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Local perspectives

Miami Herald Staff Report

SUNRISE

Let the voters decide who should be next mayor

City commissioners, on the bad advice of the city attorney, agreed to cancel the mayor's race scheduled for March 10. Just like that, the commission denies voters the right to choose the city's next leader. Instead, the commission put its stamp of approval on what looks like a "You scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours" deal.

Commissioners should rescind the decision and ask for an advisory opinion by the state attorney general's office, which isn't compromised by city politics as the city attorney appears to be. Voters deserve an independent opinion.

The current mayor, Steven Feren, recently was elected a judge and will step down as mayor in early January. This will leave a vacancy that should be filled by voters at the polls.

Citing the Sunrise city charter, City Attorney Stuart Michelson said earlier this month that the mayor's race should be taken off the ballot. Why? Because the charter says that an election must come at least 120 days after the mayor leaves office. So, Mr. Michelson reasoned, the March race cannot be held.

Amazingly, commissioners went along with this narrow ruling and this week removed the mayor's race from the ballot. By default under this sequence of poor judgments, the person who will get to be mayor is none other than Deputy Mayor Roger Wishner.

Mr. Wishner provided a key vote earlier this year in giving Mr. Michelson the job as city attorney. There was no search, no bids, no competitors. The contract is worth up to \$432,000, not counting expenses, but including the salary of the assistant city attorney Mr. Michelson hired. Mr. Wishner gets to keep the post until the next scheduled mayoral election in November, 2010.

All this at best looks much too cozy; and at worst, blatantly political.

Commissioner Joey Scutto, who was in the race for mayor, cast the only opposing vote. When the commission scrapped the March 10 mayor's race, he said: "You guys are stealing the election." He is right.

The best solution is for the commission to reschedule the mayor's election to a later date, in May, for example. This would bring the election into compliance with the city charter.

Failing that, the city should seek an opinion from the state attorney general. Either way, residents' voices should not be summarily silenced.

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