

Opinion: Good governance an oxymoron in EDC

By Larry Weitzman

Thomas Jefferson said it best as to what is good governance when he said, "Those who govern least, govern best."

I wonder how many high school seniors are aware of TJ's quote?



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El Dorado County is currently spending (wasting) tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of dollars in trying to figure out good governance using consultants and massive amounts of time being devoted by high ranking county officials, both elected and in the EDC administration. At a meeting on Aug. 28 a draft of a 12-page document was produced called the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors Governance Manual.

It's all part of a "strategic plan." The main purpose of a county is public safety and roads and acting as a fiduciary to make sure county revenues are first spent on those priorities wisely. Everything else is secondary. When I hear the word strategic, I think of the Strategic Air Command or SAC, not some county bureaucrats trying to reinvent the wheel. If the residents of El Dorado County want "good governance" we don't need 12 pages of government speak with buzz words like

protocol, rules of engagement, vision, mission, strategic goals, governance principles, the Board of Supervisors governing as a team, shared purpose, and I could go on. What a crock! We don't need a team, we need checks and balances. What they want sounds more like socialism (shared purpose).

On Page 8 of this manual is their definition of good governance which states, "achieving the best possible process for making and implementing decisions; characterized by honesty, integrity, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability, inclusion, effectiveness, efficiency and following the rule of law. If you have to have inclusion, it might be a hindrance to effectiveness and efficiency. But as to honesty and transparency (notice the words "absolute, complete and total" are missing and the using of the word "characterized" as the weasel word), there is no such thing in our current government except for a very few. Honesty and transparency certainly didn't come in to play with the CAO's "decision" to cut senior legal. That was pure politics, as are many decisions inside government. It wasn't about saving \$250,000; it was about retaliation. But we were told some big lies, particularly from the head of HHS. Things like this happen all the time in EDC. Manual or no manual, "good governance" will continue as "old governance."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to administer public safety, road construction and maintenance. What it does take is holding government employees accountable in performing the functions for which they are hired and to perform those functions properly in a timely manner. And maybe more important is for those employees at any level in government to always understand that they work for the public, the residents of El Dorado County. Most of those residents never use any other county functions other than the sheriff, district attorney and probation department to provide for our public safety and to maintain our roads and appurtenances (gutters, culverts, etc.) of which even those jobs get colored by

politics.

You want honesty and transparency then the following six words needed to be added to the Constitutional Oath of Office: I will perform my duties and all job functions with "Absolute Honesty, Complete Transparency and with Pristine Ethics." Each employee and government functionary will swear to those six words in performing their duties. Failure to comply will subject an employee to an immediate dismissal.

When you work for government you are a fiduciary to the people, and that fiduciary is critical in governing. The ultimate fiduciary rests with the sheriff as he has the power of arrest just as the district attorney has the power to prosecute. The people bestow this power upon people who must uphold that fiduciary.

If you think there is complete transparency, then why have we hired a spin doctor to keep the public away from those very people who are supposed to perform services? The idea of a spin doctor is the antithesis of transparency. If you are doing the right thing in government, why do you need someone to toot your horn or spin the facts to make you look good? Our current spin doctor, Carla Haas, has done it time and time again, publishing excuses or throwing out red herrings when failing to provide "good government." Government employees need to answer to their employers (the people) directly. It will make them honest, even though they should be sworn under oath that they would only act in such a manner.

In fact, this whole "good governance" is a PR stunt, in and of itself. The current administration and Board of Supervisors want to make themselves look good: "Hey look we're trying to have good governance." It's a lot like the Affordable Care Act, which in fact for most working, middle class people became the "Unaffordable Care Act" as coverage went down and premiums skyrocketed. But for those who didn't have insurance, for whatever reason, and got insurance, it was paid for by the

government (taxpayers). It was the biggest welfare program since the Great Society.

In the past, and even in the future, with all this good governance stuff, there will still be no written justification and record keeping requirements to spending the people's money on sole source contracts. That's outrageous. The motto "Share the wealth, hire your friends" plays a big role here. Several public servants were more prone to the hiring of friends than to meet county needs: Terri Daly, Kim Kerr, Pam Knorr and Larry Combs were pros at that. Things need to drastically change in our hiring, especially with respect to sole source contracts. We need thorough background checks. Job evaluations are mostly rubbered stamped and real evaluations are seldom performed.

This all requires Board of Supervisors to make drastic changes with respect to hiring, retention, evaluation and firing policies while demanding absolute honesty and transparency from staff and themselves instead of the self-serving platitudes of the draft "good governance" manual which is, in fact, an oxymoron.

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