TUESDAY | Nov. 1, 2005

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE:

Why L.A. Needs "Y"

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is coming to the voters for a fourth time in six years asking for support for a $4 billion facilities bond. If passed, L.A. voters will have invested nearly $14 billion in new schools in less than a decade—a staggering amount of money. Superintendent Roy Romer and the LAUSD Board deserve credit for embarking on one of the largest local public construction projects in history to meet long-neglected needs. In this the same time period, voters have approved $35 billion in new state school construction bonds. With this voting record, there can be no question about the business community’s, and the public’s, support for education.

The Chamber has supported these bonds and supports Measure Y on the November ballot.

Our support for the previous bonds has had its conditions. We insisted, for instance, that a Bond Oversight Committee be created, comprised of individuals with significant experience in large-scale construction projects to oversee the expenditure of funds.

We also lobbied hard to include funds that required LAUSD commitment to building small schools, to enable more personalized learning environments, and to serve as investments that in some areas could bring about greater neighborhood renewal. Schools, if used properly, surely can be used to anchor communities—to safely and efficiently serve as neighborhood resources to link children and families to much needed recreation, library, preschool and health services. The Chamber has supported the idea that it is crucial to get all students off year-round, multi-track schedules and forced busing and return all children to neighborhood schools.

While we applaud LAUSD’s massive efforts to build these needed schools, we call upon the LAUSD Board to ensure that it fully embraces and is held accountable for these past and present commitments. Indeed, some of our traditional allies oppose this bond issue because the district has shown inadequate progress on these commitments. We share this concern; however, we support the bond issue because we want to work with LAUSD to move forward in these areas and do not want to see the construction program interrupted.

We hope that the district will soon begin to spend the money contained in these bonds for building these smaller schools that will serve as neighborhood centers, not just for education, but for the development of local communities. The district should boldly and creatively build schools of tomorrow and schools that use state-of-the-art, joint-use designs—leveraging and truly partnering with the development of local communities. The district should boldly and serve as neighborhood centers, not just for education, but for the development of local communities. The district should boldly and creatively build schools of tomorrow and schools that use state-of-the-art, joint-use designs—leveraging and truly partnering with the Mayor, the city and other public partners on a huge scale. We ask the LAUSD Board to reiterate its support for this approach and for the commitments made in this and past bonds—in letter and in spirit.

The Chamber understands the need to build seats, but we think we should do better than building seats. We need to build futures. Unfortunately, despite some gains at lower grade levels, we are still awaiting progress in classroom outcomes for middle and high school students. The drop-out rates are too high, and the achievement levels remain too low. The district must focus the tremendous effort it has invested properly, surely can be used to anchor communities—to safely and efficiently serve as neighborhood resources to link children and families to much needed recreation, library, preschool and health services. The Chamber has supported the idea that it is crucial to get all students off year-round, multi-track schedules and forced busing and return all children to neighborhood schools.

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We are at a historic moment in Los Angeles. We have the promise of being the most important diverse, economic, and cultural capital of the world. Yet to reach this promise, we must build a bridge to span the dreams of our students to the success of tomorrow. Public education must be that bridge.

Measure Y will continue to fund the facility upgrades we need. That is why we support it and urge you to vote Yes on Y. It’s a vote not just for the education of our city’s children, but also a vote to support the crucial role our schools can play in the development of the broader community.

And that’s The Business Perspective.

Russell J. Hammer
President & CEO
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