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Submitted into the Record by Charter Renewal Board Members, Gerald White (May 24, 2010)

THE MEMPHRO REPORT

Panel wants to kill auditor post

The Charter Review Board seeks the action after Barnes' performance is questioned.

BY BILL VARIAN
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Hillsborough County internal performance auditor Jim Barnes has something else to worry about after Monday night.

Already under scrutiny for the quality of work and under fire from some county commissioners, Barnes' office got the equivalent of a no-confidence vote from the Charter Review Board.

The appointed board, convened every five years to weigh

potential changes to the county's charter, voted 6-5 to consider asking voters to do away with his job altogether. However, some on the majority of the board indicated their vote could change if commissioners take steps to fix the office.

Otherwise, "it will just continue to be a waste of county tax dollars," said board member Gerald White.

The vote may prove mostly symbolic for a variety of reasons. That's because, in order to

place a question on the November ballot, a supermajority of 10 members on the board of 14 must vote to approve it after two public hearings. And those on the losing side indicated they were more inclined to suggest changes to the charter aimed at improving how the office works.

"My concern is throwing out the entire structure without looking at the big picture," said Mitch Thrower, the board's chairman.

It was a prior Charter Review Board that voted in 2000 to put creation of the office before voters. Creating the office to fer-

ret out inefficiency in county government was a pet issue of the late activist Ralph Hughes. Voters approved it in 2002.

Detractors argued it would become the County Commissioner's witch hunt agency, and that has largely proved true. Since its creation, commissioners have routinely sliced the two people who have held the office on programs they don't like and declined to give the auditor a clear job description.

Barnes and his predecessor have been accused of doing sloppy work and not giving their subjects ample opportunity to respond. A recent peer

review found Barnes' work has not met accepted standards, which means he has not completed anything that would be considered an official audit, despite a budget of nearly \$400,000.

The auditor recently uncovered secret pay raises County Administrator Pat Bean gave to herself and County Attorney Renee Lee and accused both of snooping through his e-mail. Commission Chairman Ken Hagan has sought the resignations of all three. Bean and Lee are on paid leave while Barnes is scheduled for a repeatedly delayed evaluation Wednesday.