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Here's our chance to improve local government

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The vote on the seven proposed changes to the Home Rule Charter is an opportunity to decide term limits for commissioners, to approve technical changes to the charter, to protect the Urban Development Boundary, to strengthen the Citizens' Bill of Rights, and to ensure stability of our government when a vacancy in the Office of the Mayor occurs.

It is also an opportunity to reject two proposals that do not improve our local government operations. One further complicates the incorporation procedures, and the other weakens the integrity of the bidding process.

Our Charter Review Task Force toiled for several months to prepare proposed changes to the Home Rule Charter. After the Board of County Commissioners considered the 15 Task Force proposals, most were not placed on the November ballot, several were modified and two were accepted as written. On the issue of term limits, the Task Force simply endorsed a prior board decision to place that question on the ballot.

- The first charter question on the ballot is a clean decision about term limits. It is not tied to a salary increase or any other benefit for the elected. If this charter change is adopted, commissioners will be elected to serve no more than two consecutive four-year terms.
- The second question on the ballot adopts technical amendments to the charter, such as fixing the numbering of sections.
- The third question puts the requirement of an extraordinary vote to move the urban development boundary (UDB) in the charter.
- The fourth question pertains to the incorporation and annexation procedures. As expected, the County Commission rejected an extreme measure submitted by the Task Force that removed the commission from the decision-making process. The alternative proposed by the commission only complicates the incorporation process. If adopted into the charter, future incorporations would have a single ballot question to create a city and adopt a municipal charter. These are two separate public policy issues and should not be meshed into a single ballot question. This charter change should be rejected.
- The fifth charter question allows citizens to seek enforcement of the Bill of Rights by petitioning the Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. The current language only provides for a lawsuit in the circuit court to remedy such violations. This question should be approved to allow citizens both avenues for seeking justice.
- The sixth Charter question corrects a gap in the charter that was discovered when the former mayor was recalled. When such a vacancy occurs, this proposed change will allow

the chair or vice-chair of the commission to exercise certain limited powers until an election occurs.

- The seventh Charter question is a flawed revision of a Task Force recommendation. The Task Force suggested that Clerk of the Courts handle a bidding process when the mayor announces a conflict of interests. Mayor Gimenez supported the Task Force proposal; Clerk Harvey Ruvin did not. The commission opted to give the chair of the commission control of such bids. This should not be approved. The chair should not appoint selection committee members, recommend a winner, and then vote on the bid. The voters should reject this proposed change.

In summary, five of the seven charter measures are thoughtful changes in the rules that guide those who govern Miami-Dade County. Though I do not personally endorse the concept of term limits, this ballot question is clean, direct and to the point. The voters should reject the proposal to change the rules for incorporation and the other proposal that puts the chair of the commission in charge of certain bids.

The Home Rule Charter belongs to the citizens of Miami-Dade County. Your vote will decide how our government operates. Study the proposals and make a difference. It is a rare opportunity to change the rules for those we elect.

Terry Murphy served on the Charter Review Task Force.

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