

## They Went to Sacramento; Now What?

By Sophie Braccini



Senator Torlakson with Orinda delegation, Photo by Janice Adachi  
Back L-R: Michele Leighton, Julie Whitsitt, Sarah Butler, Senator Torlakson, OUSD Board member Pat Rudebush, Orinda Mayor Victoria Smith, OUSD Board member Riki Sorenson, Joan Kiekhaefer, Front L-R Diane Oshima, Ana Ramirez, Shannon Fuller, OUSD Board member Pam West

On February 27th more than 200 people boarded the buses that took representatives from schools in Lamorinda, Livermore, Alamo, Danville and San Ramon to Sacramento to meet our elected officials. 15 to 20 high school students from Las Lomas and Acalanes joined the group. "It was very interactive, we got to ask direct questions and got direct answers from our legislators," says Diane Oshima, Legislative Team, Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs. The budget cuts looming in the short future overpowered the other issue, long-term education reform in California. "Even though there is no money at this time, we need to define what are the most important changes the system must undergo to meet the challenges of the future," adds Oshima. But the battle does not stop there. "Our district delivered close to 5,000 letters, and met with our legislators," "says Jim Negri AUHSD Superintendent, "but we have no commitment to date that the 10% across the board cut proposed by Governor Schwarzenegger will be amended. As of today, the 'no new

taxes' Republican motto stands."

Most legislators that the team met are favorable to some type of budgetary reform. The Democratic majority, like State Representative Loni Hancock, are ready to increase the State's income as well as reducing its expenses. But in California (like in only three other States of the Union), a majority of 2/3 is required to pass a budget. This year, we can bet that the deadline of July 1st will have to be extended. And that is why schools want parents to stay motivated through the summer. "It is time that parents, educators and concerned citizens take a stand against the dismantling of California's public school system," says Camino Pablo Elementary PTA Parliamentarian Ana Ramirez.

With the long debate ahead, Negri encourages everyone to send a new set of letters to Sacramento. The new set of letters can be found at <http://www.lastrampaspta.org/letters.html>. One of the statements of the letter is: "I urge you to leave Proposition 98 minimum funding limits for education intact, and to find

ways to stabilize the state's budget at adequate levels."

The only delegate in our area who is not favorable to making a different budget decision is Guy Huston. He will be running for a position as a County Supervisor in November. "Maybe it's time that concerned parents let him know that his position on schools will influence voters," says Negri. Probably, the parents with most clout right now would be Republicans who might directly address the Governor, asking him not to cut 10% across the board, but to set priorities.

This position is the one advocated by one of the most respected voice in Sacramento, Elisabeth Hill, Head of the California Legislative Analyst's Office, the independent body that has been providing non-partisan fiscal advice to both chambers and both parties since 1941. Usually Ms. Hill's Office does not propose an alternative budget. This year, it did.

"This year we suffer from lower revenues, which creates a larger budget problem. For years we have suffered a structural deficit, and failure to set priorities," said Hill. She believes that the 10% across the board cut proposed by our Governor only offers an illusion of fairness, that priorities have to be defined. Her proposal has two sides, a targeted spending reduction program and a revenue component. On the spending reduction side she proposes to maintain the service level and set priorities, to eliminate non-working programs or find alternative funding for other programs (increase California university fees, for example). On the revenue side, she believes that a broad based tax increase is not good for business or individuals; instead she proposes to remove some tax exemptions. A video presentation of her vision can be seen at <http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/main.a>

spx.

As Ramirez reminded parents, "The state of California is the seventh largest economy in the world and spends 40% of its annual budget on education. The State ranks 46th in per pupil funding in the United States. All the legislators agree that we need to find and maintain more stable funding for our schools."

Oshima also believes it is possible, "From our perspective we are going to make a difference by supporting State support of schools. Interested citizens need to stay active over the summer and Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs will keep informing people. The budget won't be approved on July 1st, pressure on elected officials needs to continue." Otherwise, layoffs, class size increase, reduction in library time, suppression of mini-grants and weakening of special education is in store for next year and the years to come.

The Las Trampas Creek Council of PTAs is encouraging parents and concerned members of the community to engage in a second round of letter writing. Now that the mid-year budget cuts have been made, we need to once again ask our legislators to support public education funding.

The PTA's letter can be downloaded at

<http://www.lastrampaspta.org/letters.html>

and must be signed with name and address printed at the bottom of each letter. Letters can be dropped at the office of any public school in Lamorinda.