

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

Board of Supes

Your editorial (Jan. 15) states that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has the right to make rules of how and when people may communicate during public meetings. This is correct, to a point, but they must also craft these rules in accordance with the Brown Act (our state's open meeting law) while not limiting the people's First Amendment rights.

The rule changes presented by the board at last Tuesday's meeting in all probability violated not only the letter but the spirit of the law as well. Supervisor Yaroslavsky argued that the law allows them to manage their time. Having observed the board since 1999, I think Yaroslavsky's argument is a ruse, because I can't recall one meeting that has started on time. Add to that the one or more hours spent on commendations, closing in memory and other puffery that goes on before the

YOUR VIEW

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board actually sits down to conduct the public's business, and ending the public portion of the meeting somewhere between 1 or 2 p.m., then no wonder the board appears to have no time to let the public speak. Of course the board is also in a position to correct these time-management issues — they simply choose not to.

You also say that the board motion would limit the public to five minutes in total to address the board at various points during the meeting. Though technically accurate, this fails to explain that this change significantly reduces

the time the public has to speak during Public Comment. This time is an opportunity for a person to bring concerns directly to their board member without having to jump through the many hoops that is required to get an appointment with their elected official (and I don't mean a meeting with their staff). Under Yaroslavsky's motion this time would be reduced from three minutes down to two minutes.

Several years ago Supervisor Molina attempted to pass an almost identical motion, but thanks to the efforts of the L.A. Press Club Sunshine Commission (of which I was a member), the First Amendment Coalition and several other free speech advocacy groups and individuals, we were able to persuade the board to kill the motion. At that time Yaroslavsky admitted that the motion was a slippery slope, but I guess it wasn't so slippery a slope since he's chosen to resurrect it.

Genevieve M. Clavreul
Pasadena