

Opinion: Can a rocket scientist straighten out EDC?

By Larry Weitzman

For the past five or so years El Dorado County government has been out of control and the buck stops with the elected Board of Supervisors, the only county governing body which is answerable to the people. While it started before the Supervisor Brian Veerkamp regime, because of a politician's desire to be loved by everyone and not knowing how to say no, the downhill rolling boulder (of county government) has appeared to have gathered momentum from the debris that has attached itself to it.

It started gathering momentum in 2013, after then CAO Terri Daly had put in place the first part of her team, the incompetent Kim Kerr. Kerr had left a trail of destruction just prior as city manager of Ione. Kerr got a huge raise too. Kerr couldn't even properly and legally transfer a property tax base from Latrobe to El Dorado Hills Fire. She even had trouble buying snowplows, but she was a friend of Daly's so it's OK. The Veerkamp regime did nothing.



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A new contract for miscellaneous employees was in negotiation (that's a euphemism for give away the farm) in the latter half of 2013. The union asked for a three-year contract with raises of 3 percent a year and would probably have settled for 2

percent, but Daly offered them 5 percent annually over three years. Maybe it was because there was a \$54 million cash balance on June 30, 2013, but the union of course took the 15 percent deal.

It was a tens of million-dollar giveaway of taxpayer money. The Veerkamp regime approved the raise, especially Norma Santiago, who said on Daly's none too soon departure, "Daly was a champion for EDC employees." Santiago left out the residents and taxpayers of EDC.

While the Veerkamp regime looked on, Daly hired more incompetents (one of the rules of government bureaucrats is always hire your friends first. It gives you built in loyalty and yes people to support you). She did that with Kerr, Kelly Webb and Pam Knorr attempting to give them all huge raises. In the Webb case, she was appointed interim IT director. After she messed up the county IT billing costing the county millions of dollars, Webb was awarded step increases, permanent IT directorship and Daly tried to get her an illegal retroactive pay bump. The Veerkamp regime said yes to the all of this including the retroactive and the other raises. But Webb didn't meet the minimum qualifications and raises were not paid by the auditor because the BOS acted unconstitutionally. Webb shortly retired with a huge six figure pension and benefits. Webb's total compensation for years 2013 and 2014 during this nepotism exceeded \$200,000 per year.

Knorr, who had no prior human resource experience and who separated from her prior employment under questionable circumstances, got hired in at a \$30,000 annual salary increase over the then current highest salary ever paid to an HR director in EDC. The Veerkamp regime approved it. The hiring was done with a five-day recruitment, the shortest possible time allowed by EDC policy. The Veerkamp regime approved it along with the \$30,000 raise, plus attendant benefits. Never mind never questioning her about all her

aliases she used in the past and her claims against her prior employer. Background checks before and after Knorr was more like a chroma key screen, it was anything you like. While at Alpine County, she claimed her doctor told her that the Alpine BOS should not talk to her and ended up receiving a huge settlement payout, bordering on extortion. And the Veerkamp regime of the BOS hired her. They really vetted that one.

It was Knorr who recommended Larry Combs. The Veerkamp regime hired him too. Combs went on to hire his friends from Sutter County, our recently hired ACAO, Corley (who earns \$182,000 plus benefits) and the new risk manager, Marco Sandoval, who earns well into six figures. All this under the nose of the Veerkamp regime.

The following is an excerpt from the Sept. 14, 2015, BOS meeting of the Veerkamp regime at about 2:55pm:

Supervisor Ron Mikulaco: *"CAO, so I know that we met back through draft budget hearings. There was a challenge with being structurally balanced. With what you mentioned, are we going to be able to come out of this structurally balanced?"*

CAO Larry Combs: *"We are structurally balanced. The El Dorado budget is, in my opinion, in good financial shape."*

Mik: *"As we absorb the last of the third pay raise, are we going to be able to maintain a structural balance?"*

Combs: *"In my opinion, yeah."*

Nothing could have been further from the truth. There was plenty of local writings and warnings by the county auditor that considering the growing pension and health cost issues, the new sheriff's facility and crumbling roads of which Combs took road maintenance out of the budget, EDC was heading into an abyss. Combs knew the cliff was near, but the Veerkamp regime didn't want to hear the bad news. The Veerkamp regime didn't properly vet Combs either. Guess who recommend Combs?

Knorr.

Our CDA approved a development deal in EDH a few months ago, writing to the Veerkamp regime that the "development agreement" was still valid. It wasn't because it expired. No one in CDA caught this. Did anyone lose their job? Of course not, and if they did it would be government musical chairs played with an extra chair.

Elected to the BOS and taking his seat on Jan. 3 was a new District One Supervisor John Hidahl. His resume says he was a rocket scientist, an engineer who worked on propulsion systems for Aerojet who designs and builds rocket motors and he also worked for (Northrop) Grumman, an aircraft design firm with a storied and fabulous reputation. They were and are responsible for the F-14 Tomcat (Top Gun), the B-2 bomber and soon to be B-21 Raider. Grumman, because their aircraft were built so strong and rugged were called the "Grumman Iron Works."

Hidahl appears to be very intelligent. Will he require the same kind of quality control that the lives of so many of our Navy and Air Force pilots relied on including the pilots and astronauts who flew the Space Shuttle powered by Aerojet/Rocketdyne rocket motors? What goes on in EDC government wasn't allowed at his former employers. Is he going to demand the excellence of his former employers or get in lock step with the Veerkamp regime of abject mediocrity?

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