

**Valley VOTE Report
August 21, 2006 Board Meeting
by Richard Bort**

A Conversation With Bob Hertzberg



Members and guests of **Valley VOTE's Board** were treated to a 50-minute conversation with **Bob Hertzberg**, former California Assembly Speaker and mayoral candidate, at the regular Board meeting on August 21. Those who know Bob also know that having a conversation with him is like sipping from the proverbial fire hose followed by his requisite bear hugs. This conversation was different from most of his other public appearances, as Bob isn't running for any office (at least not presently), and his candor runneth over.

Hertzberg's remarks covered an extremely wide range of topics but in sum they indicated the depth of his knowledge of government, his understanding of people and their diverse motivations, and his personal commitment to make government work better for the people. He has been a student of government and politics since he was a kid, he said, as he responded to questions posed by Valley VOTE President **Joe Vitti** and others with frankness and refreshing clarity.

Hertzberg reflected that in a democracy whoever has power and voice gets his way, even if s/he has a personal agenda. We must pay attention to those in power to make sure that they serve the people. "The genius of politics," he said, "is to figure out how to get people all moving in the same direction."

ON EDUCATION, Hertzberg said, "Nothing is more important than education because it affects so many people and their futures." He cited his support for the break-up of the LAUSD when he was running for mayor, based on his observation of some 16 years of failure by the state to fix the school system while merely tinkering with the details. Bob said, "I am a big picture man," which drove his idea for having each school become the center of its community. He argued for not locking the school yard gates at 3 PM because the playground should be a park for everyone to enjoy. The school's library and other facilities should be open to the public after school hours. Unfortunately, the 80,000-strong state and LAUSD bureaucracies "were screwing it up," he said. For this reason, Bob said he wanted to really shake things up at LAUSD. He said, "We have to break it up, bring teachers, parents, and students together." He complimented his former

Sacramento roommate, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, for his current efforts to resolve the school district's problems, saying that, "the cause is worth the fight, even if I would do it differently." Hertzberg noted that Antonio has only four or five years to make his plan work, but "it's worth the fight even if [his plan] is not perfect."

ON PUBLIC CAMPAIGN FINANCING, Hertzberg sidestepped direct confrontation of the issue by cautioning that, "It's all about having confidence in government, and doing things that increase that confidence. Whether the issue is public financing of campaigns or redistricting, it is public confidence that matters most." Hertzberg still covets the notion of dividing the city into boroughs of 70,000 to 80,000 residents each. With smaller communities, such as boroughs, the populous will know which politicians are telling the truth and which are not. "Money is the symptom of the problem, not the solution," he said. "Truth is not the centerpiece – it is manipulation. If the community is small enough, money no longer is relevant. What matters is that the populations of small communities would know the politicians personally and be able to hold them accountable."

ON TERM LIMITS, Hertzberg reiterated several times that he favors a plan that no one is discussing, at least with respect to the State Assembly if not to other statewide and city offices. Incumbents should be termed out after 12 years, not six years as at present, he said, and then they should be eligible to run again for the same office after two years. He called this plan "12 on & 2 off; 12 on ." Presently, term limit laws forbid a person from ever again holding the same office from which s/he has been termed out. For example, Hertzberg cannot ever again be a State Assembly Member. The problem with this is that government ends up with little "institutional memory," and many good and effective office holders are barred from returning to office in the same capacity. Under the present system, with six-year term limits for Assembly members, for example, there is little time for a member to become expert in any issue, and the member is distracted by fundraising and seeking election to the next office.

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The Bob Hertzberg "conversation" was preceded by reports from **Valley VOTE Committee Chairs**:

Upside Down Housing Subsidies

Vic Viereck discussed the ramifications of the proposed \$1,000,000,000 "Affordable Housing Bond Issue" (Measure H), which will be on the ballot in November. He argued that **Measure H** should be defeated for the following reasons:

.* Lower income people would be subsidizing more affluent people because the \$14.66 (or more) tax per hundred thousand dollar assessed value to pay for the bond issue would be charged to all homeowners, regardless of income. Meanwhile, the definition of "affordable" could extend eligibility even to those people making more than \$100,000 annually.

- . * The tax to pay for the bond issue would make all homes less affordable.
- * The owners of rent-controlled apartments would have to absorb the tax for the bond issue with no opportunity to pass it through to tenants.
- . * The tax-exempt status of many of the subsidized buildings built with the bond issue money would erode the tax base, thereby reducing our public services.
- . * Prices on all products and services provided from Los Angeles real estate would have to be increased to cover the tax.
- . * The city's anti-business ordinances, that prevent apartment owners from recouping any more than 60% of capital improvement investments, are causing affordable apartments to deteriorate and be demolished.
- . * The city's failure to abide by its own ordinances in processing capital improvement pass-through applications diminishes the value of the pass-through.
- . * The 1986 federal Tax Reform Act led to a drastic decrease in rental housing investment by changing depreciation rules. California's legislature followed suit.
- . * The bond funds would be like a pot-of-gold to elected officials looking for campaign contributors. Who is pushing "Clean Money" campaigning?

The Future of Flight As We Know It

Undeterred by last week's terrorist apprehensions and the ensuing tightening of airline passenger restrictions, Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) still believes in the long-range growth of its facilities and traffic volumes. **Denny Schneider**, Valley VOTE's LAWA watchdog, noted some positive progress toward long-range solutions:

1. Regionalization of our air commerce will be one step closer to reality when an organizing meeting of the Southern California Regional Airport Authority will meet either the end of this month or early next. Councilmember Bill Rosendahl will represent our City.
2. The City of Palmdale has been awarded a \$900,000 Small Town Airport Access Grant from the FAA. LAWA is planning to match this grant with airport funds to provide incentives to a commercial airline to commence service into/from Palmdale. The specific timing and airline to be chosen for this has not yet been established, but this is a very significant opportunity.
3. Ontario airport is one of the fastest growing moderate sized airports in the country.

Denny reported that "any time a public agency schedules three public hearings in a week, you know that something is happening." The first two public meetings, he noted, will address future development of LAX as planned by LAWA, and are intended to collect public input about potential changes at LAX. The third meeting is to report on what is currently happening at LAX, including:

- * The on-going South Airfield Improvement Project (rebuilding of the southern-most runway (25L) 50 feet further south toward El Segundo along with addition of a center-line taxiway (taxiway

between and parallel to the two southern runways).

- . * New Fly-Away bus routes.
- . * Completion status of residential acquisition and projects for soundproofing homes within the 65 CNEL noise levels.
- . * Overview of the LAX Specific Plan Amendment Study Process

LAWA will use the public comments as justification for moving forward in the study phase for varied aspects of their LAX Master Plan projects (such as facility and runway changes, new traffic flow development and much more).

Two LAX Specific Plan Meetings: Wed., Aug. 23, 2006 6-9 p.m. and Sat., Aug. 26, 2006 9 a.m.-noon. LAX Master Plan Stakeholder Forum: Tuesday, August 29, 2006 at 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

All three public meetings will be at the Flight Path Learning Center, LAX Imperial Terminal, 6661 West Imperial Highway, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

Television by Cable or Phone

Our highly paid California legislators are finally earning their pay attempting to dispose of hundreds of bills before they adjourn on August 31. According to **Richard Bort**, Finance Committee Chair, among them is AB 2987, known as the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006. This bill makes two fundamental changes in the delivery of video programming to consumers. First, it snatches away the franchising authority from some 450 municipalities that historically have issued franchises, or licenses to use public rights of way and gives that task to the state; and it provides the opportunity for telephone companies to enter the market to deliver video programming using telephone lines rather than coaxial cables.

The bill has passed the Assembly and is now in the Senate undergoing hearings. Under the bill, local entities like the City of L.A. will continue to receive a franchise fee of 5 percent annually, but will have virtually no impact on whether, or through what hoops, a franchise applicant must jump for issuance or renewal of their franchises.

While the City would have operational control of Channel 35, it's not clear that the City would have any leverage to require Time Warner Cable to offer video-on-demand. That's why the Valley VOTE Board approved a resolution this month calling on the City to pursue video-on-demand for meetings of the City Council, major city Commissions and Committees, Neighborhood Councils that elect to be recorded and broadcast, press conferences of public officials, and the like. If the Dodgers can provide the content for Time Warner Cable to make available "Dodgers-On-Demand", surely Time Warner can do the same for City-produced content.

Transportation

Bart Reed, chair of the Transit Coalition, distributed a map showing the long-range “vision” of many who are involved in public transportation. He blamed at least one railroad that operates in the area for poor freight service to industries along its route. This has caused them to switch to trucks to carry both inbound and outbound freight, thereby further impacting traffic conditions on local streets and freeways. By gaining better on-time and more frequent freight service to industrial firms, a portion of the traffic problem could be mitigated.

Membership

Valley VOTE Chair Richard Leyner announced plans for a Valley VOTE fund-raising party at his Northridge home sometime in October. The event will honor several people who were key players in organizing Valley VOTE, VICA, and other Valley-based organizations. Richard asked members to help him use their contacts with restaurants, party rental firms, and others to keep the cost of the event down.

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on Monday, September 18, 2006. Guest speakers will be **Joe Edminston**, the Executive Director of the Santa Monica Conservancy and Los Angeles Housing Department Director **Mercedes Marquez**.

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.

Please forward this Email to interested individuals and organizations. If you would like to be removed from our distribution list please send an Email to javittisr@cs.com. We apologize if you receive more than one notice for this meeting.

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