

TODAY'S "SHORT TOPIC"

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



By Stephen L. Bakke  June 7, 2015

Here's what provoked me:

Minnesota has been in the throes of controversy over a bill which passed 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. The Minnesota State Auditor is a constitutionally elected individual and she reacted as expected – claiming political reasons for “gutting” this powerful state office. I think some of the observers and commentators are missing an incredibly obvious point! It IS politics, “stupid”!

(NOTE – prior to posting this on my website, Governor Dayton gave in and will accept the previously passed legislation permitting counties to use independent auditors – i.e. CPA firms.)

Here's my response:

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

A provision in a bill recently passed at the last minute of the legislative session limited the responsibilities of the Minnesota State Auditor. Prior to this change, most counties in the state were subject to examination by the State Auditor. The new bill gave counties the option of hiring outside independent auditors (CPAs) to perform these examinations. Governor Dayton signed the bill into law. And now, as Dayton and the legislature have made agonizing progress on a compromise budget bill, the Governor is refusing to compromise unless he is given a rescission of the revised State Auditor responsibilities.

One concern noted is that this constitutionally created elected position is becoming less relevant. There's a concern that the State Auditor is the only one able to perform an examination “following clear, consistent guidelines.” And there are 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.” So, reexamining the office's role makes sense.

Also remember that municipalities and school systems ARE permitted to choose between the State Auditor and retaining an independent CPA to perform the examination. There's no reason this freedom shouldn't also exist for counties. As to the concern about “following clear, consistent guidelines,” that's what these independent auditors do for a living!

Let the legislation stand as signed by Governor Dayton!