

Opinion: Feckless EDC Board of Supes

By Larry Weitzman

As El Dorado County salaries and benefits continue growing at an alarming rate, our Board of Supervisors just continues to go along for the EDC ride to ruination.

Salaries and benefits last fiscal year ending on June 30 even exceeded my estimates by \$3 million at \$145 million, when just two years' prior salaries were at about \$118 million, a level that was maintained for four prior years. Saleries and benefits for this fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, will exceed \$150 million (due to a hiring binge especially in the CAO's office where more than a dozen new analysts occupy space and eat up about \$2 million annually and a 15 percent raise), an increase of more than 25 percent in just three years and with no end to the increases as a new contract will have to be negotiated as the current employment/union contract ends in June.



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Even more alarming new hiring continues. On the BOS agenda for Nov. 10 was an item to hire another building inspector. With only about 400 new building permits issued last year, why does the county need another building inspector? Revenue growth is not even close to keeping pace. Something has got to give.

In case you didn't notice, it already has. In a budget letter dated Sept. 9 to the BOS for the final budget hearing before the adoption of the EDC budget CAO Larry Combs wrote, "I would like the board to consider a policy for the FY 2016-2017 budget and moving forward, whereas all road related projects are funded out of the Road Fund without any additional General Fund support."

The three things that over 95 percent of county residents want from EDC in this order of priority are public safety, roads and road maintenance, and good land use planning. That was validated in 2000 as 60.8 percent of EDC voters passed Proposition H, a measure "requiring the expenditure of at least half of the 'vehicle in-lieu tax' revenues received by the county of El Dorado annually on roads, ways, highways..." The voters mandated this expenditure of General Fund money on roads, an amount of approximately \$2 million annually.

Those expenditures continued for about six years until the state took back those fees in an effort to balance the state budget. Even when that money was usurped by the state the BOS continued to follow the voters' obvious wants and continued funding road maintenance at an average of more than \$1 million a year with the last reported year of FY 2014 spending over \$2.1 million from the General Fund on road maintenance.

But now at the recommendation Combs and the agreement of the feckless BOS our roads are going to crumble. I am sure you have already figured out why? We can't spend General Fund money when salaries and jobs have ballooned to unsustainable amounts. If you love potholes, you gotta love Larry Combs.

But Combs isn't hurting for money. He has a pension from Sutter County for life of over \$185,000 annually and one from Merced County of about \$14,000 a year. On top of that we (EDC) pay him over \$92,000 a year for half time work, i.e., 20 hours a week with about half of that time being spent in weekly BOS meetings (his income totals nearly \$300,000/year plus health

care). So Combs has a solution for spending time in BOS meetings as well, have fewer BOS meetings.

If you haven't noticed, there was no BOS meeting the first week of November. It was announced in last week's meeting there would be no meeting Nov. 24. In the future you will see more of the same. We certainly don't want to overwork the interim CAO who's now in his fifth month without a search and recruitment for a real CAO even being started. And now with fewer BOS meetings expect even more delays.

Perhaps the worst part of having fewer BOS meetings is less time facing the public answering questions as to why are we spending more money than ever on salaries and less on maintaining the county, and it's just not the roads. County buildings are falling apart. Last year about \$6 million was scheduled to be spent on county buildings. It didn't happen. Maybe it would have caused a budget deficit. But salaries and benefit rose by over \$14 million for last year, about an 11 percent increase.

While our CAO may be detrimental to EDC, the buck stops with the feckless BOS who voted 5-0 to stop General Fund road maintenance and continues to accept the excuses of high ranking staff as to why important issues are not getting solved or corrected without consequence as in the salary and benefit resolution not being corrected going on five months, a job that could be finished in less than two hours. Maybe the EDC's \$200,000 plus HR director and former interim CAO Pam Knorr who was assigned that job in June isn't spending enough time at the office? Then again, the buck stops with the BOS.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.