

City Hall hits panic mode about Valley

By Kimit Muston

I spent last week weaving around all those big orange trucks and those little orange cones that have magically appeared on Valley streets.

They are city trucks doing street repairs, filling potholes and trying to mend political fences with asphalt. They're here to stay — at least until the Nov. 5 election on secession.

Until then these trucks and cones are visible proof that Mayor Jimmy Hahn and the rest of the City Hall mafia actually love those of us in the Valley, like we were family, close immediate family who are pressing a loaded pistol right at their wallet.

Ain't love grand?

Among the asphalt fumes you can smell the faint whiffs of panic. If necessity is the mother of invention then the mother of panic must be something sold by Bandini. Change is in the wind, brother, and City Hall is passing as much as possible.

On the Basin side, Mayor Hahn is telling folks that if City Hall loses that \$121 million in excess taxes it squeezes out of the Valley every year Los Angeles will go bankrupt, while on the Valley side he's promising us City Hall will stop overtaxing us. Cross its little heart and hope to die.

But a dollar can't be on both sides of the hill at once even if a politician can be.

The one certainty is that the morning of Nov. 6, either City Hall will be going on a bureaucratic crash diet or those big orange trucks will be showing the Valley their exhaust pipes. Three will get you five the city planning office has already assigned those trucks to their November jobs — all within sight of City Hall.

Well, at least we got the streets repaired. It only took 20 years, a special bill pushed through Sacramento and a massive political movement before City Hall finally broke open its hidden vault of pothole filler and crosswalk paint. I guess if we want the drainage on San Fernando Road fixed we'll have to sacrifice a virgin.

The mayor has been touting neighborhood councils as an alternative to Valley and Hollywood secession. The idea is that every little clump of citizens and businesses would fill out extensive paperwork, hold meetings and elections, and send a representative downtown where he or she would compete to be heard over all the other chumps elected by all the other clumps.

Twenty or 30 neighborhood councils are better, according to Mayor Hahn, than "Balkanizing" Los Angeles with secession. And these neighborhood councils are dependent for funding on the City Council.

Remember, too, the councils have no legal authority beyond the right to nag. We already know how effective that is with the City Council.

Council members are rushing to offer an alternative to secession — a borough system, or B.S. for short.

Freshmen Councilwomen Wendy Greuel and Janice Hahn want a B.S. plan on the ballot in November.

Under this plan — as was originally promised to the Valley in 1915 and to Hollywood and Watts and La Canada and East Los Angeles and San Pedro at various times over the past century — the City Charter would be amended to allow sections of town to run their own affairs, except for those departments best run citywide, such as police, fire, trash pickup, street repair, building inspection, health care and tax collection.

Oh, you won't actually be voting for boroughs but in favor of a "citizens commission," which will then draft a proposal for boroughs that will be considered and modified by the mayor and the City Council. Then, maybe, possibly, in May of 2003, maybe, possibly, voted on by the public.

I don't know what bothers me the most about this borough idea: either it's the assumption voters are dumb enough to believe this is a real proposal or — no, that's what really bothers me.

Council President Alex Padilla wants to immediately create a commission to study (government's favorite word) ways to restructure city government, including boroughs, but, of course, would put nothing before voters.

Well, I have my own suggestion. Forget all those bulky and unwieldy bureaucratic solutions to L.A.'s bureaucratic mess. I have a simple way the city of Los Angeles can avoid secession: surrender.

Unconditional surrender by City Hall.

The mafia should lay down the red tape and run up the white flag above that newly renovated headquarters, and we'll drive through the Cahuenga Pass in our own big orange trucks and take over.

We may hold some bureaucratic crimes trials, but on the bright side City Hall won't have to fix our streets ever again. I promise.

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