

TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"

AN AUDITOR OF GOVERNMENT SHOULDN'T BE TAINTED BY POLITICS!



By Stephen L. Bakke  February 5, 2016

Here's what provoked me:

Minnesota has been in the throes of controversy over a bill which passed last spring granting counties the right to use independent outside auditors (CPAs) should they choose. Previously, almost all counties were required to retain the State Auditor to perform these required examinations, unless given permission to do otherwise. The Minnesota State Auditor is a constitutionally elected individual and she reacted as expected - claiming political reasons for "gutting" this powerful state office. Most recently she has begun bringing lawsuits against certain counties which have not followed her direction. I think some of the observers and commentators are missing an incredibly obvious point! It IS politics, "stupid"! And an auditor of government shouldn't be tainted by politics!

Here's my response:

An Auditor of Government shouldn't be Tainted by Politics!

The Minnesota State Auditor's office has begun bringing lawsuits against counties not honoring the Auditor's request for scheduling audits ("Auditor sues over outsourcing of duties," on February 5). A provision in a bill passed last spring limited the responsibilities of the State Auditor. Governor Dayton reluctantly signed the bill into law. Previously, counties in the state had been subject to examination by the State Auditor, unless granted permission to hire independent auditors.

The new bill gave counties the option of hiring independent auditors (CPAs) to perform these examinations. Of the 61 counties for which the State Auditor wanted to schedule audits, 50 have refused, preferring to use independent CPAs. Most of these counties claim cost savings when using independent auditors.

One early claim by the constitutionally elected State Auditor was that this department was the only entity able to perform an examination "following clear, consistent guidelines." That claim is ridiculous because that's what these independent auditors (CPAs) are trained for, and they do it for a living!

There were also charges that this legislation was political retribution by the legislature against the State Auditor. Of course there are charges of political motivation - that's the "rub"! This IS a politically affiliated elected official, and the position will always be subject to suspicion of "playing politics."

The state constitution does not define the specific responsibilities of the State Auditor, so reexamining the office's role made a lot of sense and the law was passed. The legislation should stand unchallenged.