

the final analysis, this commissioner usurped the authority of the County Administrator, arbitrarily involved two governmental officials in extraneous activities, and undermined the efforts of the Accounting Department. What should have been simple instead became very convoluted.

These examples (and others to follow in future presentments) reveal a pattern of abuse of power each time a commissioner has stepped over what should have been an obvious boundary. The government cannot operate efficiently when its policymakers get involved in daily operations. We elect county commissioners to focus on issues and goals, to build consensus. It is extremely inappropriate for a politician to act as a patron for any particular county employee or department.

B. Commissioner knowledge

The next area concerns basic, competent performance as a commissioner. To be effective, a commissioner must have not just an understanding of the essential job duties, but at least a rudimentary grasp of how the government and its departments function. Unfortunately, there appear to be gaping holes in some commissioners' knowledge. When questioned by the Grand Jury, one commissioner was unclear about the duties of the committees on which he serves and was unsure of which departments they oversee. He could not even recall which of the other commissioners are on his committees! It is disheartening when a commissioner states in an open meeting, "just put a body there," in discussing an important vacancy in the Finance Department. Examples like these are numerous and will be prominent in future presentments. Instead of interfering in a specific department or getting involved when a secretary is disciplined, citizens would be better served by commissioners who are willing to educate themselves on governmental policies.

C. Race

This issue is the most difficult to address because it is so sensitive and stirs up such emotion. Yet, as the Special Grand Jury has made its inquiries, it has become increasingly evident that racial issues produce a constant undercurrent. In Augusta's past there was significant discrimination against people of color. While progress has been made, no one can deny that there is progress still to be made. Even today, race is a very sensitive issue. Nonetheless, we would be delinquent in our duty if we did not confront this issue.

Race can be used as camouflage, as a diversion, and even as a weapon. The Grand Jury has discovered many instances where race was the tool used, not to entitle the disenfranchised, but to empower a faction. There are factions that, instead of treating racial inequity as a problem, use the issue as an opportunity. Race is even used to further personal agendas. The following illustrate some recent uses of "the race card" in county governmental affairs.

- Supervisors have become paralyzed when giving yearly evaluations and in their use of progressive discipline when dealing with a subordinate of another race, for fear of being accused of being racially motivated in their actions.
- County employees, lawfully responding to Grand Jury subpoenas, were accused by commissioners (or supervisors) of being racists.