

EDITORIAL: Here is supervisors' chance to back up their talk



Paul Dictos

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One of our frustrations with the Fresno County Board of Supervisors has been the supervisors' penchant for saying one thing and then doing another.

Case in point: The board's mantra that county government must run more like a business, and then voting in a way that suggests the board has no interest in adopting a business-like approach to governance.

The latest example happened last month when the board failed to muster the necessary supermajority support to provide the assessor's office with a state grant totaling \$2.06 million over three years.

Get this: Last summer, the board gave the go-ahead to Assessor-Recorder Paul Dictos to apply for the grant. His office's competitive application was submitted Sept. 15. One month later, the California Department of Finance sent notice that Fresno County had been chosen.

All was good until Supervisor Debbie Poochigian concluded that the grant was all about "taking money out of taxpayer's pockets" and Phil Larson decided to punish Dictos because, in Larson's view, the assessor had been unfair to farmers with his appraisals of Williamson Act properties.

Needing four votes to get the grant, Dictos received three.

However, the board has a chance Tuesday to rectify its mistake. We hope that Poochigian changes her mind, and that new supervisors Brian Pacheco and Buddy Mendes will join Andreas Borgeas and Henry R. Perea in supporting the grant.

Three fundamentals of successful businesses are: maximize revenue, give employees the tools they need to succeed and maintain high ethical standards.

All three apply to this grant.

The assessor's office has been understaffed for a long time. Dictos' predecessor, Bob Werner, told the board that he didn't have adequate help to provide timely appraisals of Fresno County properties. Dictos proposes to add 10 positions with the grant, including a senior appraiser, four appraisers and an auditor-appraiser.

The expectation is that the office will more quickly appraise properties. In good times, more tax revenue will flow to the state, county and local school districts. In a recession, property owners will sooner see property taxes decrease because the assessor has sufficient staff to quickly react to changing market conditions.

The ethical underpinning of this is that people should pay exactly what they owe — neither a penny more nor a penny less. As it stands, two people or businesses whose properties are identical in Fresno County may have different tax bills because the assessor's office has appraised one recently, but not the other. For too long, the Board of Supervisors has been OK with this.

Finally, board members complain that the state doesn't provide the county with the financial assistance it deserves. Now the state is offering a helping hand, but the board has yet to grab it.

The vote to accept the grant should be unanimous. A smart business puts all its oars in the water and then paddles in the same direction.

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