

OPINION

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

THURSDAY
JULY 26, 2007

Public in the dark

The hiring of Mr. Fujioka is yet another in a long string of examples of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' thumbing of their noses at the citizens of our county and to the word and spirit of the Brown Act.

Mr. Fujioka and the other candidates were allowed to apply with complete anonymity and their reviews and interviews were shielded from any public scrutiny.

Since the names of the prospective candidates were kept from the public eye, no member of the public had an opportunity to review or provide feedback on these candidates' qualifications or credentials; that is except for the select few invited into the "cabal." This then made the closed session notice that was provided on the Board agenda just a bad joke because without any idea which candidates were being considered, assuming that there were more than one, it guaranteed that no member of the public would be able to speak intelligently to this item.

Even after Mr. Fujioka was confirmed as the new county CEO, the Board of Supervisors refused to release the list of candidates who had applied for the CEO post, let alone the names of those who made it to the final selection round.

This entire process does not inspire confidence nor does it appear to be a very auspicious beginning for Mr. Fujioka or the citizens of L.A. County.

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Give priority to openness

IT is the natural inclination of government to hide its actions from prying eyes and limit access whenever it can get away with it. And it is the natural inclination for the public to want to see what government is doing on its behalf.

With good reason: Secrecy breeds corruption.

In the case of Los Angeles County government, the inclination toward secrecy seems to currently have the advantage. A report on Wednesday from our sister newspaper in the San Fernando Valley, the Daily News, found that increasingly the public is losing access to county documents and meetings.

Most recently, the county counsel decided to keep secret from the public details of key legal settlements, even though the public ultimately pays the costs.

Imagine, for example, if the city of Los Angeles had the same policy. The details of the outrageous, proposed "dog food" case settlement to Tennie Pierce might never have come out.

Credit local Supervisor Gloria Molina for calling out her colleagues Tuesday for their complicity in shutting down the

OUR VIEW

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long-standing practice of disclosing settlement details. But it will take more than one supervisor to keep the county from becoming a Kremlin-like organization.

The naming of a new county chief executive officer this week — a wise choice with retired Los Angeles city chief administrative officer Bill Fujioka — presents the county with a crossroads of sorts.

On the one hand, Fujioka's background as a straight-shooting Los Angeles city CAO who balanced political pressures with good financial sense bodes well for the future of accountability at the top of county government. On the other hand, the newly restructured system that created his job is ripe for abuse of disclosure.

While the new system was created as an answer to the lack of accountability in the county administration, its very structure threatens accountability.

The new county CEO and the deputies he oversees are not answerable to the public in the way that the five elected supervisors are.

It will be on the shoulders of Fujioka himself to make transparency and disclosure a priority. We will be watching.