

## OPINION

## EDITORIAL

*Budget answers not blowing in the wind*

How many transportation districts does one county need?

How many special districts is too many?

California's budget woes should challenge local governments to do what businesses do when they no longer can operate profitably — consolidate to become more efficient in the delivery of goods and services.

That should be the case for transportation districts and special districts, where overhead and administrative costs make small districts highly inefficient. With consolidation comes a solution to the long-term costs of providing expensive pensions to district executives and administrative staff.

In Ventura County, a patchwork of transportation districts isn't capable of delivering a coordinated, unified system of bus lines that can deliver workers from Santa Paula or Moorpark to jobs in Oxnard or the Port of Hueneme in anything like a time-efficient way. Santa Barbara County has a relatively efficient network of express bus lines but it is plagued with a plethora of water and sewer districts.

San Luis Obispo County is facing a mammoth funding shortfall when it comes to transportation, which might lead to some streamlining of its transportation system. It also has the mother of all special district meltdowns, the Los Osos Valley sewer disaster, which literally has taken decades to straighten out.

Reinventing government is never easy and it must happen in a way that gives elected officials a way to face angry voters who will oust a city councilman who gives away a single bus shelter.

But the current fiscal squeeze facing local and county governments means business as usual simply can't continue. Taking a look at special districts and transportation authorities may be the least expensive way to cut costs — and a way to deliver more services to more constituents at the same time.

**UNITE AGAINST PREJUDICE AND HATE**

A cross-burning in Arroyo Grande on March 18 reminds us that prejudice and hate crimes happen in our normally placid communities.

Fortunately, the residents of San Luis Obispo County are facing the issue head-on and are uniting to track down and prosecute the perpetrators. The city of Arroyo Grande has established a "Justice for All in Arroyo Grande" fund to provide an award to anyone who provides information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for this reprehensible act.

You can mail your donation to the City of Arroyo Grande, 300 E. Branch St., Arroyo Grande, CA 93420. Arroyo Grande's civic motto is "Ensuring Quality of Life." By supporting the Justice for All Fund, you will ensure that the positive quality of life that defines this wonderful city most of the time endures for all time.

**IN REMEMBRANCE**

We'd like to take a moment to pass our condolences on to the family and friends of Clarence Minetti, a longtime Santa Maria businessman, restaurateur and community member.

Minetti, who started the Far Western Tavern steakhouse in Guadalupe in 1958 with his wife, Rosalie, passed away March 28 following complications from a traffic accident. He was 93. His extended family continues to run the popular Santa Maria-style barbecue steakhouse today.

In a statement, the family said that Minetti left a "legacy of humility, hospitality, cowboy ethics and service to others."

We couldn't agree more.

**Superman is not coming to Ventura County**

BY HUGH J. RALSTON

So this is what a revolution looks like: Protests in the streets, demonstrations in the halls of power, legislators on the run — and all going viral on YouTube. The 2011 revolution in state capitals is emerging across the U.S. as public budgets collide with a stubborn slowness in job growth, the end of federal stimulus support and conflicting demands on the public purse: spend more to grow the economy now or spend less to avoid shackling future generations with crushing debt.

This revolution may be the most significant restructuring of the social contract in a generation. And from the left and the right, the debate is framed around the role of government spending — which in a representative democracy rightly belongs among the people's representatives. Elections do have consequences.

But when the consequences of these policy choices hit home in our communities, the magnitude of this restructuring becomes clear. It is also where our responsibility in managing our common future is being tested.

We at the Ventura County Community Foundation, or VCCF, believe community philanthropy has important roles in such debates, though not necessarily as advocates of specific policy priorities. We believe in impartial research that provides reliable information on what is at stake. We believe in investing in leadership skills to ensure the nonprofit sector succeeds in what only it can do, and we believe our responsibility is to steward charitable capital to protect donor intent and to bring new donors and their contributions to bear on issues that matter to our region.

In the recent update to the State of the Region Report, the Ventura County Civic Alliance — a VCCF initiative — shared research that identifies troubling local trends, including:

- Women with bachelor's degrees in Ventura County earn 50 percent of what similarly educated men earn.
- Single households headed by women, and families with children, lead the increase in local poverty rates. Proposed CalWORKS cutbacks fall disproportionately on single mothers by reducing monies for job training critical to improving their future.
- While dramatic increases in test scores validate progress in local schools, the high school dropout rate has almost doubled since 2001.
- Even as local housing values plummet, only 40 percent of our county can afford today's prices. Proposed redirection of local redevelopment funds to Sacramento will diminish even further funds for affordable housing projects.

One thing is pretty sure: Superman is not coming from Sacramento or Washington to help Ventura County address the impact of these and other challenges. So-

lutions will need to be created by those of us here.

Ventura County's nonprofit sector performs vital work, sustaining the safety net that keeps many neighbors from a complete breakdown in the face of economic reversals and/or catastrophic illnesses. Local nonprofits provide the glue that binds our neighborhoods, and the leaders who guide these organizations hold survival in their hands, all the while engaging a new generation of volunteers to step up.

But for our communities to thrive, our nonprofits must survive. VCCF's Center for Nonprofit Leadership remains a critical investment in our region, delivering nonprofit leaders the tools to be more effective. In some cases, they are high-tech tools such as social media; in other cases they are old-fashioned but still effective high-touch donor cultivation strategies.

Another essential tool in these times of relentless change is charitable capital, harnessed to sustain the solutions we develop locally. Last year, some \$3.5 million from designated and donor-advised funds at VCCF helped nonprofits meet the needs of Ventura County resi-

dents. Donors, working as families and as individuals and partnering in field-of-interest funds, have pooled capital that can, through grants, change lives.

VCCF scholarship funds change lives by investing \$1 million last year in talented students and helping them acquire skills that will pay off throughout a lifetime of changes — to their families, their communities and the organizations they will lead and serve.

Other forms of charitable capital are making a difference, starting with every donation to a local nonprofit. Faith communities are stepping up as well, providing ways for individuals to take their faith commitments into local neighborhoods.

The scale of this renegotiation of the social contract in California will be settled over the next several months, and the impact will be real: Less money from the taxpayers will mean fewer helped by the government. The gap between the needs and the resources has existed as long as people gather together. But we still have the power to determine how we close that gap: with charitable dollars, sweat equity and the generosity of neighbors who step up. Local nonprofits will play an important role.

There is plenty to do. Your community foundation and other local nonprofits are ready to work with others to harness the power of community to address the challenges Ventura County will face this decade.

Let's start with a resolution that we can do something together that matters. It can be done, and we can do it here. Come join us.

• *Hugh J. Ralston is President & CEO of the Ventura County Community Foundation.*

**Viewpoint****HOW TO CONTRIBUTE**

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