

# Valley VOTE

## Meeting Report for November 19, 2007

by

**David DeVoss**



**Assemblyman Cameron Smyth**

### **Straight Talk From Santa Clarita**

It's easy to become cynical when you live amid the miasma of Los Angeles politics. Perhaps that's why it's so refreshing to meet first-term Assemblyman Cameron Smyth, a straight talker from Santa Clarita who represents the LA communities of Porter Ranch, Granada Hills and Tujunga in Sacramento.

Of course, California's capital is not known for bipartisan cooperation. But when you hear this former Santa Clarita mayor describe his efforts to turn the old Rocketdyne site in Santa Susana into a state park or break up the Los Angeles Unified School District you come away thinking that, yes, California may, indeed, have a bright future.

"Legislators who care about education must keep the LAUSD debate in the forefront," says Smyth. "Sixty percent of LAUSD's teachers send their kids to private schools. It's interesting to note that the LAUSD couldn't have a staff meeting at (56,000-seat) Dodger Stadium because it's too small."

According to Smyth, health care and water are the two biggest issues facing California. But that doesn't mean the Assembly will deal with each logically. "This week we'll vote along party lines to approve universal health coverage, but that's only because there will be no funding attached to the bill," he concedes. Funding for health care will depend on a 2008 state ballot measure that will call for a new tax on cigarettes. "The problem is that once the state taxes something it becomes dependent on the revenue. Is it really in California's interest to promote smoking so it can collect taxes to pay for health care", Smyth asks?

Smyth clearly believes in government's power to do good. But the UC Davis graduate is honest enough to admit that bureaucrats often get in the way. Witness what's happening in Glendale (which also is part of Smyth's district) to a family that recently was told to trim 13 trees on its property by the fire department. The family trimmed the trees, but neglected to get a permit. So the

city fined them nearly \$400,000 for obeying a fire department directive and trimming trees on their own property. Says Smyth: "I come from local government and realize the need to have permits, but there is a degree of absurdity to this."

Smyth is of two minds when it comes to state term limits that will be on the ballot next year. He accepts the fact that longevity in office can lead to arrogant behavior ("When the Speaker of Assembly spends \$50,000 traveling around the world you know he's not flying Southwest.") At the same time, however, he concedes legislators need extra time to master the system, if only because of the volume and complexity of the information they are expected to process.

"What's happened is that the institutional memory is no longer with the elected officials," he says, "but with the (legislative) staff and lobbyists. Unfortunately, neither of these groups is accountable to you."

### ***Why Expand LAX When Palmdale Has Acres of Unused Space?***

That's the question Valley VOTE Executive Committee member Denny Schneider posed in a special report. Says Schneider: Safety is a valid concern both in the air and on the ground. The FAA has lost several highly experienced controllers forcing those remaining to work six-day weeks. Technology improvements will help-some day-but they are not in place. Crossing adjacent active runways is at the heart of most ground safety problems. South complex bound flights diverted north due to runway construction adds complexity. These aircraft movements increase taxiway gridlock.

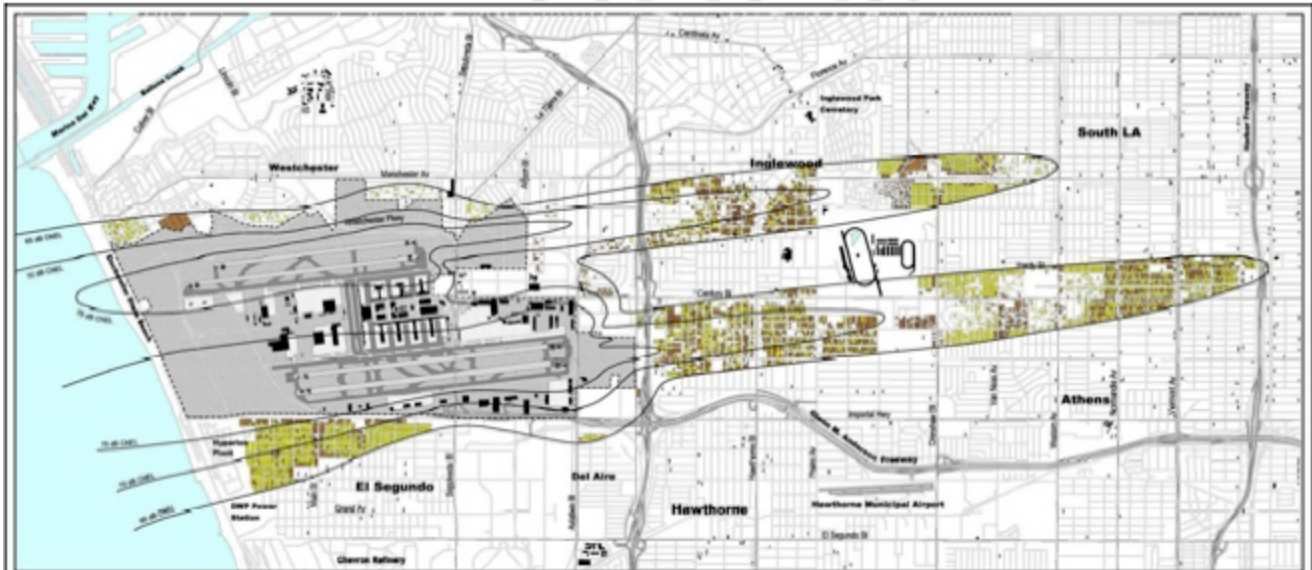
LAWA admits the 1991 disaster was "not attributed to layout" [runway separation], but uses the disaster to justify their wider runway separation plan. It increases capacity by moving a runway north into Westchester/Playa del Rey. The "collateral damage" is removal of half of the Westchester business district and more homes.

The north runway complex was safer than equivalent airports until this year. LAWA has tried to blame the newer, larger aircraft for all ills; yet most incursions involve narrow body aircraft. Review of each incursion shows pilot and/or controller error. The controllers tell us that wider runway separation might avert an occasional incident, but not the overwhelming majority-yet it will cost of billions of dollars to build their new runway.

ARSAC and others, including the controllers union, have identified several unfulfilled, urgent, low cost fixes. Improved runway striping, better signage and Runway Status Lights are off-the-shelf solutions. Increasing experienced control tower staffing is another cost effective approach.

Don't wait for disaster! Please, FAA and LAWA, implement these cost effective, sensible fixes now. If you want more air capacity address the congestion issue with airport regionalization; the sky above us is full.

# LAX Noise Contour



*Like Fins on a '59 Cadillac, LAX Noise Corridors Extend as far as Monterey Park*

## ***Service Break on Property Rights***

According to a Wall Street Journal editorial and Valley VOTE treasurer **Vic Viereck**, individual property rights are the basis for the great economic success of the United States of America. The consequence of when groups try to deprive individuals of their property rights is lack of availability of resources provided by industrious people. Due to the City of Los Angeles' rental housing policies, the city's scarcity of housing has been severely aggravated.

Locally, the opposition to condo conversions effectively demonstrates that problem. Another local example of promoting group over individual rights is a campaign against the Weddington Golf and Tennis property in Studio City. Since 1955 the Weddington family has provided the Studio City community the opportunity to play golf and tennis there. With the May 31, 2007 expiration of the lease on the property the owners have plans to update the existing driving range, rebuild the 17 tennis courts, install a new golf putting green, and provide a new club house on 70% of the land. On only the remaining 30% of the property a 272-unit first class senior citizen condo development is planned. But the Studio City Resident's Association seems to forget that it is not their land, but privately owned land. They want to deprive the property owners of the American right to improve their own property for the golfers and tennis players, provide comfortable living accommodations for local seniors, and significantly improve the tax base and revenue.

Says Viereck: When initiatives are on the ballot, such as those that profess to prevent eminent domain abuses, it's necessary to determine which one protects the rights of all property owners

## ***Walk on the Wild Side***

Los Angeles has come up with a solution to the sidewalk repair crisis, by once again burdening the seller with a "point of sale" remedy, Valley VOTE Land Use committee chair Pauline Tallent reports. . There are approximately 10,750 miles of sidewalks in the City of Los Angeles, with as many as 4,600 miles needing repairs. The City's 50/50 program has had some success since its institution

two years ago. "Point of sale" is an attractive solution for the City, in that it does not have to be passed by the voters in order to be implemented. Another observation was that if "point of sale" was implemented, the City could regulate the repair process, hire more contractors, and at the same time free up funds for other ventures, in other words, not budget for sidewalk repairs at all.

In 1911 the State of California through an Improvement Act provided cities the authority to require property owners to make repairs to sidewalks abutting their properties. This policy was in effect until 1973, at which time Federal funds became available to make sidewalk repairs at no cost to the property owner. In 1976, in order to make use of these funds, the City rescinded its authorization for property owners to do the repairs.

Says Tallent: "As the City's 50/50 program has had some success, let's base the solution on that concept. The concept should be restructured and enhanced. Property owners should have a choice, to partner with the City and pay for half the repairs, with the City doing the repairs. Or undertake the whole repairs, using private contractors that have been certified by the City, so that the repairs conform to City specifications. In both cases, the property owner should be indemnified from law suits. Some streets are State owned. The State should be similarly involved. Also an adequate budget should be in place at all times. This takes the burden off the seller, as in today's market there is often little or no equity. Neighbors could benefit by going together on the repairs, and thus avoiding the "patchwork" results of individual repairs. Property owners would be aware, that having needed repairs done, before listing the property, would enhance the value of the property."

### ***Affordable Housing: Is the Price Too High?***

SB 1818 is a state law that allows developers to build higher buildings with less setbacks and reduced parking if they insert a few affordable housing units in their project. If you don't like Sacramento telling you what to do it's simply too bad, warns Valley VOTE Neighborhood Councils committee chairman **Polly Ward**. SB 1818 requires all California cities to change city zoning laws to come into compliance with the developer-friendly provision.

An LA Planning and Housing committee hearing on Nov 6 resulted in amendments being proposed to city laws to the distress of many attendees who appeared in such numbers that the meeting had to be moved to Council Chambers. The strongest objections were offered to the reduced parking for affordable units tradeoff, says Ward. The issue's resolution is postponed for a month so that amendments offered at the meeting can be studied.

### ***Campaign Financing: Still a Chimera***

Last spring, the Los Angeles City Council Rules and Elections Committee voted to send a proposal for full public funding of City campaigns to the Neighborhood Councils for their recommendations and comments. Since then volunteers and staff from civic organizations have spoken to Neighborhood Councils in the City to explain full public funding of campaigns and encourage the councils to be prepared to evaluate this proposal or send the proposal to a committee.

According to **Robin Gilbert**, SFV coordinator for the California Clean Money Campaign, the letter notifying the Neighborhood Councils of the Education and Feedback Project was emailed to the Councils the last week of October. This message invited the councils to provide feedback and recommendations regarding possible changes to the way Los Angeles funds campaigns for City offices. The City Council believes that this project is a unique opportunity for the Neighborhood

Councils to participate in a structured dialogue with the City Council and the public regarding an important policy issue with City-wide ramifications.

Special materials, including a study booklet, have been prepared for the Education and Feedback Project, to help educate Neighborhood Councils and interested stakeholders about the options that the City might consider. Each Neighborhood Council should evaluate the features and programs described in the booklet, says Gilbert. The materials are designed to be used in an hour-long workshop, with any number of people, lead by trained volunteers from civic organizations. The Neighborhood Councils should consider whether they want to constitute an ad hoc committee of interested board members and stakeholders, assign the topic to an existing committee for discussion, or call a special meeting, to conduct the workshop.

The Neighborhood Councils will provide the feedback from the workshops to DONE.

For more information: <http://rules.lacity.org>

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### **Valley VOTE Mission Statement**

Valley VOTE, a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists and organizations is committed to exploring and implementing programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, including opportunities to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters.

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