

Statement to Peralta Board Workshop

Nov. 10, 2011

Good evening trustees. I am Helene Lecar, recently retired chair of the Measure A committee, and I'm grateful to be able to share in your deliberations this evening. I'm here tonight speaking as a member of the League of Women Voters of Berkeley, Albany and Emeryville. As you know, for 2 years, in 2001-02, our League studied first Berkeley City College, then called Vista College, and then the Peralta District and came to a consensus agreeing that

§ The Peralta Board should improve its fiscal management by tightening oversight and establishing board-approved standards, procedures and reporting requirements for contracts and for expenses incurred by trustees on District business and

§ The Peralta Board should enhance its interactions with and accountability to the general community. The Board should report fully to the public on fiscal matters.

The traumatic experiences of the past three years, and the substance of this evening's meeting address many of our concerns about the effectiveness of Board oversight of the District's fiscal management processes. The willingness of the Board to report fully to the wider Peralta community about fiscal matters, however, is still an issue that has not been addressed.

We are sitting this evening at a restaurant in Alameda to look at very serious matters on very short notice in a place that is difficult of access by public transportation, probably unfamiliar to most of the District's students, and certainly not likely to draw anyone outside of the immediate Peralta family. There will be no PTV coverage of this meeting, nor will the information available here be listed on Granicus. A person who isn't here would be hard-pressed to learn about what we will be discussing. That is, on its face, not adequate reporting to the public.

At the same time, our League President, Sherry Smith, received a letter at the League office dated November 3, soliciting League input on the possibility of entering a measure for funding District programs on the June 2012 ballot.

The letter lacks details on what the measure might say. Since it specifically mentions support of program, it cannot be a bond, but the source of revenue is not given.

§ Is the District proposing a parcel tax? What will the lifetime of the funding measure be?

§ How much new revenue is the District seeking? The letter mentions a \$50 million shortfall in our current budget. Does this include what may be automatic "trigger" cuts that the Governor has proposed if state revenues are inadequate.

§ And what will such a revenue stream support? There are generic verbs of improving and maintaining program components mentioned in the letter, but again, no specifics. Will the money support added faculty positions? Counselors? Grant writers? A presentation by Against Cuts has indicated that 37% of the District's General Fund is currently spent on central administrative expenses. We will need to know much more about how that money will be directed before we can decide whether or not it will be the best use of our beleaguered taxpayers' money.

§ We in the Berkeley City College' community are particularly concerned about the absence of any information about proposed allocation of funds among the colleges. Enrollment at the College has grown far faster than expected in the original projections behind our new building size. It is clear that our existing Measure A funds will have to underwrite the acquisition of new space in Berkeley if the District is to fulfill its commitment to the State Chancellor that was an essential component of our study a decade ago. Our consensus on that matter is very clear:

For Vista Community College to continue to prosper within the Peralta Community College District and appropriately serve the community, Vista should receive sufficient resources from the District to achieve overall equity relative to the other colleges in the district. Equity should be measured by the District's commitment of resources to achieve the following goals:

1. Timely construction of a permanent facility with adequate space and equipment to meet the needs of current and projected enrollment
2. Dependable, proportional funding based on stated criteria to develop and maintain Vista's programs
3. An appropriate balance of authority between the central District and the colleges.

§ The District's history and current structure are also sources of concern. Public support for our community colleges is powerful and widespread, but the District's historic inability to put its own fiscal house in order until threatened with legal action and de-accreditation casts doubt on its ability to manage scarce resources wisely. The prolonged, costly and as yet unproductive quest for a new chancellor also destabilizes the District's ability to make long-range plans. The question of voter confidence in District management will loom large when citizens are asked to make difficult pocketbook decisions at the ballot box.

Not all is doubt. The League is eager to work with the District to develop a sound ballot measure that will address these questions with adequate safeguards and specificity sufficient to enable our communities to weather the current economic storms and maintain the high quality of the District's educational programs in a manner we can all be proud of.