

July 15, 2010

Members, County Government Task Force
By e-mail

I write to comment on two issues that I heard via audio tape which were discussed at the July 1st meeting of your Task Force:

First, there continues to be much back and forth among Task Force members, facilitating consultants and top County administrators concerning the advisability of some form of centralizing of the information technology functions of the County.

As I mentioned when I spoke to the Task Force there exists in state law the ability within the current County structure for a majority of the County Commission to vote to create a County Data Processing Board. Such a Data Board would include a number of elected officials who would be required to meet and work together to set policy for the County's information technology.

As has been noted the law makes the County Auditor the Administrator of the Data Board. I have no recommendation as to the wisdom of creating such a Data Board for our County though I do believe some of the much stated benefits, largely financial, are exaggerated.

The transition from a currently decentralized IT operation to an enterprise-wide one would be years long and inevitably involve significant transaction costs given current vendor relationships and staff arrangements. With the world's data increasingly available to each desktop the return to centralized control almost seems a trip into the past.

The state law might not have envisioned the pace of such technological progress. A number of states and other large governmental entities that have attempted to impose such a consolidation (including outsourcing to international IT corporations) have encountered dramatic cost overruns.

If the County Commission votes to create a Data Board I will do my best to make it work. I have no problem with a decision to maintain the current arrangement. My point is that the County absolutely **does not** need a County Charter to consolidate or centralize County information technology functions. It can create a Data Board right now. Of course, it would not be (other than in being created or ended) controlled directly or solely by the County Commission.

Second, as Task force members discuss and generally opine on the “efficiency” and “streamlining” and need for “keeping the pressure on to keep efficient” and lump all the independently elected officials together as having achieved well in this regard but only lately due to having to react to economic and budget problems, you may want to consider some Auditor office facts.

What follows are the number of fulltime (we have no part-time) employees on the Auditor’s staff by year as counted in June of each year:

1992	174	2001	118
1993	160	2002	116
1994	<i>152 estimate</i>	2003	111
1995	144	2004	106
1996	143	2005	103
1997	139	2006	101
1998	131	2007	98
1999	130	2008	100
2000	123	2009	96
		2010	83

When I took office in March, 1991 we had **173** employees. The negligible (+1) increase in 1992 was caused by 15 new employees (offset by departures) when we established our own Data Processing Department, a move which saved about \$1,000,000 annually. The Regional Computer Center had been charging us \$1,850,000 a year for this service. There was a system conversion in 1994.

You can see that I was reducing staff through attrition and cross-training right from the start, not because of any “pressure” but because of a consistent managerial philosophy and there was nothing “ministerial” about it. In contrast, during the first half of my tenure offices under the County Commissioners were increasing their staffs and even as recently as 2001, the former County Administrator was recommending that the Commissioners add 80 new positions.

As is obvious from the data, I am no Johnny-come-lately to “keeping the pressure on and streamlining government” and frankly resent the notion that I somehow had to do so and have only done so recently. For nearly **two decades** I have reduced staff and “reformed” government as a matter of policy. Not bad for a “silo”, “line officer”!

Find me a “professional administrator” with as good a record in bringing efficiencies to an operation. No, they hang around a few years, collect the big paychecks and head for the hills to get the next gig as the policies they put in place for the short term start to unravel. Then in the ultimate moment of irony they plot their return to eliminate the very elected leaders who did the right thing all along.

Having been appointed by two Governors and serving on two state task forces to review and study local government structures I understand that these exercises tend to be a

forum for many diverse opinions on government operations. If your group is to be anything more than an academic exercise or debating society it is critical that these opinions be based on facts instead of inaccurate perceptions based on a desire to achieve a predetermined result or just to disparage the current county construct.

Sincerely,

/s/ Dusty Rhodes

Cc: County Commissioners & Administration
County elected officials
All media