

Business Publication

ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNMENT

Dear Editor:

The lagging economy has forced business owners to examine every aspect of their enterprises to achieve maximum efficiency. County government, funded by business and individual taxpayers, has an obligation to do the same.

In the name of efficiency and accountability, some counties in Ohio are considering changes in their government structure. Under these proposals, voters would elect a county executive responsible for government operations and economic development, and elect a "county council" to set policy.

This fall, voters in Cuyahoga County will choose their first county executive from a pool of eight candidates and seat a total of 11 council members out of 86 in the running. As business people, you may question how moving from three county commissioners to 12 public officials at an annual payroll of \$670,000 (not including additional staff and benefits such as health insurance) achieves efficiency. Furthermore, the county's chief fiscal officer (CFO, akin to the county auditor) will not be elected; instead, the county executive will hire the CFO, keeper of the county books. How does that improve accountability? I say it does not.

My intent is not to tell voters in other counties what is best for them, but for voters in our county to understand the value of an elected fiscal officer who answers to the people. It is tempting to think that the county government structure under which Greene County and 86 other counties have operated for more than 150 years must be antiquated. Yet, upon examination, our system of government responds very well because its top officers are voted in (or out) directly by vote of the people.

As Greene County Auditor, I am accountable to the voters for the county's fiscal

management. Now imagine county auditors who want to please the executives who gave them their jobs. What happens when a county executive has a pet project for which there are no funds? It is highly possible that the appointed CFO would be pressured to sign a risky loan or alter property appraisals to generate more money or even "borrow" money from another county fund improperly.

Your county auditor, the holder of the county's checkbook, must remain independently elected and answerable directly to voters.

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