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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I look forward to the Lamorinda Weekly, especially the Police Blotter sections. In this week's Weekly I saw a letter to the editor that requests downplaying of the 'cutesy' reports. I, however, disagree and love the 'cutesiness' to the section and don't think it inappropriate at all. Most of these reports are misdemeanors and minor felony offenses. So please keep them coming and keep them humorous. Thanks!

Sincerely,
D. Brennan, Moraga

Dear Editor,

I would suggest that B. Campbell, who wrote condemning "the cutesy comic remarks at the close of each item" in your community police reports and requested they be eliminated, lighten up a bit. These are most usually not reports on the high crimes of the likes of an Al Capone or a Charles Manson, but most frequently concern young people apprehended during something really stupid.

Sherrill Grogan
Orinda

Dear Editor,



Senator Mark Desaulnier with (L-R) Michelle Leighton, Pamela West and Dana Fillinger

The current debates in Sacramento lack definition of State priorities in favor of justifying budget proposals. In our communities public education is a top priority, a value shared among all Californians, as reflected in poll after poll. The proposed 5+ billion in education funding cuts will have crippling long-term effects on our kids. California's success and economic power has been fueled by creativity and intellectual curiosity, supported and nurtured by our public schools and universities. Now is the time to restore the funding those institutions require to ensure a bright and healthy future.

The Las Trampas Creek Council of PTA's represents 27 K-12 schools in six districts from Contra Costa County. Frustrated over the current budget stalemate, the group launched a letter writing campaign directed at the governor and state legislators. On January 8, 2009, representing The Las Trampas Legislation Team, Michelle Leighton, Pamela West, and Dana Fillinger delivered over 11,000 letters advocating adequate education funding to Sacramento state legislators. The Legislation Team plans to continue writing letters, visiting legislators and putting whatever pressure they can on Sacramento until results are achieved.

I hope that you can run this article on behalf of the over 500,000 constituents in the six school districts represented.

Thank you,

Pamela West
Governing Board, Orinda Union School District

To the Editor:

There will be a new Orinda school tax on a March 3 Orinda special election ballot. This new tax will raise the existing Orinda school parcel tax to \$509 per year. These taxes have no sunset or ending; they will go on forever, regardless of additional school income from State or Federal grants.

The proposed tax is not fair. Residents who own a modest, small home will pay the same tax as those living in a palatial 5-million-dollar mansion.

The claimed "senior exemption" from this tax is a sham. Only 1% of Orinda households will qualify for this exemption. Why won't the proponents of the tax tell us who will qualify for the so-called "senior exemption"?

50% of our County property taxes go to the schools. The Orinda School District is expecting a 25-million-dollar payment for school land sold for the Pine Grove development. According to the 2008-2009 Orinda School District budget, Orinda teachers average \$75,855 per year per teacher. Medical and dental benefits are covered up to \$916 per month per teacher. Teachers have tenure or job security,

and their pensions increase each year after retirement. Corporation employees enjoy neither of these benefits. In a time of severe recession, the worst since the Great Depression, we cannot afford more taxes. Orindans are losing their jobs, their businesses are closing, mortgages are being foreclosed and returns on investments are collapsing. This is not the time for new taxes.

Proponents of the new parcel tax claim the high value of Orinda homes is due solely to Orinda's schools. If this were true, San Francisco would have low home values, since its schools are poor. Actually, San Francisco home values are high. Orinda home values result from having no polluting industry, spacious lots, beautiful hills and closeness to the inner Bay Area.

To avoid waste of our tax dollars in a time of severe recession, please join me in voting NO on Measure B.

Clyde Vaughn
Orinda

Editor:

St. Mary's College has invited William Ayers to lecture students about, "Trudging Toward Freedom" on January 28 at the Soda Center. The link between his qualifications and this lecture seem dubious to me, but that is not for me to judge. I do know that Ayers is a dangerous person to have instructing, lecturing or in any way influencing people in an educational (or other) setting. St. Mary's, in the event description, has mentioned his "controversial background." His background is felonious, not controversial.

As a leader of the "guerilla organization" known as "The Weathermen," Ayers was instrumental in pushing them to spread "world communism" and "smash monogamy" through violence, with spectacular bombings that injured and killed Americans. The Weathermen, in the Port Huron statement which includes the previous quoted language, indicated that they viewed themselves as a domestic revolution affiliated with foreign movements that were killing American soldiers. Ayers has told the New York Times that he does not regret using bombs and, in fact, feels he did not do enough. After being arrested, he has decided to spread his war on democracy, capitalism and peaceful discourse through lectures instead of bombs. St. Mary's should not give him that podium.

Mr. Ayers is dangerous and wholly unqualified to lecture about freedom. He can enjoy the benefits of the freedom this country provides him, but that does not mean that St. Mary's should provide him a vehicle with which to tear it down.

James Minder
Lafayette

Dear Editor:

I have followed with interest the Lot 66 controversy. This old real estate lawyer has a few comments:

Under NO circumstances can the city take all or a part of an easement without the owners' consent or an Eminent Domain action. The easements, owned by over 20 uphill neighbors, are over all of Lot 66, according to the various deeds, and is the uphill owners only access to their property.

As one somewhat familiar with the Sessions/Petar/Northridge development, everyone involved believed Lot 66 (all of it) was subject to the easements and could not be developed -- otherwise Petar would have developed it.

Civil engineers have opined that the Holt proposal would further compromise the present minimal standards for the intersection of Sessions Road and Sierra Vista. That intersection should be improved, not degraded, as proposed.

Title companies should be notified because they have insured that all "uphill" owners have an easement across all of Lot 66.

The city attorney is just dead wrong if she says (as reported) that the city can grant a right to build on the easement (except the trail easement that the city

owns). It should be noted that the county has said the lot is "unbuildable."
To my knowledge, no planning agency -- city or county -- has ever tried to grant the right to develop over someone else's property...and an easement is an interest in property.

In my career, I have been involved with literally hundreds of land use applications. Never have I seen such a strong advocacy by staff for an applicant's position. As a long-term booster of, and contributor to, our great city, I am embarrassed by the incompetent manner this has been handled. I guess if you have served your country for 25 years and your city for a like period (as Holt says he has), you are entitled to some special privileges.

Regards,
Ned Robinson
Lafayette

To the Editor:

In October, we moved from Orinda to Walnut Creek, selling our Orinda home as the economy was plunging dramatically on a daily basis (ed note: Marian Nielsen still works at Orinda Books).

The family that bought our house did so expressly because they wanted to be in the Orinda School District . We congratulated ourselves that the modest contributions over the years that we had made to the Orinda Educational Foundation had been a good investment as Orinda 's excellent school system had been the updraft that helped our home sale in trying times.

We had lived in Orinda for forty years. Its schools were a principal reason we chose to live in Orinda and our three children all benefited from their years in the Orinda Union and Acalanes School Districts .

I hope Orindans, when they vote on the March parcel tax, will consider the important role that Orinda's excellent schools play in supporting the property value of homes in Orinda and in attracting the new young families that will continue to make Orinda the vibrant community that we have all loved.

Marian and Bob Nielsen

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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