

Marin United Taxpayers Association

TAX NEWS

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THE MUTA BOARD Don Erbel, President; Fielding Greaves, VP; Michael Hartnett, Treasurer; Nancy McCarthy, Director; Diana Perdue, Director; Anita Strom, Director.

*THE REAL MUTA*¹

President’s Message Your Marin United Taxpayers Association is enjoying a resurgence in popularity. Tax issues are all over the news. Groups with concerns about poorly run and corrupt government are forming everywhere. MUTA has been a long time advocate in these issues. We hope that you will continue to push for leaner and better run government and fairer taxation. In this issue of TAX NEWS we ask for your opinions on the November ballot measures (see enclosed insert). Thank you for your past and continuing support.

The importance and need for taxpayer watchdogs like MUTA was made clear by the recently exposed government excesses in Bell, CA, where town authorities provided obscenely large salaries and pensions to key municipal officials—a city manager getting paid \$800,000 per year (and pension of over \$500,000), several other City personnel with \$350,000+ salaries, and Council members getting \$100,000 a year for attending a handful of meetings per year in a small town. A City-sponsored ballot measure, held on an off-cycle election, with light voting, helped this all to happen by creating a Charter city that allowed for less “sunshine” and less open reporting of salary-setting, etc. This was the tip of the iceberg as excesses in other cities are coming to light. State government is reeling from this corruption scandal. (For more on this, see page 4)

MUTA has often been the only voice demanding accountability in Marin, opposing the County lowering public employees’ retirement age from 55 to 50, requesting the salaries and COMPLETE compensation of our top public administrators and elected officials. Several years ago we requested the salaries of top County officials, and the county said “it is private information” When the

¹ You will recall the public brouhaha about another group calling itself “MUTA” and run by Basia Crane, who took \$35,000 in public taxpayer funds for herself personally, despite MUTA’s objections. That group is presently run by David Randolph and may still be falsely representing that they “control” MUTA. If you are contacted by them, please call the MUTA phone number and let us know so that we can put a stop to their deceptions. Presently, the “Crane” group is comprised of people whose politics include opposition to Prop 13 and who are not anti-tax: By our estimate, they are a pro-tax organization.

Marin IJ joined us, we got that information. Whenever MUTA has requested information or complained about waste, we have been castigated as “naysayers.” Now we have the pension debacle, with taxpayers losing services in order to fund the exorbitant public pensions, and the disastrous costs associated with the County’s failed computer set-up. We face a ballot measure on a “vehicle license tax” for Marin County residents, asking us to tack another \$10 onto our license fees (already going up \$18 by State mandate) to pay for “transportation costs,” so that the County can keep “our other taxes” in their general fund to pay for their pensions and their inflated salaries and perks. MUTA for 33 years has battled against these endless new taxes and campaigns against their passage.

This year MUTA worked with the Tea Party advocates at a local event with significant attendance. People are beginning to get the picture. Marin is not just made up of fabulously wealthy individuals who don’t care about taxes. People are getting sick of seeing their tax money go to boondoggles and bigger government. MUTA is working against several local and State tax measures (along with Statewide tax groups) to oppose government getting more money to “fix” the mistakes they have made, and the excesses they have fostered and from which they benefit.

Last year’s MUTA Survey showed that our members were most concerned about more taxes, public pensions, and illegal immigration. MUTA has regularly opposed new tax measures. We have consistently fought against high public employee pensions, and in fact vigorously fought the County’s super-generous employee pension plan from its very inception decades ago, as insupportable and likely to bankrupt the County, and have opposed every lowering of the threshold to such pensions since. We have written the Marin IJ and other papers about the problems of illegal immigration in our efforts to get these matters “out front” to local government officials. They need to “hear” the “silent majority” whom we represent.

In this edition of MUTA’s TAX NEWS we are presenting details on all of the State ballot measures so that our members can see what they mean, really mean, and which conflict with each other (generally a “spoiler,” a legislative measure to attempt to negate a measure put on the ballot by the PEOPLE). Long-time MUTA officer Fielding Greaves put the enclosed list together. Please review it and send us your “vote” so we can publicly state the position of our membership.

Pay particular attention to the local Desalination ballot measures, where the government, i.e., MMWD, put a competing measure on the ballot to negate the PEOPLE’s initiative, after volunteers had collected over 16,000 signatures to put Measure T on the ballot. MMWD’s competing measure, their “blank check” Measure S, was put on the ballot by scheming MMWD INCUMBENTS (who are all running for reelection this November) **only after** those incumbents knew that the

PEOPLE's measure had qualified for the ballot. Their "spoiler" measure was put on the ballot to confuse voters, to bleed votes away from the PEOPLE's measure T, but first and foremost to give the MMWD Board spending authority for more studies, plans, and preparations for construction of their vastly expensive and monster energy-consuming desalination plant. Then in a **further sneaky move**, despite its obvious unfairness, they succeeded in placing their measure on the ballot **ahead** of the PEOPLE's measure despite the PEOPLE's measure qualifying first. MMWD's Measure S would allow them (government) to waste another \$2 or \$3 million of taxpayers money — in addition to the \$5 million already spent on desal considerations — for more costly consultants **before any decision to construct a desal plant is put to the voters.** The PEOPLE's initiative seeks a public vote on any more MMWD spending on desal, and on construction of the desal plant. VOTE the PEOPLE's initiative!

Also pay particular attention to the Marin Healthcare District election. After the actions of local activists and MUTA representatives over the past ten years, our hospital was finally taken back from Sutter Health (who swiped over \$300 million of MGH revenues on the last five years). Incumbents on the publicly elected Marin Healthcare District Board, who had previously supported Sutter Health's control, have just now given away MGH control again, to another private operating corporation. That private operator is not accountable to the public, not subject to open meeting laws, permits 49% of its Board to be people with DIRECT FINANCIAL CONFLICTS. Even worse, the public will not be able to know about or see those big, generous public contracts with financially conflicted Board members! And this, after what happened in Bell, California, where we see what government secrecy can do to the "little people" taxpayers. Get ready for increased prices at MGH, along with reduced services. The Incumbents who gave away public control this time are: Bedard, Clever, and Reinks. (Apparently Bedard did not list himself on the ballot as "Incumbent" in order to "hide" from voters his responsibility for his actions.) Two people are running against Healthcare Incumbents: Lori Woods and Joe Salama, a mediator. Woods and Salama are seeking OPEN MEETINGS and accountability by the new "private operating board."

The Marin Healthcare Board election is another important election for Marin taxpayers because the Incumbents have announced that they will put a \$300 million bond issue on the ballot next November, so the local taxpayers can pick up the tab for what the public board "blew" by letting Sutter loot over \$300 million for MGH. On top of that, the Incumbents will want the taxpayers to sanction this new "private, financially conflicted operating board" with a lease for **30 years** (as formerly with Sutter) to operate and spend MGH's public revenues with no accountability to the public (as formerly with Sutter).

California obscene shockers! Bell & Vernon, the taxpayers nightmare.

It was Alexis de Tocqueville who said, “Representative government is doomed once the people learn they can vote themselves benefits from the public treasury.”

The bad news. Taxpayers everywhere were shocked at revelations of vast fiscal abuse by officials of the two small Los Angeles County towns of Bell and Vernon, possibly unintended consequences of the legislature’s enactment in 1999 of SB 400, that enabled officials in those two neighboring towns in L.A. County to give quasi secret, obscenely huge salaries and perks to fellow officials.

Bell (area 2.5 sq. mi., pop. 37,000) city government paid its city manager \$787,637 a year (with future pension about \$700,000 plus annual CPI increases); police chief \$457,000; director of administrative services \$422,707; director of general services \$421,402; and asst. city manager \$376,000. In nearby **Vernon** (pop. only 92) a former city manager was paid over \$600,000 a year and now draws a pension of \$509,664. (Compare: a 4-star Army general, is paid \$15,000 a month, \$180,000 a year.)

The good news. (1) California State Controller John Chiang has ordered all cities and counties to disclose their salary information, with results to be posted on his website about November. (2) The League of California Cities reportedly is working on a legislative proposal to prevent this kind of obscene thieving abuse of fiduciary responsibility by government officials.

Other issues which MUTA seeks to monitor—with YOUR help:

- More consolidation among police and fire protection service
- The coming Obamacare increased healthcare medical rates and reduced access.
- Ramifications of State Democrat tax plan, according to Chronicle business columnist Kathleen Pender (Aug. 8 column), where people in highest and lowest (below \$30,000) brackets would do best, and those in middle would do worse. In 2012-13, taxpayers would owe \$86 million more in tax than they would save on their federal returns. People in the \$80,000 to \$100,000 range would pay the most (says the Finance Department), or save the least (say the Democrats).

Our most important election advice: KNOW AND UNDERSTAND ALL THE ISSUES. TELL YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS. GET INVOLVED. AND IF YOU HAVE THE TIME, OFFER US YOUR HELP IN DOING GOOD WORK.

REMINDER—letting Bush tax cuts expire is really a TAX INCREASE.