

Ambushed

Four local men — Vince Taylor, Richard Miller, Tom Birdsell and Mike Dell'Ara — recently formed the Hospital Resource Council as concerned citizens offering “constructive” help to resolve problems facing Mendocino Coast District Hospital. Successful professionals, they employed, at their own expense, a Utah-based consulting firm to make an independent assessment and recommendations for a California hospital district.

The report released, following a two-day visit, acknowledges its limitations and is diluted with prudent disclaimers throughout all 12 pages. The conclusions drawn and recommendations made by the Hospital Resource Council offer little that is new or not already undertaken by the hospital administration and its trustees, beginning months ago.

In November these community-spirited men implored the board not to make any decisions to cut programs or obligate the hospital financially until their independent study was complete. Yet two months later, last Thursday night, they chastised the board for not being decisive enough to take quicker actions.

The entire board and many managers, including CEO Bryan Ballard and Chief Financial Officer Jacob Lewis, restrained themselves while under the assault and sat silent while the group made its hour-long presentation.

HRC closed with an unanticipated request that two unnamed board members step down and they would name the replacements. How this squares with the public's right to elect its representatives on the board was not addressed. The board was ambushed with what appears to be an immeasurable amount of arrogance or a politically-motivated agenda.

It's presumptuous and preposterous that Taylor, Miller, Birdsell and Dell'Ara so easily surmise that their experiences running corporations qualify them to swim in the challenging waters of the highly convoluted and constrictive requirements of public hospital administration in California.

Perhaps if they'd attended all the meetings of the past year, including staying for the one they left following their presentation last Thursday, they would by now recognize, as we do, that the solutions are not as elementary as supposed.

For the third month in a row, the financial picture clearly indicates the hospital's train is moving in the right direction. Many at-risk hospitals in California never got this far.

The hospital district's board of directors serves with no pay at the will of the voters who elected them. When the next election comes around, any of these men, or others from the community who feel they can do a better job, can and should exercise their right to run for office.

Until then, what the hospital board, administration and staff need is constructive support and credit for the efforts and successes being made to cut costs, save jobs, improve billing, restructure programs and possibly change the governance itself in order to keep Coast Hospital's doors open.