



January 17, 2009

County government works best

We have all heard the mantra that all local government is broken. The Kernan-Shepard Commission and the governor have recommended the elimination of most county-elected officials and suggest that they be replaced by one county executive and appointed staff.

With all due respect to Gov. Mitch Daniels, I submit to you that if a business were run like government, we would not be experiencing the current financial pain that business has thrust us into. We are all hurting badly in these tough economic times, but the problems we are experiencing are not a product of inefficient, ineffective, or incompetent county government.

Every local government decision is made at a public meeting, generally with legal notice. While you may or may not agree with a government decision, it is made with thoughtful consideration by a diversified group of elected officials who bring their own individual life experiences, education and expertise.

This diversification is a key component of what makes county government work. One elected executive would be vulnerable to, at the minimum, cronyism and to the extreme, corruption. The checks and balances that are firmly in place to protect your dollars would be diminished, if not lost. Serving the people as an elected official is an honorable and challenging job. The reward we receive for serving the people is an occasional thank you or compliment.

There are several layers of oversight in county government to protect people's money. The auditor and treasurer perform independent functions to ensure complete accountability to the public. Every transaction is performed with accuracy, transparency and integrity. County government works and is there when you need it. Not one single penny of your money has been lost to mismanagement, greed, theft or fraud.

Unlike a business of similar size, most elected officials receive a modest or lower salary for their level of responsibility. They are dedicated public servants who are held accountable by you, the public. We need to look no further than the daily news for multiple examples of greed, excesses, theft and fraud perpetuated by some in the private sector. Elected officials are not rewarded with bonuses, spa visits, golden parachutes, private jets, hunting trips to Europe or stock options. Helping a taxpayer to save his or her home is my reward for being a public servant.

I don't want to be a shareholder of a corporation with a CEO who greedily conspires to deceive the public. I want my elected officials to be accessible to me at the grocery store, the beauty shop and the football game. We are elected by you, the people, and should be held accountable by you. That level of accessibility and accountability will disappear with appointed staff and our forefathers' dream will be lost.

Our founding fathers envisioned a government of the people, by the people and for the people. That is exactly what you have with county government, and I can think of no greater disservice to those who came before us: to abandon our means to serve the people.