



Valley VOTE Meeting Report

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By

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Daily News Editor Ron Kaye

View From The Valley The System Works! (But Not For You)

LA has the best government money can buy. OK, it's an old joke. But laconic *Los Angeles Daily News* editor Ron Kaye almost turns this unfortunate truth into a tale in which redemption is possible if honest people will stand up and get organized.

As the leader of the city's perennial No. 2 daily, Kaye's Tantalus-like pursuit of the *Los Angeles Times* affords him the freedom to speak truth to power. And speak he did earlier this week on the tenth anniversary of the founding of Valley VOTE.

There is a "system" to city government, Kaye concedes, but citizens must be organized, well financed and persistent to make it work for them. "The system doesn't work for the people," Kaye sighs. "The Police Protective League (see next item) matters more than any of you because it has money."

Adds Kaye: "Everywhere you look in the city people are powerless. The surprising thing is that most of them don't care."

According to Kaye, the path money takes in LA is as predictable as the transoceanic currents. Middle class residents in the Valley pay taxes to City Hall, which uses the money to lavishly feather its nest and give subsidies to wealthy developers, who, in turn, return a portion of the funds to politicians in the form of political contributions. "They have free cars and office holder accounts that can be spent on anything. Even the staff people have cars and Blackberries. You're paying for all this stuff."

City council members insist Measure S, the 9% communications tax proposal on the Feb. 5 ballot, is needed to fund essential services, but Kaye says the city treasury has plenty of money. "Every year, LA's general fund

revenues grow at an average rate of 5.7%. The problem is that since 2000 Los Angeles' employee costs have risen 7.5% a year, a 53% increase."

Why is it, Kaye wonders, that City Hall has no money to repair sidewalks, yet has the funds to give a 23% pay hike to unionized municipal workers who already are the highest paid in the nation?

One shudders to imagine the depths to which local politicians could sink without *Daily News* oversight. But the newspaper's continued operation is not guaranteed. Over the past decade the *Daily News* staff has declines from 260 to 110. "We are a great community resource but our vitality and life are at stake" Kaye says. "We need your support."

(Valley VOTE suggests with great conviction that all of its members subscribe to the *Los Angeles Daily News*.)

LA's Finest Are Asked, So, What's in Your Wallet?

U.S. diplomats have to do it. So do ranking officials at the Pentagon and in the Department of Justice. Defense contractors with security clearances have filled one out, as has every presidential candidate. What do all these people have in common? Each has completed a financial disclosure form detailing their assets.

Now the monitor administering the federal consent decree under which the LAPD is forced to operate wants police officers fighting cash-rich gangs and narcotics dealers to report, under oath, details relating to personal income and investment, not only of themselves but also for immediate family members.

Nobody is saying the LAPD is corrupt. Indeed, Los Angeles police are highly regarded for their integrity and professionalism. That's why special guest speaker

Tim Sands, President of the Los Angeles Police Protective League,

opposes the proposal. "We're not attempting to protect or hide any corrupt cops," he told Valley VOTE. "This union does not represent those types of individuals."

Sands believes the financial disclosure proposal is demeaning, intrusive and a gross violation of privacy. "Neither will it help fight corruption," he says. "Sting operations, polygraph tests and subpoenas help fight corruption," he insists. "Financial disclosure is not the way to go."

Concerned citizens can debate the merit of the proposal - and it seemed evident from comments at the meeting that most members feel full financial disclosure is unwarranted - but the most troubling aspect of financial disclosure is that information could leak into the public domain jeopardizing the safety of police officers.

Skyscrapers on the Horizon for Universal City

The much discussed Universal Project is actually two projects: an MTA development on the East side of Lankershim Blvd. by Thomas Properties Group and another on Universal Studios land by NBC/Universal. The surrounding communities are united against both proposals, reports Valley VOTE Executive Committee member Polly Ward. "They believe the size of each is simply too massive and will have negative effects on Studio City and the entire San Fernando Valley," Ward says. "They say that the only way to mitigate the projects is to reduce the size of the projects - perhaps a six-story limit for all new buildings."

The projects expect to have finished environmental impact reports by March.

Where's The Audit?

The Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance beats up apartment owners at every turn, says Valley VOTE treasurer Vic Viereck, himself an apartment owner. Besides the severe restrictions, owners who fail to pay the annual Rent Registration Fees and Systematic Code Enforcement Fees by the last day in February are subject to a late penalty of 58.6%. Furthermore, if owners of rent stabilized property fail to have a current Rent Registration Statement, it is illegal for them to collect even one dime of rent starting in the month of June.

Often the Los Angeles Housing Department fails to provide Rent Registration Statements by May 1 as it is required to do, but it is not penalized like owners. Last November, Viereck reports that absentee LAHD employees

left voice messages on their phones referring callers to names and phone numbers of other absent employees who also left voice messages. Naturally, the third referred person also was absent from his office. After years of such performance, the LAHD General Manager still has her job.

Apartment owners have to report their annual gross rents to the Los Angeles Office of Finance, even if the total is less than the amount exempt from tax. Unfortunately, the Office of Finance has no way to keep track of information it needs. As a result, it has retained a private company named Muniservices to keep track of subject gross receipts.

“Inept public service from two city departments makes me wonder where's the audit, asks Viereck.

Should LA Sell Shares in Its Golden Goose?

The Finance Committee chairman Richard Bort says he is beginning a project to examine financial statements of the L.A. Department of Water and Power to determine the answers to several questions:

1. How do the profit margins and dividend rates of LADWP compare to those of other large municipal and investor-owned utilities in California? What are the implications of these findings?
2. If the City of L.A. were to consider selling the LADWP to investors, what would the estimated value be? What would be the potential impact on the city and its taxpayers and ratepayers if such a sale were to occur?

“This financial exploration is necessarily limited to a macro-level view, and we recognize that there are a myriad of details lurking below the surface,” says Bort. “But we want to look at the “big picture” to try to draw some conclusions as to strategic directions that the city might take with respect to this behemoth utility.”

LAX Redux

The Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners (BOAC) has authorized Tom Bradley International Terminal to add two A380 size gates and an improved baggage system. The entire airport is being surveyed to determine which portions of the decrepit 1960s infrastructure can be salvaged. In addition to this news, Valley VOTE's Denny Schneider offers the following:

“The first step in the Master Plan process, the Notice of Preparation (NOP), should be completed in the next two months. The BOAC approved an environmental review contractor at their meeting last week so that the process could proceed. The NOP contains preliminary options to be refined over the following three months of public Scoping Meetings. A packed gallery called for evaluation of the safety issues to ensure that the appropriate options would be evaluated. BOAC rejected this notion as they want to move forward ASAP as the draft preparation and then reviews will take until the end of 2010 for a final draft approval.

NASA was to simulate conditions on the North runways and draw safety actions necessary to resolve the question of additional runway spacing, but the study is delayed or canceled. A recent NASA/FAA gaff on another FAA contract to evaluate national flight safety has resulted in NASA rejecting the LAWA contract to do a full analysis.

Until last year never more than one or two minor incursions occurred on the North; 80% of the incursions were on the South complex. In 2007 there was a dramatic increase while closures of the South complex runways added northern traffic and complexity to the operations.

Each north complex incursion reported listed pilot and/or controller error; none blamed runway geometry. Expansion proponents continue emphasizing the need for wider runway spacing despite that Air Traffic Controllers estimate that runway geometry account for as few as 5% of the incursions over the next several years. Proponents say wider aircraft need wider spacing. LAWA, expansion proponents, and the FAA blame the newer larger aircraft (NLA), such as the A380 for the present safety lapses, but the incursions to date have each been when no NLA are present.

Using safety improvement as justification, LAWA created a Master Plan option that would provide greater spacing between northern runways with a new centerline taxiway. The northern most runway, 24R, would be moved at least 340' toward Westchester. This potentially results in massive demolition of the business district and more residence removals because the FAA increased its runway protection zone requirements last year. LAX can already accommodate an Airbus A380 without changes, but it requires space allocations and ground traffic

controls. “

For more details about these issues Schneider urges you to see www.RegionalSolution.org. For status of the current projects at LAX go to <http://www.lawa.org/lax/laxexpect.cfm>

For Valley Neighborhood Councils All Politics Is Local

Three events in the past several months affect the Neighborhood Council system in the San Fernando Valley and the entire Los Angeles metropolitan area. George Truesdell of the Northridge West Neighborhood Council explains:

The first event was the acceptance by the City Clerk to handle all election related activities for all Neighborhood Councils. This action by that entity seemed to fly in the face of other city “pols” who felt they were in no position to accommodate this work. In order for this to work though, all affected councils will have to amend their respective bylaws to allow for bi-annual elections and four-year terms of office. This action appears to give greater credence to the Neighborhood Council System, right when many folks were saying we were not a viable form of governance.

The second event was a meeting of the Education and Neighborhoods Committee chaired by Richard Alarcon held on January 8, 2008. Of the four items on the agenda, three directly affected the Neighborhood Council System, and arose out of the 73 recommendations suggested by the Neighborhood Council Review Commission (NCRC). The main item for consideration was whether Neighborhood Councils would be allowed to file “Council Files.” This measure was unanimously approved by the (3) committee members with terms better than recommended. The measure, as approved, allows for three filings/year/NC, with only one additional NC required to second the filing. The system will operate under a sunset clause of two years, to test the viability of the process. This action seems to say that certain downtown members believe that we are more than dysfunctional troublemakers.

The third event concerns a small article in the Los Angeles Times of January 16, 2008. The article relates the outcome of the January 8 meeting whereby NC's were given more access to the City Council through the use of “filings,” but also appears to place unreasonable burdens on those NC members who deign to use this newfound power. The restrictions intended to deter these filings include the completion of conflict-of-interest forms describing income, real estate holdings, and stock market investments from every member of an NC making a filing. The fact that we have created this discomfort in those folks is heartening given the state of affairs in our current city government,” says Truesdell. “ But, we cannot live with these restrictions because, it is my opinion that no one will complete the forms, thereby negating this new “power.” We can and should continue to be aggressive though in withholding our support for all activities presented by those persons who proposed these harsh restrictions.

Aside from these items, other activities of note by our NC's include:

West Hills has aligned themselves with four other councils to their south, to form a larger and stronger entity. They created a newsletter and combined resources for other activities. In 2007 they hosted a Senior Citizens & Care Givers conference in conjunction with the City of Los Angeles Department of Aging.

Northridge West and East joined together to promote a “Senior Fair” like the one conducted by West Hills in 2007. They also created a joint committee with the support of Greig Smith's office to clean up Reseda Boulevard after the business community dropped their support for the project after one year.

Northridge West has also arranged for CERT classes to be taught by LAFD personnel during the first 3 Saturdays in March, at Beckford Elementary School, and has paid for and arranged for all participants to receive the official workbook. Other information regarding this event can be found in our website at www.northridgewest.org.

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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