

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE:

A Stronger County CAO For Efficient Government



Coming up at the Chamber

[View all upcoming events on our Web calendar.](#)

WED | March 14
International Trade &
Investment Committee
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WED | March 14
Member Orientation
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WED | March 14
New Member Reception
By Invitation Only
[more info](#)

THU | March 15
Export Seminar Series:
International Matchmaking
[more info](#)

WED | March 21
Doing Business with Beihai,
China
[more info](#)

WED | March 21
Business After Hours Mixer
At the House of Blues
[more info](#)

THU | March 22
U.S.-Korea Roundtable
Summit
[more info](#)

MON-WED | March 26-28
Access Washington, D.C.
[more info](#)

THU | March 29
Export Seminar Series:
Getting Paid For Export Sales
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The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce is the voice of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.org

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What do California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Ohio have in common? They are the only states that have a population greater than Los Angeles County.

Many say that L.A. County is the least manageable local government in the country. Over the past several decades the county has relied on federal and state bailouts and management oversight of its transit, health care and prison systems. The vast population and expansive land mass make governing L.A. County a daunting task—even for the most seasoned elected officials. Casual observers, and every candidate for the recently failed search for a new chief administrative officer, know that the system is crying for change.

The county Board of Supervisors sets policy like other elected boards. But each supervisor represents two million constituents, while being responsible for county jails, the nation's second largest health care system, foster care and county courts. This includes the day-to-day oversight of the dozens of department heads that collectively manage the county's 100,000 employees.

The Board of Supervisors appoints a CAO who has some budgetary authority but lacks the power to hire, fire or discipline department heads and other employees. Those administrative duties fall squarely on the supervisors' shoulders. As the supervisors balance so many responsibilities, the hiring process for county managers can take months and sometimes years.

Since all five county supervisors are equally in charge, each with their own constituency, often no one is in charge. Separating political and legislative duties from administrative duties is the norm in all levels of government. It is not in the best interest of taxpayers or citizens to have the same people making policy as those who oversee its enforcement and implementation.

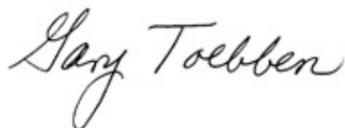
[At today's meeting](#), the L.A. County Board of Supervisors approved, 4 to 1, a long-overdue proposal to bring greater efficiency and accountability to county government. Next week the board will have a final reading on the ordinance. The decision transfers the authority to hire, fire, supervise and discipline non-elected department heads to the CAO. The board is still ultimately responsible for determining overall county policy, but the CAO now has the authority to integrate the many departments' operations in an efficient and effective way. This has the benefit of allowing the supervisors to focus on the larger, macro-governmental issues facing the county's 10 millions residents.

We support this change as a reform that will significantly improve services to L.A. County citizens. We also support County CAO David Janssen. More than anyone, Janssen understands the limitations of previous CAO authority as well as the possibilities for improvement available under the new plan.

All of us in business recognize that this new model should result in much greater efficiency and accountability. We also know that success will depend on the board's continued commitment to reforming county governance and not reverting to the status quo.

Voters will have the opportunity to make this change permanent at the ballot box through a charter amendment in 2008. With the commitment of the board and voters, it may finally be a new day in L.A. County governance.

And that's *The Business Perspective*.



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The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben, President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.

by Gary Toebben,
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Angeles Area
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Commerce

**L.A. Business
THIS WEEK**
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