

Regarding "Council relapse/Moves would replace reform with a facade"
(Editorial, Feb.12):

When the major newspaper in a major city tells the public that white means black and bad means good, it's time to cry *foul*.

No major city across the nation gives their mayor the power to appoint the city's chief financial monitor, the city auditor. For good reason! A city auditor has the duty to scrutinize and report on the mayor's financial bookkeeping and performance. If the city auditor isn't fully independent of the person whose books are being audited (the mayor) it's not just bad public policy, it's a standing invitation to corruption. In San Diego, it's also a flagrant disregard for our city's crying need for governmental integrity, honesty, and true reform.

All major cities and auditing associations agree that the city auditor should be either elected by the public or appointed by the city's legislative body, the city council. There may be numerous well-justified complaints about city council members, but in this case the only right course of action is "to shut the mayor out of the process entirely." The city council holds public hearings and makes the laws. The mayor manages city departments and finances, and creates the city budget. The city auditor keeps close tabs on how the mayor manages the city's books and lets the public know. That is what checks and balances are all about.

Why have the U-T and other powerful special interests in the San Diego community joined the mayor in relentlessly pushing for a mayor-appointed city auditor? Control and power? Confusion between the democratic requirements of city government and authoritarian standards of privately-held corporations? We can't second guess the reasons. But what is clear is that a mayor-selected city auditor is bad news for the public. Until the day that San Diego voters get the chance to decide for themselves whether they want to elect a city auditor answerable directly to the people, we must insist on a strict hands-off, arms-length policy between the mayor and the city auditor.