

thereafter. Each Review Committee would have a term of six months. Its duties would include the examination of all aspects of county government.

Review Committee members would be appointed by a Grand Jury, which would not be allowed to appoint any of its own jurors. Applications would be solicited and applicants could include individuals from the Grand Jury pool. The committee would consist of no fewer than 21 members, 2 from each electoral district, and a chairman chosen on a countywide basis. It would make its findings known in the same style as Grand Jury presentments. Because the committee's term would be limited to six months, any unresolved inquiry or problem would be given over to the Grand Jury process. This entity would function as a built-in watchdog group and would help ensure a more accountable and responsive government.

- F. Quorum and Abstentions— Under the current consolidation bill a quorum of seven commissioners must be present to hold a commission meeting. Any action passed by the commission requires six votes. The mayor currently is allowed to vote only to break a five-five tie. This "six vote must" regulation is not effective and is easily manipulated. The manipulation seems to be done one of two ways: either a commissioner leaves the room at the time of a vote, or a commissioner abstains from voting. This usually occurs to avoid creating a five-five tie, giving the mayor the tie-breaking vote. Abstaining is done in order to make sure there are not six votes to defeat or pass legislation, therefore no action is taken. This parliamentary maneuver derails the entire process and gives the abstaining commissioner(s) a *de facto* veto.

We believe that abstentions should be cast only when a commissioner has a conflict of interest or there is the appearance of conflict on an issue. Currently, abstentions are to obstruct. These are premeditated acts, which allow personal agendas to impede the overall flow of government.

The Special Grand Jury also recommends the following changes to the system so that the commission process will function in a fair and open manner. The six-vote threshold should be changed to allow *a simple majority of the quorum* to pass commission actions. The mayor should be allowed to vote to break any tie, not just five-five ties. Most importantly, the abstention/leaving the room loophole must be closed. A roll call is held at the start of all commission meetings. Once a commissioner is marked "present", he can vote in one of the following ways: 1) "Aye" (in favor of motion), 2) "Nay" (against motion), 3) "Abstain" (due to conflict of interest, no comment or "present"— commissioner not in room). All abstentions would count toward the quorum. This method of voting would prohibit our representatives from leaving the chamber as a way to prevent business from moving forward. It would help put an end to the gridlock.

IV. Conclusion

The Special Grand Jury believes that these are important issues. We urge that this presentment be studied and considered by the public and by their representatives. Over the past decade Augusta's population and economy have remained stagnant, while Aiken, Burke, and Columbia counties seem to be prospering. They are