

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Mr. Joe Centeno, Chairman  
Board of Supervisors  
County of Santa Barbara

Re: 2009/10 County operating budget

Dear Chairman Centeno:

The Board of Directors of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association voted unanimously at our Board meeting today to recommend to the Board of Supervisors that you reject the fiscal year 2009/10 County operating budget.

This budget would undermine Santa Barbara County's essential law enforcement safety net. This would be especially so with respect to the Sheriff's Department.

Moreover, the Board of Directors of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association opposes cuts in the District Attorney's office that would discontinue prosecution of a variety of offenses, including petty theft, public drunkenness, aggressive panhandling, simple battery, and disturbing the peace.

To be clear, if prosecution of these offenses were to end, their incidence would skyrocket and the safety of local communities, particularly the socioeconomically poorest communities, would substantially diminish. These would be cuts the County simply could not afford to make.

The Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association understands that budget cuts are unavoidable and necessary, and has long called for fiscal restraint. Our Board continues to encourage you to make the safety and quality of life of the public your top priority. It is the view of the Board of Directors of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association that non-public-safety departments should shoulder the predominance of budgetary reductions.

In addition, we urge the Board of Supervisors to consider new revenue options, including oil and gas. We would encourage you, in particular, to support reconsideration of the Tranquillon Ridge Project at the state level. We believe that, as a result of the state budget crisis, the state may be receptive to reconsideration at this time.

We also encourage you to consider cutting development fees as a way to stimulate new applications and revenue. The City of Carpinteria has implemented this approach, and has experienced increased revenue.

Furthermore, we believe that the County of Santa Barbara should contract for more services. If budgetary projections on the basis of pension obligations in the next several years come to pass,

literally tens of millions of dollars more of County services would have to be cut, if there were not more contracting of services.

Finally, we encourage you to reform the County pension system now. The current system will bankrupt the County if it is not reformed in the immediate future. We intend to be in further communication with you on the subject of the County pension system in the near future.

Thank you for your consideration of our position and your service to the public. You are always welcome to attend our luncheon meetings held on the second Thursday every other month at the Marriott in Buellton. Please contact our Executive Director, Joe Armendariz, if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Lanny Ebenstein, Ph.D.  
President