The Miami Herald
Posted on Wed, Aug. 22, 2012

Charter reform — not a job for life

The Miami Herald Editorial
HeraldEd@MiamiHerald.com

Fresh from his reelection win for a sixth term Miami-Dade Commissioner Dennis Moss now wants to yank away from voters the opportunity to vote for term limits without any other strings attached.

On the County Commission agenda for charter reform on Thursday: A Moss item that would rescind an already commission-approved proposal for a two-term limit of eight years, which is supposed to go on the ballot in November.

Mr. Moss would replace this sensible proposal with one tying term limits to a raise in commissioners' salaries to the state standard of about $92,000 (from the current 1950s era $6,000 a year salary) and no outside employment. Sorry, but voters have said No, No and No to the salary proposal before.

Absurd. Mr. Moss has made no secret that he does not support term limits, and that is his right. It is also the right of voters to have a say on their county's governance, and to vote on it without other issues tied to it. The proposal — first offered by Commissioners Lynda Bell, Rebeca Sosa, Esteban Bovo Jr. and Jean Monestime and approved in March by the commission — would offer two consecutive four-year terms, which polls show voters want without other issues mucking up the question. We agree that commissioners' salaries need to be raised, but term limits must come first.

We would have preferred a viable contender against Mr. Moss in his race, as we noted in our recent recommendation supporting him based on few other options. Unfortunately, Mr. Moss' big win thanks to his big-money contributors seems to have gone to his head. Instead of joining the reformers, he's back to the same old same old. His colleagues should send a clear signal that promises made are not to be rescinded and replaced with pricey window dressing. Period.

Then there's Commissioner Joe Martinez, who lost his bid for mayor and seems to be angling for chief cop now that popular county Police Director Jim Loftus is retiring. He wants to put before voters a proposal that would make the elections supervisor and the county police director (aka sheriff) elected posts.

Mr. Martinez is on target on the elections supervisor, which every other county in Florida elects. It would create an independent office guiding elections. Right now, the supervisor answers to the mayor, which has the potential to create conflicts of interest. Such conflicts in the past have forced the elected county clerk to step in on elections duties.

As for electing what amounts to a sheriff: Why fix what's not broken? Most counties that elect

their sheriffs have that position aligned with the state as a constitutional officer, not as a county charter office. Besides, electing sheriffs is not ideal. They should be appointed after a national search of the best. Urban areas like Miami-Dade should have a professional police director not a politician. Mr. Martinez, a former police captain, perhaps is capable of heading a 3,000-strong force, but opening the post to elections is not wise in the long run.

Other charter-reform issues that will be taken up include incorporation and annexation. Commissioner Bell and others have offered amendments to close huge loopholes that a charter-reform commission left open in its zeal to allow new cities to pop up without voters having all the facts and while making it more difficult for existing cities to annex new areas.

Commissioners should send a strong signal to voters that they are serious about true reforms.

© 2012 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
http://www.miamiherald.com