

Gerald Giannini

The way Will O'Neill is trying to spin his elected mayor project in letters to Newport Beach HOAs is truly astounding. Imagine disparaging the form of government that has helped make our city one of the most desirable places to live just because we don't directly elect our mayor.

The truth is our current system works better than his proposal ever could. We elect all our council representatives, and they pick someone to serve in the ceremonial role of mayor for one year, then the position rotates. This way all Newport's villages have equal representation and get equal attention. There's no opportunity for a politician to spend eight years trying to make headlines as a prelude to running for higher office.

Just because our form of government isn't good for Will O'Neill doesn't mean it isn't good for Newport Beach.

Next, while Mr. O'Neill swears up and down that his initiative isn't a power grab, remember that it would transfer nearly total control of our city government to the elected mayor, and that he plans to run for that office when he's termed out in 2024. (Conveniently, he has written Measure B to include an exemption from the term limits voters overwhelmingly approved in 1992 to allow someone like himself to run for mayor after being on the council for eight years.)

Taking power away from all other elected city officials and the city manager, and giving it to one person, is the definition of a power grab.

Here are some questions Mr. O'Neill should answer if he wants voters to be fully informed:

Would he be working so hard to create this new office if he wasn't eligible to run for it?

Why does he go to such lengths to avoid talking about one of the biggest changes that would result from his initiative: the reduction in the number of council districts from seven to six, leaving each council member with thousands more constituents to represent while the district where the mayor lives would have double representation?

We know the four councilmen supporting this measure committed \$215,000 from our budget to put Measure B on the June ballot, but how much would the elected mayor office cost our city annually? And how much will it cost to redistrict the city, just a year after regular ten-year redistricting is completed? Would it be money well spent for residents or just for Will O'Neill?

–Why is Measure B attracting so much money from special interests and out-of-town donors?

–And finally, if Measure B is such a great idea, why didn't its proponents, Will O'Neill, Noah Blom, Kevin Muldoon and Duffy Duffield, organize forums and panels to explain the details to the public, and why are they turning down almost every invitation to debate those who oppose it?

Could it be they are hoping people will vote for Measure B because it sounds like a good idea, without reading the fine print?

Based on what's happened in the past with Measure Y and other calamities, it's absolutely possible that they underestimate Newport Beach voters' commitment to getting the facts and doing what's best for our city even when politicians try to trick us into doing the opposite.