



County of Hamilton

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BIGGER GOVERNMENT ON THE WAY?

Dusty Rhodes, Hamilton County Auditor

When was the last time you heard someone say "What we really need is bigger government and more of it"? That is the objective of a "government reform study committee" recently initiated by County Commissioner Todd Portune.

County government is a limited form of government. It is unable to pass ordinances or laws. County government is meant to do only what state law specifically says it can do. Counties are simply administrative units of the state.

County government also has a built-in system of checks and balances. Independently elected officials such as the Prosecutor, Treasurer and County Auditor are accountable directly to the voters. This differs from city governments where such duties are the province of appointed personnel.

Commissioner Portune seems to prefer an enlarged County Council rather than the present three-member County Commission, the elimination of some or all of the independent elected offices and a grand, all-powerful County Executive. He has expressed his apparent unhappiness with the current county government structure calling it "archaic and agrarian".

Of course, county government has been continuously updated over the years by the State Legislature. Its functions and authority are not static as a "reform" proponent would have you believe.

The hidden goal is to make the County much more like the City of Cincinnati in its powers and organization. What more could they do with more power and a bigger County "Council"? I hope we never find out.

Why do we need to change the current structure of county government to give more power to the County Commission?

Is it because of the Jobs and Family Services accounting debacle that still hinders the county's ability to do business?

No.

Is it because of the expensive struggle to complete "The Banks" which has gone on for over a decade?

No.

Is it because of the expenditure of over \$20 million on outside attorneys over the past decade?

No.

Is it due to the lease deal the county negotiated with the Bengals?

No.

All of these failures originated from county operations overseen by the same County Commission that now wants even more power and authority. Now the fox wants to watch the henhouse!

The act of "reforming" county government is nothing more than a dramatic expansion of government. It would create a second and unnecessary level of local government with all its attendant costs.

It would start us down the road to "metropolitan government" eliminating local communities, moving control further away from the people and replacing local officials with high-paid appointees – chosen by the County Commissioners.

Thomas Jefferson said it best. In a letter to Joseph Cappel dated February 2, 1816 he wrote:

"...the way to have good and safe government, is not to trust it all to one, but to divide it among the many, distributing to every one exactly the functions he is competent to.

"What has destroyed liberty and the rights of man in every government which has ever existed under the sun? The generalizing and concentrating all cares and power into one body, no matter whether of the autocrats of Russia or France, or of the aristocrats of a Venetian senate".

Be ready if the latest "study committee" comes up with some kind of "County Charter" proposal. If one other Commissioner joins with Portune to place such an idea on the fall ballot we must work together to defeat it.

County government needs to be limited – not expanded.

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