

Valley VOTE

Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment

Meeting Report March 21, 2016

by David DeVoss

Michoacán's Valley Girl



Valley VOTE President Joe Vitti with
39th District Assemblywoman Patty Lopez

Patty Lopez was born in the Mexican state of Michoacán, moved to the San Fernando Valley at age 12 and has been working ever since. Today she represents the 39th Assembly District that extends from Sylmar and Santa Clarita to Pacoima and North Hollywood. Many of her district's voters come from Latin America and not all of them speak English. For this reason, Lopez has become the Assembly's leading advocate for adult education. "Parents like myself need to be more educated," she explains. "Often that means translating study materials into a different language."

Lopez also is active in task forces on immigrants, special needs education and veterans' affairs.

Lopez has introduced two Assembly bills that would assist veterans. AB 1871 would give the children of active members of the California National Guard attending Cal State colleges priority access to child care facilities. Her second bill, AB 1791, would eliminate the state income tax on military retirement benefits.

Lopez' most admirable quality may be her "less is more" attitude toward legislation. For example, her district is zoned for horses, which occasionally are involved in traffic accidents. Her response to the problem is not a new law

regulating horses on public streets but the addition of pages to the California Driver Handbook that would add safety information to the test prospective drivers must take.

Lopez is a proud Mexican American who admits our immigration system needs reform. She does not fault people living in this country illegally as much as their native countries – Mexico, Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala - that do little to provide the safety and jobs that might dissuade desperate citizens from heading North. “Other countries are not taking this problem seriously,” she says. “So many people take advantage of this country.”

Until the U.S. government redirects its anger away from illegal immigrants simply seeking a better life to corrupt Hispanic oligarchs bleeding every peso possible out of their countries, Lopez will continue supporting poor Valley residents who do not speak English. “People in my district who do not speak English just want to protect their kids,” she says. “And the children don’t want to be afraid that their parents will be deported.”

The Menace of Methane

On October 23, businessman Gabriel Khanlian was sitting in his Porter Ranch home office working on his computer when he developed a throbbing headache and began vomiting blood. “I called the gas company and was told there was nothing wrong,” Khanlian remembers. “The company continues to insist people aren’t sick and it’s just their imaginations.”



Gabriel Khanlian of Save Porter Ranch

Gas company intransience drove Khanlian to join the Save Porter Ranch protest group, which is debating its next step now that the gas leak is repaired. Most Porter Ranch residents would like to shut the entire SoCal Gas operation down but they realize this will be difficult since the natural gas brought in and stored in 125 old Aliso Canyon oil wells is used by millions of people from Ventura to Santa Barbara.

So, why not switch, or at least begin the transition, to a cleaner form of energy? “Let’s fill the canyon with solar panels with wind turbines on the ridge line,” Khanlian proposes. “People say windmills are unsightly, but this is an empty canyon. People are still getting sick and in response we get air monitoring devices in our backyards. I have a son eight years old. Don’t kids’ lives matter?”

The Save Porter Ranch group says the Valley should stick together and demand the Aliso Canyon facility be closed – or come up with a plan that will clean the air and not sacrifice the natural gas storage facility. Khanlian's group believes a switch to clean energy is possible if the five to ten year transition starts now.

Vic Viereck – Sidewalk Vending

The primary attraction to people who do street vending is the substantially lower cost they incur compared to what owners of brick and mortar businesses must pay. Some people, including elected officials, advocate some form of licensing for sidewalk vendors. They say licensing of sidewalk vending will raise the revenue necessary to enforce regulations on street vendors.

Aside from any other problems that may be caused by street vending, reduced tax revenue is a major problem. The substantially reduced cost of operating sidewalk businesses enables vendors to undercut prices charged by brick and mortar businesses. That reduces sales and profits at the brick and mortar businesses. Even if sidewalk vendors of merchandise responsibly report the volume of their merchandise sales, the reduced level of sales is a big negative hit to municipal sales tax revenue. Brick and mortar businesses also are at a disadvantage because they must absorb consistent overhead costs that cannot be easily reduced.

Reduced profits at brick and mortar businesses means fewer income taxes are paid. While income tax revenue only affects state and national governments, reduced profit at brick and mortar locations negatively affects the value of their property. Reduced property values reduce property tax revenues. Sales and property taxes are two major sources of revenue for cities, counties and school districts. Too many other needed governmental services could be reduced as a result of the sidewalk vending.

Ralph Kroy – Sunshine Canyon Landfill

The Sunshine Canyon landfill continues to receive an increased number of complaints from citizens and violations from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). In the past month alone there have been 100 complaints, and four Notices of Violation (NOV's) for Rule 402 – Public Nuisance. The total number of complaints now stands at 8,702, and 169 NOV's since January 2009 to present. Despite the hazards it presents, the landfill continues to grow by 2,500,000 tons a year.

Even though the landfill is getting a bit more attention due to the Porter Ranch/ Aliso Canyon gas leak, there is scant increase in the attention shown by government agencies, politicians or the news media. The sole exception is Dr. Cyrus Rangan, Director of the Bureau of Toxicology and Environmental Assessment for the County of Los Angeles Public Health Department. He has started meeting with various agencies that oversee landfill operations and we are

hopeful that he can get some action.

The March 2016 meeting of the Sunshine Canyon Landfill - Community Advisory Committee (SCL-CAC) at the Knollwood Country Club, drew a large contingent of parents of children from the Van Gogh Street Elementary School, which is heavily impacted by the odors from the landfill. They have started an environmental group and are reviewing all reports prepared by the landfill and the SCAQMD, scrutinizing them for methane, which is not captured by the gas collection system and could impact their children.

David DeVoss – Department of Building & Safety

Sooner or later everyone who owns a house in LA comes into contact with the Department of Building & Safety. The organization is intended to insure safe construction and adherence to zoning codes. But anyone who had followed the shredding of Ventura Blvd's Specific Plan or the drive to Manhattanize Hollywood knows any rule can be avoided if the developer is big enough.

But what of residential construction? Recently I sought a permit to construct a backyard pavilion. The structure had a shower, freestanding bar, gas fireplace and one wall. Open on three sides, the pool pavilion was not intended for Nannies, grannies or Airbnb guests. Still, it took four and a half months to get a permit and when it finally came the city ordered the vertical posts be set seven feet into the ground ("You must engineer for earthquakes!"), four sprinklers be installed, one of them in the shower ("You live in a fire zone!") and that the tiny bathroom have two doors, both wide enough for wheel chairs ("Disabled need to evacuate quickly in the event of a fire or earthquake!").

The fact my four-sided structure has only one wall made no difference at all.

Denny Schneider – Los Angeles World Airports

The FAA mandate is to keep the sky safe and to foster interstate commerce. It does that very well. Air transport is the safest conveyance when measured in deaths/mile. Unfortunately, the FAA does not care about pollution, passenger comfort or aircraft noise adversely impacting people on the ground.

The FAA's answer to growth is NextGen, a technology that saves time, fuel and reduces pollution by directly routing aircraft from one city to another via GPS coordinates. It's a good idea but the devil is in the details of its implementation.

Several years ago the FAA came out to the LAX-Community Noise Roundtable to present their plan. They had already hit a buzz saw of angry people on the East Coast that were newly impacted and vowed not to repeat the implementation errors. They told us that they wouldn't start from scratch in Southern California, but only make nominal changes that were not controversial. Despite these assurances, there is plenty of controversy.

The FAA released their plans late last year along with a low level environmental review document called an Environmental Assessment (EA) rather than a full blown Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that requires much more detailed analysis. The initial estimate of impacts by the FAA “averaged” out to no significant changes! It was met by heavy criticism and tens of thousands of questions submitted by communities throughout the region. The FAA extended the comment period twice because of massive public confusion. The public distrusts the FAA noise estimate predictions and fears that their local communities will be under the new, very concentrated flight tracks. The FAA is required to develop answers to all the questions submitted before finalizing the EA in August, which is a precursor to implementation of the flight track changes. We still don’t know the real impacts that people will experience, but many communities are demanding that the FAA must go back and review their estimates of the actual impacts and be willing to make changes.

Valley VOTE meetings are held the third Monday of each month to address critical public policy issues impacting the San Fernando Valley. The meetings are held at Galpin Ford, 2nd Floor Meeting Room, 15555 Roscoe Boulevard, North Hills, CA 91343 *The next meeting will be April 18, 2016.*