

Hey Richard Alarcon, It's the Ratepayers' Money!

Details Written by Jack Humphreville 04 Jan 2013



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LA WATCHDOG - Councilmember Richard Alarcon does not understand that Ratepayers' hard earned money that is forked over to the Department of Water and Power and the Bureau of Sanitation is to be used to provide water, power and sewer services to the residents of Los Angeles and not to fund his troubled pet project, the out of the way Children's Museum situated in the Hansen Dam complex in the far northern reaches of the City.

In his December 26 letter to The Daily News (see below), the arrogant Alarcon does not make any distinction between the Ratepayers' money and the City's coffers. He feels it is the City Council's absolute right to loot DWP and the Bureau of Sanitation to help the City avoid the repayment of \$18 million in State grants if the ill conceived Museum does not open by March of 2015.

Of course, this is in addition to the \$250 million transfer from DWP to the City. Alarcon also refers to a public/private partnership where the very successful Discovery Science Center of Orange County would operate this center so children would have the opportunity to learn about "science, environmentalism, recycling, and conservation."

As part of the deal, both Alarcon and Mayor Villaraigosa expected the Discovery Science Center to finance this boondoggle through corporate sponsorships and charitable donations.

However, this was not to be, resulting in the desperate Alarcon and his cronies on the City Council putting the arm on DWP and the Bureau of Sanitation to "invest" \$7.5 million in this dubious deal.

(Note: Andrea Alarcon, the 33 year old daughter of Richard Alarcon and the politically appointed President of the Board of Public Works, oversees the Bureau of Sanitation.)

This last minute deal was rushed through the Herb Wesson-led City Council in less than two weeks without any review by the Energy and Environment Committee chaired by the complicit Jose Huizar, or the Arts, Parks, Health and Aging Committee, consisting of not only of Alarcon, but Council Members LaBonge and Reyes, sponsors of various pet projects financed by the DWP piggy bank.

The inability of the experienced executives from Discovery Science Center to attract outside money also calls into question the very viability of the poorly located Children's Museum.

For openers, the fledgling Children's Museum will be competing with well established, financially stable, centrally located venues that have proven programs, such as the California Science Center and the Natural History Museum at Exposition Park, the Page Museum at Rancho La Brea Tar Pits, and Kidspace Children's Museum at the Rose Bowl.

Over the next five years, the Children's Museum expects to lose \$5 million, an amount that is probably understated. And since these losses will be footed by our cash strapped City, the Museum will need to cut costs, impacting the quality of its yet to be defined programs.

Furthermore, within the next five years, DWP and the Bureau of Sanitation will need to "invest" additional funds to renew and refresh these exhibits in order to compete with their well endowed competitors and keep up with the changes in technology.

While Alarcon and his co-conspirators will wax eloquently about the merits of this \$7.5 million investment, there is no market analysis to support the claims that this is a good investment relative to other venues or other forms of advertising.

For example, would sponsoring an exhibit at the California Science Center be a better investment given its established reputation and central location, especially since DWP and the Bureau of Sanitation would not have to pay for the completion of the building?

In a nutshell, this deal is no bargain. It stinks.

Not only are Ratepayer funds being looted by Alarcon and his scheming buddies on the City Council, but it is an uneconomic investment in a financially unstable, partially built museum with no track record, located in a flood plain in the far reaches of the City, at a cost that would lead to immediate firing of any advertising executive who even dared to mention this ridiculous scam.

Of course, this deal that was hatched in the putrid bowels of City Hall raises a number of questions in advance of the March 5 City elections.

Why are wannabe mayors, Eric Garcetti and Controller Wendy Greuel, not coming to the rescue of the Ratepayers?

Where is wannabe Controller Dennis Zine, a member of the Energy and Environment Committee that oversees our Department of Water and Power?

And do you trust Richard Alarcon and his cronies on the City Council?

While our ethically challenged elected officials will not rescind this blatant theft of Ratepayer money, we can express our dissatisfaction on March 5 by voting against any candidate who supported this raid on the Ratepayers of our Department of Water and Power and the Bureau of Sanitation.

And we can also hit the thieving Elected Elite in the wallet by voting NO on the half cent increase in the City's sales tax to a job killing rate of 9.5%, one of the highest in the nation.

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Letters to the Editor of The Daily News for Wednesday, Dec. 26, 2012

Councilman Richard Alarcon Defends Museum:

Re "City of Los Angeles keeps throwing our cash into children's museum money pit" (Editorial, Dec. 19):

Just two years ago, the newspaper wrote "for the good of the children, the taxpayers and Los Angeles as a whole, here's hoping the Children's Museum can get the money needed to open and thrive." The 2010 editorial also reminded readers that LA would have to "return \$18 million in grants if the museum didn't open" and concluded that "Los Angeles leaders deserve credit for piecing together this tentative deal." Now, the Daily News has done an about-face and is attacking the same project it once supported, ignoring the millions of dollars of cost to the city that would be incurred if a Children's Museum is not opened. Let's be clear. The city was put into this difficult situation because of decisions made before I returned to the council, when the Children's Museum building was completed without proper funding mechanisms in place to ensure a successful operation.

The benefits of having a world-class education center in the San Fernando Valley are obvious, but when we are faced with having to repay \$18 million if we don't open the project, the importance of finishing what was started becomes even more clear. That is why, just as the 2010 Daily News editorial suggests, Mayor Villaraigosa and I have worked to create a public-private partnership with the Discovery Science Center to manage and operate the center and bring this project to fruition. This partnership will not only allow us to finally realize the opportunity for children and families across the region to learn about science, environmentalism, recycling and conservation, but it will save taxpayers from having to pay the \$18 million our city will be on the hook for if the project doesn't open. The Children's Museum has been a long time coming, and I am excited that after a long and difficult process, families in the Valley will soon be able to enjoy this world-class center.

- Richard Alarcon, Los Angeles

Richard Alarcon represents the 7th District on the Los Angeles City Council

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(Jack Humphreville writes LA Watchdog for CityWatch. He is the President of the DWP Advocacy Committee, the Ratepayer Advocate for the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council, and a Neighborhood Council Budget Advocate. Humphreville is the publisher of the Recycler Classifieds -- www.recycler.com. He can be reached at: lajack@gmail.com)

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CityWatch
Vol 11 Issue 2
Pub: Jan 4, 2013

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