

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY COMMISSION

ROOM 163, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION / 500 WEST TEMPLE / LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012 / 974-1491

June 2, 1976

Honorable Board of Supervisors
Los Angeles County
383, Hall of Administration
Los Angeles, Calif. 90012

Gentlemen:

SUBJECT: COUNTY PROPOSITION B

Dr. Robert J. Downey, Chairman
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Commission Secretary

County Proposition B, which removes department heads from civil service, also eliminates the present charter requirement for open competitive examinations and merit system selection for these positions. In the appointment of department heads the amendment states that the Board will make appointments from a list " . . . received from the Civil Service Commission certifying the candidates as meeting the standards for the position."

No argument opposing Proposition B appears in the official ballot pamphlet. Our commission regrets that so important an issue will be decided by an electorate that is ill informed about its potential consequences. The ballot measure would politicize the process of selecting County executives who have substantial power and influence over selection of contractors, regulation of business and development, and expenditures of millions of

public dollars. Under the loose phrasing of the proposition, the list from the Civil Service Commission, a body appointed by the Board, could include anyone.

Our commission has been a severe critic of the rigidity and over-protectiveness of the present civil service system. We would support changes to the system to enable the Board to discipline or discharge County executives in a responsible manner if their performance did not measure up to acceptable standards. Nevertheless, we oppose Proposition B. We can not support a proposal which eliminates all requirements for merit system selection and provides no protection against arbitrary, capricious or politically motivated discharge.

Under Proposition B the Board of Supervisors would be open to all kinds of pressures by special interests to appoint department executives dominated by those interests. In cases of dismissal, there are no safeguards against blaming department heads for County problems and dismissing them without recourse to a public hearing, regardless of the causes of the problems.

Fear of arbitrary dismissal would make department heads even more reluctant than they are now to risk bringing unpleasant news to the Board. The Board's access to vital information on County operations - something the Board already complains is inadequate - would be even more severely restricted. Proposition B could destroy the greatest strength the County organization now possesses - the professional caliber of its managers.

We recognize that in voting to place Proposition B on the ballot, the present Board's intention was to provide greater flexibility in disciplining and discharging incompetent department heads. Unfortunately,

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in providing this authority to the Board, Proposition B eliminates all safeguards against political influence both in selection and discharge.

For these reasons, the commission voted unanimously today to oppose Proposition B on the June 8 ballot. The commission also voted to reconsider executive appointment and dismissal procedures as they relate to the proposal for an elected mayor which the Board may place on the November ballot.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT J. DOWNEY
Chairman

RJD:ml