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My Turn

From critic to convert

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Almost three years have passed since I began criticizing the governance and management of Taos County's Holy Cross Hospital (HCH). When this first got my attention, this organization seemed the embodiment of secrecy, indifference, and unaccountability. A series of inexplicable, misguided, and/or self-defeating management initiatives left me scratching my head in incredulity. Who the heck was in charge here?

To my utter dismay, those nominally in charge, the HCH governing body, seemed either unable or unwilling to exercise the clear-eyed, potentially boat-rocking oversight upon which we depend. To the contrary, an unelected and unaccountable board of trustees, one-quarter of which had been in place for upwards of 20 years each, exercised authority like anointed royalty having ascended to positions of power by Divine right.

My response to this was sustained criticism, not of the talented and dedicated members of the HCH professional staff, but of those in charge, the HCH board of trustees and its CEO. In a series of *Taos News* op-eds, on radio, and in repeated public comment, wherever and whenever an opportunity presented itself, I challenged, prodded, derided, ridiculed, mocked, and parodied the HCH board's exercise of its authority. These were, indeed, the bad old days.

That said, the recent change in HCH governance and management is truly breathtaking. Where there had been near total secrecy, there is now growing transparency. Where little desire existed to hear the concerns of the community, there is now dedication to listen and to understand, even when this feedback is painful. Where there had been indifference to connection with the people of Taos, there is now strong desire for partnering with the community.

HCH's still relatively new CEO, Bill Patten, embodies the changed leadership. Meeting with him one-on-one and watching him in action on multiple occasions, Patten has not been just talk. He has acted consistent with his words. His instincts sound, his judgment solid, his vision compelling, his style effective, his communication near pitch perfect, Patten has made converts of all sorts of the previously disaffected. I count myself among them. I believe he's "the real deal." The most negative thing I could say about Patten is that he is so very talented that sometime down the road, someone, somewhere will make him an offer that he can't refuse.

But lest this be confused with some sycophantic endorsement, I offer no comment on complex HCH business or operational decisions. My expertise is elsewhere. As a matter of professional background, I've consulted to organizations around issues of leadership and authority. It's familiar territory for me. This

experience leads me to believe that organization change is unlikely to be about one gifted individual. A different HCH board, led by a new chair, Chris Stagg, must be an important piece of the equation. Patten may be the public face of this new and enlightened leadership, but he can only be as good and as effective as the HCH board and our community help him to be. Kudos to the current board!

Having taken steps toward increased openness and accountability, HCH has come a long way toward restoring community trust and confidence. While additional measures along these lines are desired by those like me, an old saying seems apropos: "The quest for the perfect must not be allowed to become the enemy of the good."

The bottom line is now the bottom line. Money matters, and our hospital desperately needs and is worthy of our financial help. Our trust is being restored day by day. The time has come for Taos County to show its strong support for this "new day" in management and governance at Holy Cross Hospital.

We should demonstrate our endorsement by passing the property tax measure scheduled for a March 8 vote. The money generated will provide funding for capital equipment critically required to meet Taos County's health care needs. Converted former critic, I urge the voters of Taos County to join with me in casting their ballots in favor of this tax measure. The health of our community depends upon it.

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