

To: San Diego City Council
From: League of Women Voters San Diego
Re: Item-203 Amending City Charter relating to the Chief Financial Officer...
Date: Feb. 25, 2008

Today you make the decision on which propositions will appear on the June ballot. We're here again today to say that we've got serious concerns about what's on the table.

On the selection of a city auditor: One thing ought to be crystal clear – it's imperative to get the city auditor out from under any influence or control from the executive branch of city government, which is the mayor.

Across our nation, no major city gives their mayor the power to appoint the city auditor. Independent experts, national auditor's associations, and all big-time cities agree that the city auditor should be either elected by the public or appointed by the city's legislative body. That's you, the city council.

The statements on record from city consultants and officials that justify giving the mayor control -- in one form or another -- over choosing the person who is responsible for monitoring, analyzing, critiquing, and reporting on the mayor's financial books oddly ignore the highest and best standards of municipal accounting practices.

Instead, they scrape the bottom of the barrel to justify a role for the mayor in appointing our city auditor. It's a disturbing warning sign that San Diego's bad old ways are still with us and that real reform has not yet taken root.

On the question of the single subject rule for ballot propositions: All charter changes require a public vote. If you choose to lump together these 5 separate charter changes into a single ballot proposition, you will be denying San Diego voters our rights to decide which portions of the city charter we want to amend and how we want to amend them.

You have decided that these 5 items are important enough to put before the voters. They all have something to do with handling the city's financial matters. But that's where the superficial connection ends.

One charter change -- to require a balanced budget -- has nothing to do with the second change -- redefining the parameters of the mayor's chief financial officer. Or the third change -- how to appoint the city treasurer. And the fourth change -- creating a

complicated arrangement for a public/private authoritative audit committee – should have nothing to do with the other three.

And towering over these four items is the fifth change you want to lump with these others -- which involves the crucial choice about how to select the independent monitor of our city's finances and departmental performance.

Voters have the right and responsibility to examine, judge, and vote on what kind of independence we want for our city auditor. It would be a clear denial of fair, open, and honest accountability to the public if you make the decision to bury and hide the vote on city auditor inside a hodgepodge of other charter changes.

A take it or leave it / up or down / single vote arrangement like the one you are considering deprives us voters of our rights to make clear and meaningful voting decisions about our city government. We urge you to reconsider.