

A Moment of the Clarity is Needed Before Schwarzenegger Takes Office

On October 7th California voters once again entered the history books by recalling Governor Davis. Perhaps many of us were intoxicated by the thought of removing the Governor who locked us into bloated long term-contracts to solve the energy crisis, continuously stole money from local government even when the State had a surplus of dollars, and advocated for a new prison increasing the capacity to house people on death row, all while the State's economic rating plunged on Wall Street.

Many things look good while we are intoxicated but after the hangover wears off the next day, we start to wonder if the "spirits" from the previous evening led us to make a bad decision. I suggest we use the current moment of clarity to reflect on the messages Governor-Elect Schwarzenegger is proposing. In addition, Alameda County residents need to tell our representatives in Sacramento what we want here at home.

Mr. Schwarzenegger promised that there would be no tax hikes under his administration. If he keeps this promise, Californians may suffer for years to come. To "balance" the budget last fiscal year the State rolled over \$8 billion in debt into the next fiscal year; thus we start the next fiscal year with a deficit of *at least* \$8 billion. The most recent set of budget cuts are forcing local government to consider closing offices on certain days to reduce their operational budgets, laying off employees, or cutting programs that are not mandated – which will disproportionately hit prevention programs. If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, then we have a ton of trouble ahead of us. If the new Governor is set on submitting a balanced budget by not raising taxes, he will be forced to slash government services beyond belief. **I don't see how we can keep a satisfactory level of service, balance the budget and not raise taxes.**

I have devoted plenty of ink in this column to the necessity of preserving the Vehicle License Fee (VLF) increase and how those advocating for a reduction of the VLF have misrepresented the issue. The "increase" in the VLF returns the fee to its 1997 level. The Vehicle License Fee is one of the only sources of discretionary (flexible) revenue for Alameda County. Alameda County's VLF allocation for this fiscal year was \$100 million. The VLF cut proposed by the Governor-Elect would mean that our County's allocation would dwindle to less than \$34 million. I can understand the aversion people have to paying fees and taxes however, listed below are some of the programs and initiatives that are partially or completely funded by the Vehicle License Fee:

The Alameda County Medical Center; County contracts with community-based organizations to assist the homeless, elderly and youth; HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment services; mental health services; Camp Wilmont Sweeney (an unlocked facility for non-violent youth offenders); the

County's Work Furlough Program, the Sheriff's Crime Lab; Juvenile Hall; the Registrar of Voters; the County Assessor, and the list goes on and on.

Needless to say, significant cuts to some or all of those programs will terminate the effective delivery of services by local government to our residents. Don't be fooled the VLF is not an excessive fee; it is the cornerstone to funding essential government services.

The Governor-Elect's recent visit to Sacramento has created quite a buzz, many who are expected to be serious opponents to the new Governor's programs met with him and apparently listened attentively to Mr. Schwarzenegger's proposals. The notable exception was State's Treasurer, Phil Angelides. The State Treasurer is the banker for state as well as the investment officer for most state funds. Apparently Mr. Angelides told the Governor-Elect that he couldn't see how our new Governor could implement his new programs and initiatives while not raising taxes with the current drain on our revenues.

Finally, the word is out that the Governor sees our youth as our greatest asset, and will work to keep their programs off of the chopping block. I am hopeful that the Governor-Elect will defend the needs of foster care youth and students from working families that need PELL grants to attend college as much as he will defend after-school sports programs in suburban school districts. All of our children need government to continue to provide the bridge to success.

During my time on the Board of Supervisors, I have come to find that those in office and in our communities need to be pro-active in difficult times, we can't take a "wait and see" attitude. Residents and representatives must let Mr. Schwarzenegger know we will not stand for cutting services to the elderly, the poor or the disenfranchised so he can keep the car tax low and fulfill his other hollow campaign promises. Being an elected official means making tough choices and defending those who are not always in a position to defend themselves. The sobering reality is the people of California require more services than our current revenues will pay for. Mr. Schwarzenegger and the rest of us who are elected to office are charged with making it all work.