

County Taxpayers are Soaked Again

Like any festering sore or cancerous growth, the annual Cap-to-Cap junket sponsored by the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce continues unabated. Placer County taxpayers increasingly pay for elected and appointed officials' excursions to Washington, D.C. The rationale for using public funds is that contacts made through the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce generates a greater share of the pork barrel for Placer County projects. Although no one has demonstrated that the junkets have not resulted in additional allocations to Placer county, no one has proved that the trips have generated one cent of return to Placer County.

The 2005 delegation included 30 public officials who purportedly represented Placer County taxpayers. The delegation is up from the 21 representatives in both 2000 and 2001. A compilation of participants listed on the distributions for 2000, 2001 and 2005 are listed in the accompanying graphic.

Only Sacramento County with 81 supplicants had more public officials in the 2005 delegation than Placer County. Other counties in the region were more careful in expending public money. El Dorado County had 13, Yolo County had 12, and Sutter County had 1.

The compilation indicates that taxpayers directly paid approximately 40% of the cost of the junket (see graphic for delegates by category).

Participation by Placer County officials in the annual Cap-to-Cap trip is a disservice to Placer County taxpayers because any benefit most likely could be effected without leaving California. Placer County is in Sacramento County's shadow in any conferences and the trip could be made more cheaply without the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

The Cap-to-Cap has little benefit because any public official who may be contacted in Washington is likely to be influenced by Placer county supplicants frequently is available in California. Other Washington denizens may listen to Placer County supplicants to be polite, but their hearts are with their own constituents, not with Placer County voters. Our own elected officials can better negotiate pieces of pork than representatives of Placer County, its cities, or its special districts.

Placer County delegates have little voice in Cap-to-Cap whose agenda is set by Sacramento interests primarily by the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce. The 2005 banquets exemplify the dominance of Sacramento. One for a deceased representative from a Sacramento congressional district, another for a senator from an eastern state who is reported to be a 2008 candidate for President. According to reports, the most attention Placer County delegates received was to solicit support for Placer County to help pay for new arena for Kings.

The trip is also overly expensive. The Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce charges \$3,000 for each attendee. All right, this is an exaggeration. Like any good huckster, the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce has set the price at approximately \$2,950 to \$2,995. In any case, any one who might spend his own money on the same trip could make it for \$2,000, a few hundred dollars less if he accepted slightly less luxurious accommodations.

If any justification could be made for representatives from Placer County to travel to Washington, it would be as a delegation of Placer County interests. Placer County on its own can attract as much, if not more, interest as it does as part—a small part—of a regional effort. If nothing else the trip would be less costly than one sponsored by the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

—Dan Sokol

SPECIAL ELECTION: JUNE 7, 2005

MEASURE

RECOMMENDATION

D

Placer Hills Union School District: Proposes a \$48 parcel tax, not a property tax, on all parcels in the district. A parcel tax levies on all parcels, including empty lots, which a property tax does not. Student enrollment has been dropping rapidly, down 19% since 1996. Mismanagement of the district has not down-sized to accommodate this, leaving high overhead costs. The school district has adequate funds to continue ALL current student programs but really seeks immediate funds to restore its reserves without awaiting a proposed state school budget increase of 7%, due next year. **Do not reward mismanagement with more money to mismanage.**

NO

Slaying the "Gerrymander"

A number of proposals to redistrict boundaries for congressional and legislative races are marching toward the election ballot, either a special election this year or the 2006 primary.

Governor Schwarzenegger set off this stampede with his "Year for reform" speech earlier this year. The purpose is to make more districts competitive and not just slam-dunk perpetration of the same officeholders terms.

In April, Ted Costa of the Peoples Advocate (initiated the governor recall in 2003) wrapped up signature gathering for an initiative to put redistricting in the hands of retired judges. The legislature now adjust the voting boundaries which traditionally occurs every ten years following the census tabulation.

California Chamber of Commerce President Allan Zaremborg has a similar plan that has greater detail in how the judges be chosen and how they would operate. Signatures for the measure are still being gathered.

Robert W. Harris, a Sacramento lobbyist, has submitted three initiatives that closely mirror Costa's and Zaremborg's. Each are called the "California Fair Voting and Equal Representation Act." Only slight differences separate them, such as requiring a panel of four judges rather than three.

Meanwhile, the legislature is into the act. Senator Lowenthal has introduced a measure, SCA3, that calls for a panel

of ten retired judges to help legislators select five California voters to carry out the boundary selection. Governor Schwarzenegger supports SCA3 and Costa's endeavor. The governor has also asked Assembly Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy to carry two pieces of legislation on his behalf that would hand the job to an independent redistricting commission.

The legislature, in its "wisdom," has, over the years, carved out some strange voting districts in an effort to corral voters of their choosing. Some of their districts are snakelike or resemble animals such as lizards. This practice began in the late 1700s when Eldridge Gerry (U.S. Vice President, 1813-14) was governor of Massachusetts, and Gerry helped redraw a district that resembled a salamander. The practice was labeled "gerrymander" and has continued to describe odd-looking voter districts.

A recent poll of 800 likely voters, conducted in April by the Rose Institute of Claremont McKenna College, showed 13 percent agreeing that it is a conflict of interest for legislators to draw their own district boundaries.

Whether it appears on a special election ballot this year or on the primary ballot in 2006 or is hashed-out in the legislature, it appears that redistricting reform will happen. Be concerned—the validity of your vote is at stake.

—Wally Reemelin

PARTICIPANT COMPILATION FOR 2000, 2001 AND 2005

	2000	2001	2005
Placer County	5	6	8
Placer County Water Agency	4	4	3
Placer County Transportation Commission	2	1	1
City of Auburn	0	1	2
City of Colfax	0	0	1
City of Lincoln	3	4	5
City of Rocklin	0	0	3
City of Roseville	7	5	7
TOTAL:	21	21	30

COMPILATION OF DELEGATES BY CATEGORY FOR 2000, 2001 AND 2005

	2000	2001	2005		2000	2001	2005
Government	77	94	137	Travel Support	5	4	0
Private Enterprise	64	70	114	Media	0	0	3
Health Providers	13	15	20	Unable to Categorize	3	10	27
Educational	18	18	13	TOTAL:	188	231	346
Nonprofit	18	20	32				



"I look forward to the day when sacking and looting can be accomplished with just a few adjustments to accounting."

In Memoriam

Nancy Merle
Shirley Betteridge

Political Ambition

*I've never before yearned so much
To hold office, state or national.
Of late I'm perhaps a touch
Insane with desire, or irrational.
The lure isn't what I might do
For my countrymen, winning
their praise,*

*It's not being famous, it's true—
It's voting myself a raise.*

Richard Armour