

The Compassionate Tax?

By Roland Peterson, Chairman of Governmental Affairs



CAMPAIGN SEASON is now in full swing. Candidacies have been declared. Endorsements have been lined up. Candidates and their supporters are going, or will soon go, door-to-door to solicit our votes for Council, School Board, other offices, and yes, even President. To a degree that exceeds most previous elections, I believe this City's election will be about taxes.

It is no secret that the City of Berkeley and the Berkeley Unified School District have significant budget deficits. It is also no secret that those deficits are expected to grow in the next few years. The point of this column is not to confirm or refute any calculation of these projections, but to comment on how they will be addressed.

When the deficits first started appearing, the phrase I heard many times about addressing these deficits was "share the pain." If everyone accepted a "small" reduction in services combined with a "small" increase in taxes, then the City would get over the deficit problem. But that strategy failed. With the last set of tax increases sent to the voters, every one of them failed except for the animal shelter. (As an aside, I have now learned with crystal clarity that it is political suicide to campaign against puppies and kittens. They always win.) To be sure, the two-thirds requirement to pass tax measures was instrumental in stopping these new taxes, but in the past, Berkeley voters approved new taxes with greater majorities than that. Berkeley is in new territory.

When I read the Berkeley ballot measures, I took careful note of who supported and who opposed which tax increases. It is now the norm that Council candidates support some new taxes and oppose others. It is rare to find candidates who support *all* proposed tax increases. Such pure supporters of major taxation still do exist, but in this election cycle, they are now in the distinct minority. In fact, there are some candidates who oppose *almost* every tax increase. Does this bode well for fiscal sanity in our city? It certainly suggests that the Council is coming, or will come, to the realization that it can't tax its way to a balanced budget.

The Chamber of Commerce will take its own positions on the Berkeley ballot measures, and I encourage you to consider them closely. There are several that will affect your wallet whether you live in Berkeley or not. And if you are also a Berkeley resident, this is the year to pay particularly close attention to the Council races. These races are all about the budget. When I hear people talk about Berkeley and its many social programs, the word that comes up most often is compassionate. Berkeley voters are compassionate toward those with special needs. This City is now coming face-to-face with the question of just how much can Berkeley residents and businesses pay in taxes and still have economic vitality and a quality of life. This is the new question of just what is compassionate in a new arena—the tax rate. ■

Survivors of the Fittest

Carolyn Henry-Golphin, Chairman of the Board



IN THE MIDST of war and terrorists threats, budget cuts and layoffs we have to keep our business minds and professional behaviors focused on our daily concepts and ideals. What a time to reflect on the pioneers, the optimist, the die-hards, the long standing, the ones who have held out, held on and are still around. I'm talking about the ever-present businesses that received their well deserved 25-year recognition at our Annual Dinner in August. Their success gives us motivation and zeal to press on to the mark. I'm sure I can speak for the city and the entire Chamber membership, "we salute you."

As we weave through our business community and connect with our peers, there are those survivors who just stand out from the rest for one reason or another. It's always good to watch a colleague get close to the end of their term and to see how they exhale, and then take another breath for their next endeavor. To my predecessor, John DeClercq, I pay tribute to your Chairman leadership of our Chamber Board for the past two years.

Now as we move on, yours truly has acknowledged the duties of the Chair and I'm ready to go! There are so many directions ahead with green lights and certainly some red lights too. However, our very capable and well-seasoned Board of Directors, many who have survived over the years, is well versed with the ballot measures that are being proposed. They are able, ready and prepared to

confront the issues and support the business community during this season of campaigns and elections. It is suggested that you take the time to read and try to get your questions answered. Our Government Affairs Chairman, Roland Peterson will lead us through our process as we try to determine our positions. Whatever the outcome, it is very important that we all exercise our duty to vote on November 2, 2004.

But something keeps bringing me back to the victors and leaders of our community that have elevated their positions and relocated to warmer climates (aloha). Vice Chancellor Horace Mitchell of UC Berkeley and Larry Bush, YMCA Executive Director, just to name a few, are examples of "survivors of the fittest". The accolades and expressions of gratitude from their staff and colleagues spoke volumes of their hard work and dedication to our community.

All of us have victories to tell and it really does help when you share them. It makes me think about our recent Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece and how the United States really "brought home the gold". And even in our own city of Berkeley! Thank you Natalie Coughlin for representing us. A young survivor of the fittest!

My sincerest appreciation to my business community, family and personal friends for your wonderful expressions of support that you gave to me at the Chamber's installation of officers. My church family, St. Paul AME Berkeley, words cannot express my love for you. And to Restaurants Unlimited, Inc. and Skates on the Bay, your unwavering encouragement will always be recognized.

Here's to all of the Survivors in Berkeley! ■

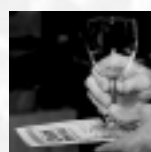
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CHAMBER RECOMMENDATIONS ON LOCAL, REGIONAL AND STATE BALLOT MEASURES AND PROPOSITIONS.

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A Dose of Reality



By Rachel A. Rupert, CEO

"REALITY SHOWS" – now you have to wonder just how dull your life really is to have to sit in front of a TV and watch someone else bomb out in a job interview, survive the Amazon, face a fear factor, marry off dear old dad, race to nowhere, be entertained by the Amish in the City, et

cetera ad nauseam. Who knew when Jim Carey stared in the "The Truman Show," directors would look at one another and say, "cha ching, cha ching." "Find a need, and fill it," was Henry J. Kaiser's mantra, but I dare say he was relating to the true essence of reality – the kind made up of everyday men and women who fill a need, which makes the old economy tick.

At this year's annual dinner, the Chamber paid homage to those members that have been steadfast members for 25+ years. Now that's real folks! That's what survival is all about. They have been a part of Berkeley's economic base for a VERY long time and for that we all owe them a round of applause, which should resonate throughout the City of Berkeley.

Unlike your reality shows, these businesses are real. And, I bet each one has a story to tell about the good times, bad times and almost didn't make it times. But, you know what, they are still here and in a couple of years (Oh please let it be MUCH shorter), the reality shows will be but a faded memory. Whew! What a relief.

Thank you to our steadfast 25+ year members. And, to all our members, I say thank you for being a part of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce. Your support has allowed us to maintain that vital link between the business community and city hall. Additionally, we were able to launch a successful leadership program, which has produced its first graduating class, and I'm pleased to announce the second class is currently walking the pathway prepped by their predecessors. If you want to attend the 2005-'06 class, better start planning now, because the list is already growing.

"Reality Shows" – I don't need no stinkin reality shows. Every morning I get up is a new day to make my own dreams come true and create my own reality. Now that's got to be better than TV – a slice of life always is. ■

Crab Feed



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Leadership Berkeley • Class of 2003 – 04

Congratulations to the Leadership Class newly graduates: Carol Hirsch-Butler, David Manson, Winston Burton, Donna LaSala, Cisco DeVries, Brandon Healy, Diane Rames, Dially Paulino, Donald Medley, Sarah Kayler, Susan Lewis, Doris Pierce, Nikki Miller, Sharon Girard, Mark Chernis, Rebekah Hilger, Helen Marcus and Doreen Moreno. (Far right) Jack Papazian, Program Director, Carole Rinaldi, Class Coordinator and Council Member Maio (seated) celebrate with class.

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Jesse Tieger, East Bay Smart Lights

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Contact **Jesse Tieger** at (510) 981-8955 x224 or jesse@ebenergy.org, or visit us at www.smartlights.org. Services and incentives provided on a first-come, first-served basis and only while funding lasts. ■



Photography by Dana Davis

We Survived! 2004 Annual Dinner!

THANK YOU WELLS FARGO for sponsoring this year's Annual Dinner and **WELLS FARGO MORTGAGE** for your generous donation to the Chamber's scholarship fund! **THANK YOU** to all that donated the silent auction items!

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Don't Believe Those Public Opinion Polls

Dennis Kuby, Medical and Death Insurance



Dennis Kuby is a Professional Financial Advisor. The views expressed in this column are not necessarily those of the Berkeley Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Kuby welcomes all comments.

SEVERAL months ago, I was startled to read a news story on the front page of The Berkeley Voice, a weekly newspaper, that 62 % of registered Berkeley voters would approve of yet another city property tax hike in November! Alert, take any report of a public opinion poll with a grain of salt, and toss it over your shoulder. Polling has never been an exact science so there's a reason to be skeptical. Probe deeper, and you will find that a special interest group is either planting a story, or a reporter isn't checking out the facts, or the survey is not valid. That's another way of saying it doesn't pass the "smell" test.

I picked up the phone and started asking my neighbors, "Did anyone call you about the city property tax?" Not a single, solitary property owner in my neighborhood participated in that public opinion research which was reported in The Voice. So I took the next step and found out the name of the company that did the survey and persisted until I talked directly with the president of the firm. Here are three critical questions you should always ask before you put any credence in what's reported in the newspapers, especially when a highly charged, political election is coming up.

Who is the sample, and how large is it? Berkeley is a city of 100,000, and this specific poll only covered, randomly, 400 people from the flats to the campus to the hills.

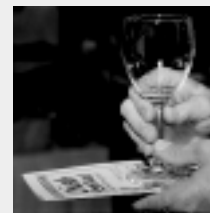
There was no economic delineation as to those being polled, whether they were renters or homeowners, Republicans or Democrats. Now, if history is any guide, we know the political temperament of the student body at Cal, and no one there ever met a property tax hike that he or she wouldn't approve. Furthermore, since when do 400 people speak as a unified voice for 100,000?

How is the question worded? If the question format is structured on a **Agree/Disagree** basis it is the least reliable indication of voter sentiment because words can be emotionally charged with bias. For example, if you were asked, "Would you support our police and firefighters if it meant a modest, monthly \$30 increase in your property tax?" Most respondents might say yes because there is nothing in the question that argues against it!

Who is behind the poll, and who is financing the survey? If polls are to be taken seriously, full disclosure must be made as to who is funding the survey, and "who wants to know what and why?" Before we can objectively evaluate the accuracy of any public opinion research which seeks to influence our vote, we need to know who's putting up the money. It will at least give us a context of better understanding when people who ask questions for a living call you on the phone. ■



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- Sunrise Mixer - "Meet & Greet"
Wednesday, October 13TH
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Jazz Café - 2087 Addison Street
- Sunset Mixer - Synectic Tech./Telepacific
Thursday, October 14TH
5:30 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.
Telepacific Office - 6101 CHRISTIE AVE
- Sunset Mixer - Art & Wine Mixer
Thursday, Re-scheduled for May '05
5:30 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.
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- 2004 Crush Festival
Sunday, November 7TH
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Doubletree Hotel - 200 Marina Blvd.
- Sunrise Mixer - "Meet & Greet"
Wednesday, November 10TH
8:00 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.
Jazz Café- 2087 Addison Street
- Luncheon - Grow 'Ur Business
Tuesday, January 11TH
11:30 P.M. – 1:30 P.M.
Spenger's - 1919 Fourth Street
- Sunrise Mixer - "Meet & Greet"
Wednesday, January 12TH
8:00 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.
Jazz Café - 2087 Addison Street

Crab Feed

- All You Can Eat "Crab Feed"
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