

# EDITORIAL

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★ Friday 08/08/08

## County secrecy

Re: "County boss faces friction on job" (Aug. 4):

I've been underwhelmed by the performance of the Los Angeles county chief executive officer's office and have found that even less of the public's business seems to be discussed in the open. The monetary cap to augment contracts without returning to the Board of Supervisors (and thus to the public) has been increased now up to 30 percent, which means in some cases, millions of our tax dollars get spent with little accounting to we the people.

— GENEVIÈVE M. CLAVREUL  
Pasadena

TODAY'S  
FORECAST



Mostly sunny  
High 97 — Low 66  
Details: C12

**Monday**  
August 4, 2008

50 Cents  
Designated areas higher

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# County boss faces friction on job

**GOVERNMENT:** New chief executive officer's reorganization efforts have been met with resistance.

**By Troy Anderson**  
Staff Writer

A year after restructuring Los Angeles County's top executive office in a bid to boost efficiency, the move has ignited political infighting, accusa-

tions of power grabs and micromanagement and concern by some that a new "super-bureaucracy" has emerged.

For years, the Los Angeles County Chief Administrative Office rarely ruffled feathers among the 37 department heads and five elected Board of Supervisors members overseeing the nation's largest county government.

But since giving the Chief Executive Office more power, the county nest has been torn by what some political

observers see as a power struggle between Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky — who initially proposed the creation of an elected county executive — and newly appointed Chief Executive Officer Bill Fujioka.

Yaroslavsky, a Democrat and influential member of the board's 3-2 majority, recently said the new management layer of deputy CEOs could be developing a "really unhealthy" culture, "budget decisions were being hatched" without consulting supervi-

sors and communication between supervisors' offices is now reminiscent of how "Russia used to be."

But Fujioka, who is taking several steps including sending "strike teams" into various departments to fix problems, defends his work.

"Like any major initiative, this is a culture shift," he said. "This is a paradigm shift. And as with any major initiative, after one year, you have to make adjustments to ensure whatever we do is as efficient and

effective as possible."

Political analysts say they aren't surprised that tensions have developed as more power has been handed to a strong-willed executive the supervisors are finding harder to control.

"It takes awhile to get used to new things, and those that had power before might be giving up some now," said Bob Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies. "And

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that's always hard to do."

Fujioka also is making recommendations for the appointments of five department heads and has started "efficiency" initiatives to save taxpayers money.

He already has recommended the appointment of Dean Logan, whom the board recently named the county's registrar-recorder.

"I can't imagine the supervisors aren't nervous about the possibility they will lose control, for better or worse, for what they were elected to oversee, and losing it to an unelected bureaucracy," said Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, a political analyst and senior scholar at the University of Southern California School of Policy, Planning & Development.

## Critical report

The power struggle also comes as a recent 26-page report on the CEO structure by the Citizens Economy and Effi-

ciency Commission noted the new system has created another managerial layer with five deputy CEOs — in stark contrast to the office of former CAO David Janssen, whose job was to keep the "budget in the black and keep things quiet."

The report authors wrote that some board offices and department heads believe the deputy CEOs are micromanaging departments and involving themselves in issues that should be the province of department managers, leading to significant delays in responding to constituent concerns and other county problems.

One board office described it as an "extra layer you have to go through, like a wall has been erected; now departments have to climb over the wall to get things done."

Some department heads also complained that the deputies "are more empowered than ever in making decisions" and "attempt to micromanage departments."

Supervisor Don Knabe said he wants to make sure the county is not creating "some new superbureaucracy at the deputy CEO level."

"I think the problem is the CEO is pushing the deputy CEOs to push the department heads," Knabe said. "They end up getting in an overload situation and in some cases it's slowing everything down."

"Problems just sit there and don't get acted upon. The whole purpose of this was accountability and to move the day-to-day operations quicker and faster so we can deal with the broader policy issues."

Report authors noted one of the goals of the new structure was to free up more of the board's time for larger policy debates. But the authors found the percentage of items held at board meetings for policy discussion has not changed.

They wrote that the board has not "let go yet," preferring to focus intensely on oversight and operational issues than policy issues.

And at a board meeting late last month, Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich said he was concerned about the costs of the new structure.

"When the ordinance was being discussed, the CAO at the time indicated that there would be no costs basically

associated with it," he said. "However, now in retrospect, we find that it's nearly a \$2 million increase in net county cost."

"So did the commission look at the increased costs to determine whether the benefits outweigh the costs?"

## CEO's budget grows

Although the commission didn't explore the costs, a Daily News review in March found that since the new structure went into effect, the CEO's office budget has surged nearly 50 percent from \$27.7 million in 2006-07 to \$41.2 million in 2007-08.

The new deputy CEOs draw annual salaries of more than \$200,000 each, and their executive secretaries make \$73,000 a year or more.

But Fujioka said he is working to address supervisors' and the commission report's concerns and notes the report also says the new structure has resulted in significant progress in improving county services.

He said the report notes "increased collaboration" between departments that long oper-

ated as independent "silos."

And some department heads say Fujioka's teams have been helpful. A "strike team" recently was sent to the Department of Children and Family Services after a series of audits found procurement, contracting and other problems.

"The CEO is helping us in coming up with creative ideas and how to utilize less resources to get the job done," DCRS Director Trish Ploehn said. "We are facing a potential (\$25 million) budget cut with the state budget, so it's critically important my administrative structures are streamlined, and this has been a big help."

Fujioka also sent a "strike team" into the health department to address problems at the former Martin Luther King/Drew Medical Center and to find ways to save money in the health department.

Department of Health Services Interim Director John Schunhoff said the team has been helpful in restructuring the MLK clinic and identifying problem employees who had been shuffled around the county.

"Another team is coming in

to help us shore up our human resources operations, including performance management, which has to do with discipline to really strengthen it and to try to make sure we have a system in place to take care of these issues so they don't happen again," Schunhoff said.

But in response to the commission's report, the supervisors late last month directed Fujioka to meet with the supervisors' chiefs of staff to review eight recommendations and come up with a joint proposal for the board's approval.

"This is the county of Los Angeles, which has been in place for more than 100 years," Fujioka said. "To change this structure is going to take time. The fact we have multiple instances of better and strong collaboration and coordination after only one year is significant."

"I think it would be a tragedy if we returned to the status quo. We just need to continue working collectively and collaboratively together. It's my goal to make this work and move it forward."

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