

Rein in power of DeKalb CEO

By KEVIN LEVITAS

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The time has come for fundamental change in the structure of DeKalb County's government. And nothing makes the case for transformation stronger than the recent veto of reasonable restrictions on alcohol pouring hours by DeKalb CEO Vernon Jones.

It matters little how unfounded are claims by Jones in his recent AJC opinion column ("Families, economy would've taken fall," @issue, Nov. 16) regarding his veto, an action which ensured that liquor will continue flowing in bars and nightclubs until 4 a.m. in DeKalb (unlike the city of Atlanta where pouring stops at 2 a.m.).



(ENLARGE)

State Rep, Kevin Levitas is a DeKalb County Democrat.

In Jones' words, the veto was exercised in "support [of] public safety" and to preserve the "quality of life for working families." How can this claim be reconciled with approximately 500 citations and arrests initiated by DeKalb police this past weekend in just two days of targeting illegal activity around nightclubs and bars? The overriding fact remains that the CEO in DeKalb wields a mighty political sword that can intimidate commission members and, therefore, adversely affect our communities. The present structure of government, which concentrates executive power in the CEO, effectively protects a veto from being overridden.

Responding to the need to bring about deep-rooted change, I pre-filed House Bill 894, which would introduce vital governmental reforms and provide important checks and balances to a system heavily tilted, in its current form, in favor of one person.

My legislation would fundamentally change government to allow commissioners to set their own meeting agendas and to preside over their own meetings instead of the CEO doing this. It would also allow the commissioners, as the people's representatives, to exercise investigation and oversight authority over the operations of county government and to demand accountability.

As a member of the Georgia General Assembly, I cannot imagine being placed in the position of our county commissioners. If the governor had the same powers as DeKalb's CEO and could set the agenda for the Legislature, preside over both the House and the Senate sessions and be the sole arbiter of government operations, there would be little left for the people's representatives to do. Avoiding this concentration of power in the executive is fundamental to our system of government.

Until the General Assembly meets in January and we are able to bring about the needed changes in DeKalb, I have two suggestions for the CEO and the DeKalb Commission to improve the quality of life in

DeKalb. First, support police Chief Terrell Bolton's request for a substantial infusion of hundreds of officers to fight the increasing crime in our neighborhoods. Second, allow the voters in each county commission district to decide for themselves which pouring hours proposal best reflects their values and desires. Unchecked and heavy-handed executive power serves no one's best interest, except, perhaps, the person who possesses it and those who can profit from it.

We need to bring about a balanced, fair and responsible government that works effectively for all citizens of DeKalb and which ensures that we are truly represented by a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

— State Rep, **Kevin Levitas** is a DeKalb County Democrat.