pamela made it clear on the April 28 review that she has the duty to recommend an annual budget. The one proposed

is \$10 million short and reduces some senior programs that no supervisors want cut. On top of that she basically said to the BOS, stay out of my sand box. She will present a budget on June 30, which we already know will carry the deficit over until the 2016-17 budget and beyond. [Supervisor] Shiva Frentzen is not happy with the lack of cooperation.

It appears to me that the tough decisions are being postponed by endless studies. Since Pamela is not making the tough calls, I would hope that the BOS could step in and meet with the department heads directly and solve the problem. Pamela quickly squelched that idea by quoting policy 304C that gives the CAO the power to develop the budget, plus she stated that she does not want to be bothered by the Ad Hoc Committee in this process. On that point I agree, if we cannot deal with the budget issues, then the committee is not serving the purpose I believe it was created for.

Policy 304 also states that the "CAO shall be responsible to the BOS for the proper and efficient administration of such of the affairs of the county"... Proper and efficient is not a \$10 million deficit. Perhaps the CAO should be reminded that her position is temporary, and not balancing the budget has consequences.

[Supervisors] Mike Ranalli and Sue Novasel recommended "patience". Joe Harn, our auditor-controller, is predicting dire consequences from the lack of action on cutting spending. Who do you believe? We need more than two supervisors, willing to take charge of the county.

Paul Freeman, Cameron Park