

# CALAVERAS GRAND JURY CALLS FOR TERM LIMITS

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SAN ANDREAS - The Calaveras County grand jury issued a report Thursday calling for term limits for members of the Board of Supervisors to "prevent stagnation and undue influence by lengthy time in office."

Although he wasn't identified by name in the report, the grand jury investigation appeared to be aimed largely at Tom Tryon, who has been a supervisor since 1984 and is running for his eighth term.

Twice, the report said that some supervisors have served "nearly 30 years." Tryon is the only board member nearing that mark. "That's just a raw political attack," Tryon said of the report.

The grand jury also conducted eight other investigations and made recommendations that included increasing staffing at the County Jail and getting up to date on county employee performance appraisals.

The grand jury reported that its investigation into the supervisors was prompted by a resident's complaint alleging "conflict of interest, appearance of impropriety and breach of ethics."

The report said witnesses claimed to have seen a variety of board misbehavior, including violations of California's open-meeting law, "cronyism" and intimidation by supervisors of county employees. The report did not, however, document any specific incidents of misbehavior.

The report recommended more elaborate mandatory ethics training for supervisors and mandatory rotation of committee assignments, and also that supervisors should comply with the chain of command.

Like Tryon, Supervisor Merita Callaway disagreed with most of the findings and recommendations.

"I think if the electorate of my district or Tom's district or anyone thinks we are in too long, then they will elect us out," she said. Callaway, who was first elected in 1993, is the second-longest-serving supervisor.

Callaway and Tryon said it takes a few years for any official to learn how to best fulfill an assignment, and that expertise would be lost with term limits or time-limited committee assignments.

Tryon and Callaway did, however, say that an allegation about supervisors pressuring county employees hits the mark.

"Staff should always have the discretion to provide their own, professional recommendations," Tryon said. "And board members should be able to disagree or agree when the action comes before the board."

The other three board members, Chairman Gary Tofanelli and Supervisors Darren Spellman and Steve Wilensky, did not respond to requests for comment.

Other findings:

- » That the county government should increase staffing at the county animal shelter and cooperate with the Humane Society to build a new shelter.
- » That county leaders should provide more resources to the Assessor's Office, something various county department leaders began working on this month.
- » That county administrators should clear a backlog of employee evaluations. A survey of 80 personnel files found that only 17.8 percent had up-to-date employee reviews.
- » That county leaders should immediately come up with money to increase staffing at the existing County Jail and should find money to build a once-planned 80-bed dormitory for a new jail.

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