

Opinion: Tangled web of political musical chairs

By Larry Weitzman

Patrick Blacklock is the current CAO of Yolo County. It would take some explaining to understand that his influence and impact on El Dorado County has been more significant than any of our current members of the Board of Supervisors. Blacklock started his employment by government bodies in May 2001 as the county administrator officer of Amador County.

As Amador CAO it was Blacklock who elevated Terri Daly from her position of manager of In-Home Supportive Services to assistant CAO of Amador County. After Blacklock left Amador, Daly became CAO of Amador County. When Amador County refused her salary demand in 2010, Daly left to find a job as ACAO in EDC, later to become the CAO. It is unknown if there was an appropriate recruitment, and a quality and thorough background check performed.



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EDC recently has failed in performing background checks of many potential high-ranking employees.

How EDC hired our latest county counsel is also an interesting series of "coincidences." Robyn Drivon, 60, was essentially fired as Yolo County counsel when her contract was not renewed. In case you forgot, Patrick Blacklock is Yolo County

CAO. Luckily for Blacklock an administrator he mentored, Terri Daly, was in need of a county counsel. In an abbreviated recruitment EDC miraculously ends up with Drivon, at the highest pay step no less, saving Yolo County from a potential age discrimination lawsuit. On top of that what kind of background check was performed? More on age discrimination later.

That leads us to the current interim CAO, Pamela Knorr, who is on a one-year agreement after the BOS terminated Daly, with the BOS paying Daly three times the amount of her contract requirement or about \$153,000 upon her firing. Supervisor Brian Veerkamp voted in favor of such severance pay, after knowing of the massive hiring of new EDC employees by Daly and her raise recommendations. (On Nov. 5, 2013, it was Knorr as then director of Human Resources who made the raise recommendation along with Daly at the BOS meeting when all BOS members – including Veerkamp, approved it). That one-two punch of mass hiring and 15 percent raises are the main cause of EDC's current fiscal problems. The county has bled \$25 million to \$30 million in cash over the last two years and it continues at the rate of about \$1.3 million a month. Starting on July 1, because of the final 5 percent of the raise package becoming effective, the bleed could increase to about \$1.7 million a month.

Knorr's recent history is worth a look. Knorr, 44, claims to have 28 years of public administration experience. Her definition of what is public administration experience would be interestingly to learn, especially her public administration experience when she was 16 years old. Knorr's last three jobs were in Texas as an administrator for the Attorney General's Office, child support division (2007-08), as the first CAO of Alpine County (2008-13) and HR director of EDC starting in September 2013, about a month after her termination from Alpine, and then as the interim CAO after Terri Daly was fired in last November.

Where is Blacklock in Alpine County? Nowhere, except whom do you think did Alpine County hire as a consultant to help with their new CAO position? You guessed it, a Blacklock, but in this case it was John Blacklock, Patrick's father. It was John Blacklock who participated in the background check and provided Alpine County a recommendation and guess who the recommendation was from? According to Skip Veatch, retired Alpine sheriff and Alpine County BOS member, he remembers a recommendation from Patrick Blacklock. In a phone conversation with Patrick Blacklock he denies making any recommendation of Pamela Knorr to Alpine County and further stated he barely knows Knorr, maybe meeting her once at a California State Association of Counties event.

As for EDC doing a background check on Knorr, it appears nothing significant was done and that would have told a story. Knorr's termination from Alpine County is even more interesting. In my investigation, and via the California Public Records Act, I acquired most relevant documents concerning Knorr's employment and termination including Knorr's severance document with Alpine, her last employment contract and a tort claim for harassment against Alpine. However, when inquiring of her employment file regarding letters of recommendation and background checks, I was advised in a phone conversation that the file seems to be strangely missing from county records. However, when confirming this fact about a week later by email this reply was received: "No, no missing. Just not available to the public. I have a copies of the applications and recruitment materials from all of the applicants but again, it is not a public record. I was not working in Personnel at the time of the recruitment so I cannot absolutely verify that this is all of the information that the board received at the time; however, I have no reason to believe there was more. Sorry if that was misunderstood."

Knorr's employment contract with Alpine dated July 3, 2012, and her tort claim against the county filed April 11, 2013,

raises a huge question. Knorr executed an employment contract with Alpine County dated July 3, 2012, with an effective date of June 2, 2012, to June 30, 2017. It was an at-will contract on 120 days notice that paid \$11,757 a month plus \$400 for a car allowance and a credit card for business expenses.

In a claim for damages filed under penalty of perjury by Knorr on April 11, 2013, Knorr alleged that since April 16, 2012, she was harassed, intimidated, retaliated against by Sheriff John Crawford, causing fear, emotional distress and harassment and that this started on April 16, 2012, and was ongoing. Knorr claimed such damaging behavior or actions also against several other high-ranking Alpine County officials, including the undersheriff, a BOS member, the county auditor and county counsel. According to the claim, there was another specific act of retaliation and harassment that occurred on June 18, 2012. In fact, Knorr even attached an alleged email of resignation on that same April 16, 2012, where she said, "I can no longer work under these conditions." In addition it was signed as "Former County Administrative Officer." From the email you can see an implication that these conditions were ongoing before April 16, 2012, as that was the date of the email. It is unknown if said email was actually sent to its intended recipients, BOS members and county counsel.

If this is a truthful depiction of Knorr's working conditions, then why would she sign a long-term employment contract? Sounds like a set up? You will understand more. One of the aforementioned contract provisions in the July 3, 2012, contract was, "In the event the County terminates without cause, County shall provide severance pay ... for 18 months. This severance pay is conditioned upon ... receiving Employee's signed written liability release...." Instead of paying out \$211,626, Alpine County via a negotiated severance agreement paid her \$158,000 in two equal payments, one on execution Aug. 1, 2013, and a second on July 1, 2014. In addition, Alpine County was to provide Knorr with a positive letter of

recommendation. Knorr was also paid \$10,000 from her tort claim for damages. One Alpine BOS member is sorry he agreed to the recommendation letter.

About a month later after collecting nearly \$170,000 in severance, Knorr was hired in at El Dorado County as HR director and Terri Daly actually gave Knorr a raise, from about \$141,000 a year (her Alpine salary) to about \$160,000, a new high salary for HR directors in EDC by about \$30,000 a year, a raise that was approved by the BOS. By the way, Daly's plan was to appoint Knorr as HR without any recruitment and background check.

It is not known yet if Blacklock played a role in Knorr's EDC hiring, but Blacklock seems to have a history with one or both women.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.