

## Political Forum



### Keeping Tax Dollars At Home Helps to Preserve Our Future

By Alex Padilla, Los Angeles City Council President, Councilmember, District 7

For the past ten years, Los Angeles City and County have been under assault. We haven't been under assault by rouge nations or outside invaders – but by our very own elected leaders in Sacramento.

During that ten-year timeframe, local cities and municipalities statewide have lost more than \$40 billion in tax money – your tax money – that came into local coffers from property tax and other sources of revenue.

This past January, the Governor announced that in order to help balance the State budget, the State would be seizing \$1.3 billion each year from local governments across California – translating to a \$49 million annual hit to the City of Los Angeles alone. This is \$49 million that will not be going to pay for police and fire protection, \$49 million that will not be funding much-needed parks and libraries, and \$49 million that won't be going into local road repairs.

We understand the State faces a monumental challenge in balancing its budget, and it's certainly not a crisis that we would wish upon anyone. But Sacramento should not be balancing its budget on the backs of cities and counties.

In Los Angeles City and County, with annual budgets of \$5.4 billion and \$17.1 billion respectively, we have found ways to exercise leadership and mustered up the wherewithal to make the tough decisions so that we don't run up colossal deficits. Being penalized by Sacramento for our financial responsibility isn't just nonsensical – it's just wrong. This reverse Robin Hood scenario is one that has drawn the ire of leaders throughout California, who have never understood why our State government would want to inflict this fiscal pain on the very communities they serve.

But today in Sacramento, the winds of change are blowing in just as quickly as the Tule Fog. Under a proposal negotiated between the Office of the Governor and the League of California Cities – an association of local governments up and down the State – we are prepared to make temporary sacrifices. The sacrifices are small considering what we would receive in return: a guarantee from the Governor that he would support a constitutional amendment that would prohibit the State from seizing local tax dollars originally intended for local programs and services.

This new proposal would allow for cities and counties to help bail out Sacramento for the next two years for a total of \$2.6 billion. In exchange for the \$2.6 billion in payments, we would have an ironclad guarantee of the

#### Council District 7 includes these communities:

- Sylmar
- Lake View Terrace
- Pacoima
- North Hills
- Mission Hills
- Panorama City

Governor's support for a constitutional amendment that would prohibit unilateral raids of local coffers by State entities. What's more, the State would repay local cities \$520 million in fiscal year 2006-07 as a demonstration of good faith as a partial repayment of previous tax seizures. That would result in up to \$69 million for the City of Los Angeles alone.

That's why we're urging the State Legislature to draft a constitutional amendment that would take the form of a ballot measure in November. Since it is a constitutional amendment, the change would require a two-thirds vote of the Legislature, as well as a majority vote of the public.

Unlike many items on the ballot these days, this particular measure would not raise your taxes – in fact, it would give cities and counties the access to the tax revenue already earmarked for them. Without the threat of the State taking that money away, cities and counties have less of a need for additional revenue.

Moreover, passage of this constitutional amendment wouldn't give one more dime to government – it would merely ensure that the State couldn't dip into our wallets and pocket-books. School and highway funding would not be affected, either.

Luckily, the Governor has been very receptive to the leadership of cities throughout California, and has shown a willingness to compromise and take the plight of local government into account when making the tough decisions that are necessary to help move the State forward.

Sacramento is finally showing it's ready to act responsibly. Let's capitalize on this opportunity and preserve California's future for the years to come. ■

*Alex Padilla is the president of the Los Angeles City Council, is the second vice president of the California League of Cities, and is chair of the League's Latino Caucus.*

## Councilman Smith, Mayor Hahn 'Pool' Their Resources to Cool Off Northridge



An artist's rendering of the new Northridge aquatic center.

### Pair acts to rebuild quake-damaged swimming pool. Opening date for new facility not announced.

Councilmember Greig Smith and Mayor James K. Hahn formally announced June 7 that the Northridge Pool will not only once again hold water, but is well on its way to becoming the premiere aquatic facility for the Northwest San Fernando Valley.

Councilman Smith has been on a determined quest to secure funding to rebuild the Northridge Pool, which has not been open for a full summer since 1999. The pool sustained what was thought to be minor damage after the 1994 Northridge earthquake. After many attempts at repairing cracks, it was found that the entire pool was structurally unsound, its foundation having washed away, leaving the pool virtually "floating."

"Giving this pool back to the community was more than a campaign promise, it was personal," said Councilman Smith. "I wanted the children and families of this community to enjoy the same experience my own children had growing up in the Valley. A neighborhood pool is more than just a place to swim – it's about bringing families together, building friendships and creating lifelong memories."

The new Northridge Aquatic Center will feature a large pool for laps and swimming lessons, as well as a zero depth pool, which is handicapped-accessible and equipped for

activities for younger children. In addition, there will be a new lifeguard office, first aid station, new restrooms, showers, private changing rooms for family use and an equipment room.

"After sustaining severe damage more than ten years ago during the Northridge Earthquake, the Northridge community is finally on the road to rebuilding and reopening their community pool," said Mayor Jim Hahn. "While the majority of the City's 59 swimming pools are able to provide our neighborhoods, especially kids and seniors with a place to cool off, get some exercise, and enjoy the beautiful weather, we are working diligently to secure funding to ensure that we re-open closed pools and fix ailing pools throughout the City for everyone to enjoy."

The \$4.8 million price tag for the Aquatic Center has been gathered together from seven funding sources, including Prop 40, Prop K, Seismic Bonds, Sites and Facilities money as well as a General Fund contribution. The Northridge Pool is a seasonal facility, with July and August being the peak months for usage. For summer 1999, the last full summer that the pool was open, there was a total attendance of 16,538, of which 14,150 were children 17 and under. The pool caters to the immediate surrounding community with the exception of the day campers of the Northridge Recreation Center, who travel from all parts of the Valley. Approximately 12,000 children from Northridge use the pool. ■

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