

## **Fair Game**

By TOM JOHNSON

**After a lot of back and forth, at the end of the day, it's No on Measure B**



I like **Will O'Neill**. I consider him a good friend. Overall, I think what he has brought to the political front in Newport Beach, for the most part, has been good. But, like many, I've honestly been struggling with my positioning on his **Measure B** initiative that is proposing a direct election of our mayor.

And, although at times I've vacillated back-and-forth in my thoughts, when push comes to shove, I'm happy with the system that we've had for years and see no reason to change. For me, that means **No on B**.

Here's my reasoning. First off, four-year terms for a mayor after potentially serving eight years on council is, quite frankly, too long. Perhaps if it were just two years, maybe I'd be more comfortable. But four years, with a second term of equal length is developing local career politicians and I'm not looking for that.

People say, "but Will's good and he'll be good for Newport Beach."

I agree, but in order to properly vet the idea you have to remove Will from the thought process.

First off, what would happen if B passed, Will ran and, God forbid, didn't win. It could happen.

Remember just over a year ago when **Republican State Senator John Moorlach** was running against **Democrat Katrina Foley** for the **Orange County Board of Supervisors**? Then, two other Republicans, **Kevin Muldoon** and **Michael Vo**, jumped into the mix and spilt the vote allowing Foley a clear path to victory.

You know if you're a member of the Republican party that you're still kicking yourself for that one.

Let's replay that, B passes and Will runs; Muldoon at that point is still looking for a landing spot after losing his latest Supervisor run. Another popular name, you pick 'em, throws their hat into the ring for a run at mayor. And then a fourth person, maybe someone we've virtually run out of office before or someone like that enters the race.

Remember, no one needs 50%+1 of the vote, so this "unwanted" candidate can win with less than 30% because everyone else split votes and does.

Now what, we're stuck!

Or take another approach. B passes and Will runs and wins. What happens when Will is done?

What's next? Can someone come into town with a boatload of money and buy an election?

You bet!

Hypothetically, let's say some big landowner or developer with a project that would totally change the look and feel of Newport Beach buys an election. At that point, they then control the agenda development process.

Is that good for Newport? I say, not only "no, but heck no."

Here's the best idea. Vote No on B and for those that think a directly elected mayor makes sense, bring back the issue, but again, this time vet the process like it should have been done this time. You know, community presentations and community input. Do things like talk about term lengths; and do things like talk about a 50%+1 majority requirement to protect the city from the issue of some clown eventually, mistakenly, making his or her way into office.

And for people who argue that they "can't believe we don't elect our own mayor now," welcome to most towns and cities in America. The process of electing council people over seven districts and then allowing them to select a one-year mayor has worked quite effectively for years.

I mean think about it. We've even had people get voted onto a council seat, and then, because of their own questionable actions, never get to the ceremonial turn at the mayor's chair.

Remember **Dick Nichols** (2002-2006), who was accused of bringing shame to the community with inappropriate "racist" comments when he implied that there was a problem with people of Mexican descent using our beaches; or even more recently, **Scott Peotter** (2014-2018), who was chastised by people and groups for his questionable "bigoted" comments relating to his opposition of gay marriage, while at the same time attaching those comments while using the City seal.

Check the records, neither of them became mayor. Pretty effective system, wouldn't you say?

We are blessed to have a strong City Manager, **Grace Leung**, who currently manages our council agendas with input from staff and council people. It's part of what we pay her for.

And when the time comes for Grace to retire, guess what, we'll hire another outstanding city manager, with the final hiring decision made by, who else, the city council.

Yes, it sounds good on the surface to elect our own mayor. But you have to ask yourself why almost every former mayor agrees with our current system as it stands, and why, it's rumored that one of Newport Beach's biggest landowners and developers, and arguably the biggest, favors an elected mayor?

If it ain't broke, there's no fixing needed. Vote No on B. In fact, many people said when Will first presented the initiative that "it was a solution to a problem that doesn't exist."

After much consternation, I agree.

The initiative will be on the **June 7th** ballot. Ballots will begin being mailed to homes beginning **May**

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