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Opinion Editorial

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In 1997, the voters of Los Angeles overwhelmingly passed Proposition 8, creating an Elected Charter Reform Commission and charging it with the duty of crafting a new constitution for the City. So far, the Elected Commission has done an outstanding job drafting a charter that boldly embraces the principles of accountability in government and strengthens the voice of Angelenos. We wholeheartedly support the Elected Commission's decision to give Angelenos a meaningful voice in their government through a system of neighborhood councils.

The Elected Commission has also rightly recognized the difference a more accountable city government will make in improving city services and has tentatively decided to grant the Mayor sole discretion in removing department heads. This a key decision that establishes an important balance between the executive and legislative branches of government.

The Elected Commission's charter proposal replicates the governing principles championed by our country's founding fathers: separate branches of government with checks and balances. The Mayor and City Council, as heads of two distinct branches of government, are partners in governing. The Council's role in confirming all mayoral appointments, the budget and virtually every other major mayoral initiative is an important check and balance on the executive branch. The Mayor's sole discretion in firing **department heads** is an equally important separation of powers that brings accountability to Los Angeles government.

Some have asked why granting the Mayor the ability to fire **department heads** without interference from the Council is so important. The reason is simple. This system would make the city bureaucracy accountable and responsive to the public it serves. The authority of the Mayor to dismiss department heads who are meeting the public's needs is the linchpin of an accountable city government. Virtually every major city in the country, including Seattle, Denver, Houston, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York, gives its Mayor the sole authority to fire **department heads**. Los Angeles is one of the only major cities in the nation that does not.

The current city charter requires the Mayor to obtain Council approval to fire general managers. Council interference in the firing of department heads is bad government because it politicizes management and erases the lines of accountability. With the Mayor and 15 councilmembers for bosses, department heads are pulled in 16 different directions, and as a result, are forced to set department priorities based on who called last or yelled the loudest. Instead, department heads should set priorities based on constituents' needs and how their resources can be used most strategically and effectively.

Some detractors have attempted to frame this reform as a "corporate CEO approach" to government. Unfortunately, these individuals have either missed the point or are afraid to look at the merits. Separation of powers is good government that has been a tradition in this country since 1789 when President George Washington was granted the power to remove department heads without Senate

approval. This executive authority has been a tried and true practice in state and local governments throughout the nation and the world ever since.

The Elected Commission has recognized the impact an accountable government will make in improving city services. **Making department heads accountable to the Mayor** is the right decision, and just as neighborhood empowerment is a key element in true charter reform, this issue is crucial to improved city services. Meaningful charter reform should lead to changes that make a real difference for our citizens and our future. Now is the time to do away with the status quo. The Elected Commission is on the right path toward meeting these goals. We encourage all Angelenos to voice their support.

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