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OPINION

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

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County power play

Re the story, "County chief's powers widened": So, Janssen has proposed creating clusters of departments overseen by deputy CAOs. The initial Board of Supervisors motion was to give the CAO more authority by placing that person directly over the affected department heads.

Janssen's proposal would seem to defeat that purpose by creating another management layer — the departmental clusters overseen by deputy CAOs. We have a term for this in management, it is called the monster with many heads. This style never succeeds.

In many ways, this is no different than the current county structure, except non-elected subordinates will get to meddle with each department and the department heads will be more accountable to their deputy CAO than the CAO.

Meanwhile the CAO will be in the position of running his/her own fiefdom without any direct accountability to the electorate; and I don't see this making the County run any smoother.

As to Janssen's comments about "I could do this for free, but it would have no meaning." What an arrogant and condescending statement that insults every volunteer that gives of his or her time to countless organizations throughout this county and to every professional that provides their services pro bono. This is a good reason why Janssen should have remained in retirement.

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County chief's powers widened

Board hopes move will aid recruitment

BY TROY ANDERSON
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Stung by difficulties in luring a new chief administrative officer, Los Angeles County supervisors voted 4-1 Tuesday to give the position greater authority, including the ability to hire and fire most nonelected department heads.

The change in the power structure of the nation's largest county requires final approval next Tuesday. It would create a structure similar to those in Ventura, Orange and San Diego counties.

Advocates say the change will help the county recruit a new CAO and allow the Board of Supervisors to hold one person accountable for fixing many of the county's problems.

"It's a step toward putting someone in charge," said Bob Stern, president of the Center for Governmental Studies. "A better step would be to have a county mayor, but that's a harder step."

Two previous applicants turned down the county's recent offers for the post.

"This will help recruit a [CAO]. I'm guessing that the people they recruited said, 'Look, you are not giving me enough power. I don't have the power to hire and fire that I need.' The important thing is that they put this on the ballot. If it's just a temporary shift, then it's not good," Stern said.

The exceptions to the CAO's hiring and firing powers would include the nonelected auditor-controller, county counsel and executive offices, plus the elected sheriff, district attorney and assessor.

Supervisor Michael Antonovich, who cast

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COUNTY CAO's powers broadened

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the opposing vote, noted that voters have rejected proposals for an elected county executive in the past.

"We don't know if we are going to have four, six, eight, 10 or 12 junior CAOs running around, building new offices and hiring new staff costing millions of dollars," Antonovich said.

"But that's OK. We'll get this money out of thin air. And to create this body that will be a soundwall between elected representatives and their voters is wasteful and disruptive to our democratic form of government."

Although many details have not yet been worked out, CAO David Janssen has proposed creating clusters of departments that would be overseen by deputy CAOs.

Janssen has until May to develop a plan for the new structure.

"Supervisor Antonovich is correct," Janssen said. "This is not going to be free. I could do it for free, but it would have no meaning. The idea is to have three or four deputy CAOs responsible for oversight of the departments."

"That way you don't have to go to five different departments if you have a concern about why something is not being addressed. You can go to one place and be assured it's going to be fixed."

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