



DISTRICT 5 NEWS

December 2004



Holiday Greetings from Supervisor Keith Carson:

The District 5 E-newsletter is designed to keep the residents of Alameda County's Fifth District informed about local, state, and federal issues. In light of the recent elections, we can expect an aggressive increase of attacks on what is left of our social safety net, our jobs, our environment and our civil liberties. It is even more important that we stay informed about the legislative issues that affect our communities so that we can build a stronger network of neighborhood support based services.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT/ LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Big Money More Important than Ever in Elections

Private interest groups with big money played a huge role in this last election. Over the last 20 years the cost of running a state or federal campaign has skyrocketed. To run a competitive race more and more candidates are spending millions of dollars, bringing more private interests into the democratic process. Individual contributions totaled over \$2.5 billion for the last election, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. That represents a significant jump over the \$1.5 billion in individual contributions raised in the 2000 election cycle.

This past presidential election was the most expensive in history totaling over \$1.2 billion. This figure includes private funding, federal public funding match dollars given before the primary, and money from political parties and advocacy groups. In the race for the White House, President Bush spent over \$360 million of private and government funds from January 2003 through election day; Sen. John Kerry spent over \$317 million during the same period. According to a post-election analysis by the Center for Responsive Politics, in 96 percent of the House races and 91 percent of the Senate races, the candidates who spent the most money won. The 2004 presidential and congressional elections cost a record \$4 billion. These figures represent a 33% percent increase over the \$3 billion spent on federal elections four years ago.

CALIFORNIA

Private Interests Intervene in the Case of Three Strikes

Narrowly defeated Proposition 66 would have reformed our current "Three-Strikes" law so that only violent or serious convictions would count as a third strike, carrying a mandatory 25-to-life sentence. Early polling indicated that the proposition had strong support among voters. According to a statewide field poll done in October nearly two-thirds of California voters favoring a ballot measure that would amend the state's "three strikes" law to prohibit extended prison sentences for nonviolent crimes. So what happened?

Joe Klaas, Chairman of Citizens Against Violent Crime and advocate in support of Prop 66 attributed the measure's defeat to the huge well financed campaign of fear and deception in the campaign's final days. You might have even received a personal phone message from Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown telling you that rapists would be released into the streets if Prop. 66 passed.

Or you may have seen Anti- Prop. 66 campaign ads endorsed by the Governor right before the election, that depicted the release of violent killers who would not have been eligible for release under Prop 66 since the measure explicitly applied only to non-violent offenders. One of the state's richest men, Henry T. Nicholas III poured over \$3 million dollars into defeating the initiative.

Under the current three strikes law, the majority of persons imprisoned under the law are second time offenders whose third strikes are non-violent felonies such as property crime and simple drug offences. The California prison system is the largest in the U.S., with a budget of over \$5.3 billion dollars a year and houses over 161,000 inmates, according to this year's State Budget. Housing non-violent offenders for 25 years to life is a costly burden on taxpayers. For every inmate, we pay \$29-31 thousand dollars a year, money that could be used for social programs designed to prevent crime.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Voters Protect Local Government Revenue

Proposition 1A passed overwhelmingly with 83.6% of the vote. This proposition protects local funding by prohibiting the state from using local money in several key ways:

- Prohibits the state from reducing local governments' property tax proceeds.
- Protects local funding for public safety, health, libraries, parks, and other local services.
- Requires local sales tax revenues to remain with local government.
- Requires the state to fund legislative mandates on local governments or suspend their operation.

However, there is a clause which suspends these provisions if the Governor declares a fiscal necessity and two-thirds of the Legislature approves the suspension. Suspended funds must be repaid within three years. Over the last ten years, Alameda County has lost approximately two billion dollars to the state as a result of "shifting" money into the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF). Under the provisions of Prop. 1A the state is also supposed to pay back \$30.7 million dollars in Vehicle License Fees (VLF) by 2006. The VLF is a major source of revenue that the state takes from local governments. Proposition 1A provides much needed relief and protects local governments control over local tax revenue intended to benefit local community services and programs.

UPCOMING EVENTS/ ANNOUNCEMENTS

Berkeley Youth Alternatives (BYA) is hosting a series of "FreeStyle Fridayz" that have engaged young people through workshops which create strategies for community activism, personal empowerment, and socially conscious hip hop performances, spoken word, mural art, and other forms of artistic expression. The final session in the series will be held this Friday Dec. 17th starting at 6pm. For more information contact BYA at (510)647-0719.

ALAMEDA COUNTY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS VACANCIES

Consumer Affairs Commission; 2 vacancies/ Status of Women Commission; 1 vacancy/
Paratransit Advisory Planning Commission; 1 vacancy/ Tree Advisory Board;1 vacancy/
Parks, Recs, and Historical Commission; 1 vacancy/ Advisory Commission on Aging; 1 vacancy/
Citizens Watchdog Committee (CWC) for Measure B; 1 vacancy.

For more information on the Board and Commissions look on the county website:

<http://www.co.alameda.ca.us/board/district5/pdf/vacancies.pdf> or call (510) 272-6695

Contact us with your feedback.

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