

April 2015

Vol 10

THE TRUTH A PARTY



Mayor-Strong or Mayor-Weak?

As our 5-year Charter Review Committee convenes, we ask the questions; "Should a city our size move to a mayor-strong government?" And "Is one form of government more conducive to balancing power?" Should we kiss this frog to see if it turns into a prince? What if it remains a frog?

Many of us assume that a mayor of a populace approaching 100,000 residents actually runs the city. Upon adopting home rule in 1991, Rio Rancho implemented a city manager/weak-mayor style of governing. The City Manager (appointed by the Governing Body) runs the day-to-day operations of the city. The Mayor presides over governing body meetings, acting as a tie-breaker vote when needed. He acts as an ambassador for the city, but he lacks the authority that many people expect a mayor to have. In fact, in 2012 the citizens voted for a full-time mayor, showing they desired a change. No significant change in mayoral duties or pay occurred, however, he is expected to keep full-time office hours.

Changing to a mayor-strong system would

separate the executive and legislative branches of our city government. While the Governing Body is very limited in its ability to communicate with one another on policy issues outside of meetings, the City Manager is not as restricted. The Office of the City Manager can wield substantial influence over Governing Body members. He works at the will of 4 Governing Body members (the majority), whereas a strong mayor works at the will of the voters.

The Governing Body and City Manager also share the same City Attorney, who works at the will of the City Manager and Mayor. This would appear to place the City Attorney and the City Council at odds from time-to-time, leaving Governing Body members without impartial legal advice on city issues. City Council members voting on approval of complex issues should have an unbiased legal advisor at their disposal.

Separation of powers and accountability make a mayor-strong system seem more desirable, but as our mothers told us "the grass isn't always greener on the other side

of the fence". Changing could come with increased costs. The strong mayor would oversee the day-to-day operations, hire his own department heads and chief of staff. He would also hold veto power. Upon each election the city could see swifter changes, for better or worse, and we'd likely be stuck with him until the end of his term.

If the Charter Review Committee recommends this transformation, it could be on the ballot next spring. If approved, it will probably take effect in 2018. Even though drawbacks can exist in both systems, it's important that we find the best fit for the future success of Rio Rancho.

Is one form of government a prince and the other a frog, or are they both inherently full of warts? To find out, we are sponsoring a forum on this topic. Former Mayor Tom Swisstack and former City Manager James Jimenez have graciously agreed to debate the pros and cons in this point/counterpoint discussion. Join us on Thursday, April 2nd (7pm) at Rio Rancho Church of Christ for this informative event.

In search of Xena-Warrior Superintendent

Articles by Renee Wilkins, RRTP President

It was becoming ridiculous. After receiving literally a dozen consecutive emails from Rio Rancho Public Schools titled "Understanding the PARCC Exam" (Part 1,2,3, and so on...), I finally started sending them to my junk file

unread. Truthfully, these lengthy emails only deepened my unease about this test. After all, if it takes two weeks of daily essays to convince us it's good, then it must be really bad. Rumors circulated that RRPS was

threatening to fire teachers who informed parents it was legal to opt out of the exam.

I'm sure the School District thought it was being cleverly proactive.

In Search of Xena-Warrior Superintendent continued

Therein lies the problem.

My mind swirling amid escalating rumors and increasing public protests, I had the opportunity to visit with Kathy Sandoval, Principal of nationally-awarded AIMS Charter School. In five minutes she resolved many of my concerns. While I do believe our public schools are over-testing our kids, it has become clear to me that the growing problems of RRPS aren't caused by the PARCC, the NWEA, the SBA exams or Common Core. The problem is leadership. Somewhere along the way, Sue Cleveland and her team got lost in their own propaganda, perpetually acting in damage control mode out of self-preservation. They lost the trust of parents and teachers.

There is a right leader for the right time. Now is the time for an energetic, straight-shooter. Someone with Chutzpah. Someone to forge us a path through the waste-deep muck that parents, students and teachers have to trudge through every day. Someone brave enough to throw out what doesn't work, and strong enough to defend what

does. Leadership is why AIMS is successful. State and national mandates aside, school boards and superintendents do have a choice in many of the policies they implement into our local schools. Often times they exacerbate the situation not so much in what they are doing, but how they are doing it. Seemingly irresistible funding sources also have undesirable strings attached.

Dr. Cleveland and her District coalition did a fine job establishing a good foundation in the early days of RRPS and should be commended for their work. But just because they built it doesn't mean they own it. Although experience is important, people do become set in their ways after 20 years in one position, losing the ability to change and grow with the times. With two new RRPS School Board members, my hope is that our School Board will be courageous enough to search for a new "Warrior Superintendent" to reinvigorate, energize and unite our school district in a time of great uncertainty and change.

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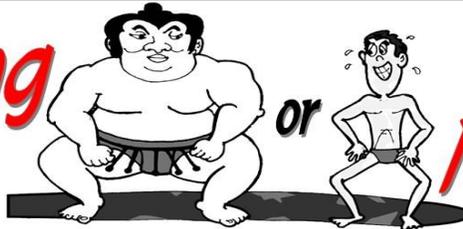
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Subject to change

Should Rio Rancho change its form of government?

Mayor-Strong



Mayor-Weak

Join us for a
Point/Counterpoint
discussion
with

Former City Manager

James Jimenez

Former Mayor

Tom Swisstack

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Thursday, April 2nd - 7pm
Rio Rancho Church of Christ
1006 22nd St SE, Rio Rancho

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