

THE PLAIN DEALER

Dodging reform

Dimora and Russo ought to be ashamed of themselves, but with power and patronage at stake, that's too much to ask

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

County Commissioner Jimmy Dimora and Auditor Frank Russo obviously care more about padding the payroll with cronies than they do about protecting the citizens of Cuyahoga County.

Nothing else can explain their asinine criticisms of the first county government reform plan in memory that actually enjoys some positive momentum.

Don't Dimora and Russo understand that voters are utterly disgusted with county government - with its mismanagement and obscene payroll-padding?

Someday soon, voters will become so fed up with the antics of their county officials that they will revolt. That's not just a possibility. Absent meaningful change in county government, it's a certainty.

And when those voters reject a request to fund vital human services, the port authority or maybe even the Metroparks, the suffering of this community will become a permanent blot on the legacy of those who resist meaningful change.

Last week, Ohio House Speaker Jon Husted told County Commissioner Tim Hagan and The Plain Dealer that he would support a law giving Cuyahoga County voters the right to retain the three commissioners, prosecutor and judges as elected officials. The plan would eliminate an elected auditor, recorder, clerk of courts, treasurer, coroner, engineer and sheriff.

Soon after, Commissioner Peter Lawson Jones announced his support. But Dimora ranted against the idea on Tuesday and Russo sent a preposterous letter to the editor suggesting that a committee be formed to study the idea of county government reform.

Russo must think the people of Cuyahoga County are complete idiots. What Russo wants to do is painfully obvious: de lay any reform long enough for voters to stop paying attention.

That's exactly what happened in the mid- 1990s in the wake of the SAFE crisis that resulted in the county losing \$114 million from its investment portfolio. Faced with mounting calls for structural change, the commissioners named Kathleen Barber, the retired head of John Carroll University's political science department, to head a committee that spent 14 months producing a thoughtful plan to reform county government. Of that government, Barber wrote, "Its structure is better suited to the days of the Erie Canal than the Information Superhighway."

Shamefully, the commissioners never really tried to implement the Barber plan. This time, that can't be allowed to happen.

This plan isn't perfect, but anything that eliminates seven elected countywide offices represents significant progress.

No one should be fooled by the opposition from Dimora and Russo. It's not about doing what's right by the taxpayers.

They stopped caring about the taxpayers years ago.

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Paid for by the Republican Party of Cuyahoga County, Rob Frost, Chairman, 1500 W. 3rd St Ste 120, Cleveland, OH 44113