

Clerks seek to protect, not expand, audit role

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February 22, 2008

The February 19 article, "Bill gives court clerks power," incorrectly implied that I and other clerks throughout Florida are attempting to expand our role as county auditor through proposed state audit legislation (H.B. 399/S.B. 640). Instead, Florida's Clerks & Comptrollers are seeking to protect our existing ability to ensure that taxpayer money is being spent within the confines of public policy and the law. This legislation comes at a time when the clerk's responsibility to act on behalf of the people as a check and balance on county spending is in jeopardy due to statewide legal efforts to limit that role. Today, taxpayers are finding accountability and transparency in government more important than ever.

The Florida Constitution states that the role of the county auditor belongs to the clerk, unless that role is altered in a county charter by a vote of the electorate. In Palm Beach County, the public has never voted to limit the clerk's role as the watchdog of their hard-earned tax dollars. Contrary to the article's assertion, while our county charter established an Internal Auditor, it did not grant him sole authority to conduct audits. In fact, the county charter states that the Clerk's audit role remains as "presently constituted."

The framers of our state constitution deemed the clerk's independent role so important that they made clerks the only elected official that can be held personally liable if expenditures don't serve a public purpose. The county's internal and external auditors are valuable; however, they are hired and paid for by the very entity they are auditing. While county staffers have said this

provides an adequate check and balance on county spending, others say it's the equivalent of the fox watching the hen house.

My focus remains on promoting transparency by providing the public with information about how their money is spent. I can't imagine that any government official wouldn't welcome an objective analysis of spending to ensure compliance with the law and public policy.

I encourage you to learn more about this very important issue by visiting our Web site at www.mypalmbeachclerk.com and clicking on "Get the Facts."

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