

September 19, 2006

Hon. Bob Foster
Mayor
City of Long Beach
333 W. Ocean Blvd., 14th Floor
Long Beach, CA 90802

Re: Proposed \$2.1 million supplement to the salaries
of Long Beach police officers

Dear Mister Mayor:

I write in support of your proposal to allocate a \$2.1 million setaside fund, representing the first half of a two-year payout by Sempra Energy, as a FY2007 supplement to the salaries of the men and women of the Long Beach Police Department.

While the city currently is covered through 2009 by a contract with officers, these funds, in combination with structural revenue growth and the expected second half of Sempra's payout, should help to show the members of the police force that your administration takes as its top priority the fair treatment of public safety professionals.

In meetings held with officers and reported in the Press-Telegram, leaders of the Police Officers Association seemed to meet with skepticism over the size of the proposed supplemental funding. Granted, having endured five years without any pay increase at all and with money so tight this decade, largely due to the loss of \$40 million annually from the passage in 2000 of a citywide finance ballot measure, it is no surprise that there is discontent over dollars within the rank-and-file.

Concern by officers over the size is an important factor and will play itself out over time, if, as has been said, other departments are able to lure veterans with 10, 15 and 20 years or more of experience from Long Beach. But while a 4-points-over-three-years plan may be modest, it does combine with the 21 percent contract and the incremental longevity pay to create movement in the right direction. Passage of this supplement to the contract is a good thing, and you deserve praise for putting this funding into the hands of rank-and-file officers.

This supplemental funding and the \$1.3 million that you also put towards library operations are important symbols of your dedication as Mayor to keeping the promises you made in the recent campaign. And each of these supplementals is the right step at the right time, but it is also clear from comments by the POA, budget staff, Eleanor Schmidt and others that these dollars represent only the beginning of where our city needs to go.

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I applaud you, sir, for putting these allocations forward and for a promising start to your administration. But I believe that the lasting effects of the recession of the early 1990s, the dollar grabs by the state through ERAF, the decimation of our economy due to the loss of shipbuilding and aircraft manufacture and -- most directly to the dollar flow in the budget -- the passage of the 2000 citywide finance measure all combine to leave the fiscal state of Long Beach in a precarious situation.

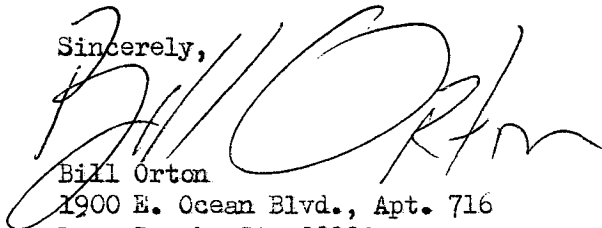
The 2000 measure depleted the General Fund of forty million dollars annually, money that flowed into the treasury in a predictable way. The drastic cuts over the five previous budgets, the loss of 400 staff jobs, the reliance on risky oil revenues to make up the shortfalls all come about from the halving of the utility users' tax. While the ten percent rate was an onerous level, the fact remains that using a ballot measure as the mechanism to set fiscal policy for a full-service city held dire consequences, not the least of which is that the leaders of the city no longer have the flexibility to deal with urgent crises, such as the flow of officers from our police force or wholesale rollbacks in city services.

I believe the public needs to hear that while this budget is solid and your supplementals for library and police are positive steps, that our city finances remain in deep challenge. The ability of staff and council to have eliminated the structural deficit of \$100 million over five years is a tremendous accomplishment, but that we continue to stand at the brink of crisis, largely because a ballot measure robbed leaders of the ability to adjust the bottom line, which is really what leaders are called upon to do.

We don't need to return to the days of a ten percent utility user tax, but it is time to begin the discussion of striking down the language of the 2000 measure, restoring the ability of the council to act -- as Doug Drummond and his colleagues did -- when crisis calls, and to let leaders responsibly deal with citywide finance as they are elected to do.

Congratulations on this supplemental spending, Mr. Mayor. I urge the members of council to adopt your proposal and hope that it creates the sense among police rank-and-file that they are dealing with leaders who care about keeping every officer.

Sincerely,



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