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Public Forum

Acalanes Parcel Tax

As one whose offspring enjoyed superb educations at the Acalanes High school component of the Acalanes School District, it's most disheartening to read in the October Bloomberg Markets publication, the history of unethical and costly strategies employed by the district, in its multiple "bond refinancing" forays. Particular "refis" were employed in April and May of 2004 - again, January and December of 2005. The "fiscal massaging" provided by investment bankers, bond attorneys and credit rating services, etc., resulted in the district shelling out 41 cents of every "refi" dollar for such activity. Attorney General Brown, in January of 2009, "opined" that such procedures are both illegal - and, unconstitutional - in fact, subject to suits that would invalidate said bonds.

This distressing exposure thus makes it most difficult to even consider voting for a November parcel tax being proposed by the District. As a recent local "opinion commentary" observed, "this district has an insatiable appetite for money." Such funds, are often devoted to what many taxpayers would categorize as "wants" - not, applications which support the "needs" that would unquestionably promote the outstanding academic achievements of its several campuses.

As a long time grass roots taxpayer advocate, it's been noted that such organizations generally support and defend taxes to meet genuine public or educational "needs". In contrast - "wants" are almost universally opposed - this, on basis that "wanters" should fund such options. The City of Lafayette has done well in this context - e.g., when a long ago "wants" tax (for a world class sport complex) was forgone - and, highly motivated "wanters" ultimately brought the project to fruition, via their own alternative funding efforts. So should be the approach for all public tax-consuming agencies...schools included!

This is noted, because the Acalanes District has seemingly still not embraced this concept. Last year's tax was heavily focused on such "wants" items as artificial turf for playing fields, new tennis courts, etc. - expenditures which unmistakably were "wants". And, had just a "needs portion" been offered to voters (less amounts for legitimate "wants" capital charges), tolerance for a current "term-limited" parcel tax (to deal with temporary State subvention deficiencies) would be much more "salable" to voters in today's general voter unhappiness with politics and taxes in general.

Finally, the ethics angle" re "proposition filing timing" can't be ignored. Its submission to the County Elections Office was such that there was no time to submit "opposing data" for inclusion in voter pamphlets, etc.

If ongoing "needs" must be accommodated by the eventually expiring parcel tax - then, come back next spring with a "timed" renewal of that tax.

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