

OPINION



EDITORIALS

Ambulance plan speeds ahead

After a bit of wrangling, City Council votes to cut costs, improve quality.

The Long Beach City Council made the right call this week when the council voted to streamline the Long Beach Fire Department's ambulance services, albeit in a confusing display of political theater.

It all started earlier in the week, when council members Gerrie Schipske, Al Austin and Steve Neal submitted a memo asking for a delay in the fire department's "rapid medic deployment model" until fiscal year 2015, which begins this October.

Currently, the city divides its ambulance services between "basic" and "advanced" life-support ambulances. Advanced life-support ambulances carry two paramedics, while basic ambulances contain two non-sworn emergency medical technicians.

Under the new plan, the city would remove that needless division and instead, staff all ambulances with one paramedic and one EMT along with adding one paramedic to all 17 fire engine companies, which only nine engine companies now have. The plan, city documents show, is estimated to save the city nearly \$150,000 per month.

The three council members apparently arrived at the dubious conclusion that it was unnecessary to achieve cost savings, and potentially improve quality, sooner rather than later, because the fire department was on budget without the cuts. They asked for the delay in the deployment model until the department's finances could be explored further during October budget talks.

In contrast, the change in deployment is supported by Long

Beach Fire officials, including Long Beach Fire Chief Mike Du-Ree, though the Register reports that the city's firefighter union believes the change will "reduce the level of care the department provides."

However, considering that under the new plan the first-responding fire engine will have a paramedic on-board, it seems hard to believe it wasn't the loss of 21 union members under the new plan that factored more into the union's opposition.

Undeterred though, the three council members pushed for the delay at Tuesday's city council meeting, but some wrangling by other council members assured its defeat. "First, there was a motion to delay the plan. Then, District 3 Councilman Gary DeLong made a substitute motion to effectively derail Schipske's, Austin's and Neal's plan to push back the start," the Register reported.

The substitute motion ended in a tie, due to the absence of Mayor-elect Robert Garcia. According to City Attorney Charles Parkin, the failure of the motions allowed for the changes to continue.

After surviving the last fiscal downturn by cutting many city services nearly to the bone, it is worrisome that the council came so close to backing away from fiscal prudence. There is never a wrong time to start preparing for the next fiscal crisis through the creation of a more efficient government.

The next council would be wise to continue to explore even more ways to trim and improve services, perhaps by looking into contracting out paramedic services altogether.

Jump-starting prosperity

By JARED MEYER
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

New York Times reporter Jennifer Medina told a heart-wrenching story about Mary Carmen Acosta and her husband, Sebastian Plancarte, who lost their jobs and their home and now make their living east of Los Angeles, selling popsicles. Her article points out many hardships faced by some of California's residents – lack of jobs, high cost of energy and low economic mobility.

Medina suggested that California's low-skilled workers, many of whom are immigrants, have been left behind during the economic recovery and need more government help. But the Golden State's problems are self-inflicted. In Texas, which also has a large immigrant population, economic growth is faster, unemployment is lower, and jobs are plentiful.

Toyota recently announced it would move its U.S. operations headquarters from California to Texas. The makers of Sriracha hot sauce were at risk of being forced out of California, and were being aggressively courted by Texas and other states. What state (besides California) would drive out job-creating businesses? These will not be the last companies to make the move from high-tax, high-regulation California, which was ranked 47th for business outlook this year by the American Legislative Exchange Council.

California could drill in its Monterey Shale oil reserves – instead of banning exploration, as the Los Angeles City Council has moved to do. California could follow in North Dakota's footsteps in energy production, and Sebastian could be earning \$120,000 a year in the oil- and-gas sector, as many North Dakota residents are doing.

Misguided energy policies in California also lead to higher prices. Despite the hardship higher energy costs bring, California continues to raise its Renewable Portfolio Standards. The state's electricity companies have to provide an increasing portion of their power from green energy sources. By 2020, 33 percent of energy generated must be from renewable sources.

California's tax system is hostile to new business creation. Its top individual rate is 13.3 percent – the highest in the nation. Many small businesses file as sole proprietorships or partnerships, so high personal tax rates hinder job creation. California also has a flat corporate tax rate of 8.84 percent – the 10th-highest in the nation.

Many states offer roadmaps to improvement. If California continues to resist common-sense economic reforms, one piece of advice could help Sebastian and Mary Carmen – move east.

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ECONOMY

Don't settle for the 'new normal'

Set the achievement bar high, and the U.S. will meet it.

By WILLIAM JEYNES
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

For many high school youth it is graduation time, and they are headed into the workplace or into a college education with declarations that the U.S. is in steady, and yet sudden, economic decline. Our political and economic leaders proclaim that youth must adapt to the reality of "the new normal" of anemic economic growth, poor job prospects and a college education that may or may not be worth the sacrifice.

The words "the new normal," first coined by PIMCO's Bill Gross, the nation's foremost investment manager as measured in gross investment holdings, solemnly echo in the minds of many Americans and can be downright depressing. President Barack Obama, Gov. Jerry Brown, and countless leaders of both political parties are cautiously lowering expectations. Ronald Brownstein of the National Journal reports that, "a slim majority of Americans now define getting ahead as not falling behind ... rather than the traditional definition of steady increases in pay and income."

My work as a quantitative researcher and policy advisor has led many to the conclusion that Americans are better than this grim scenario and that it is high time for our nation's leaders to step up to the plate and reignite a vision of high expectations in the minds and hearts of Americans.

The Chinese Christian philosopher Watchman Nee argued just the reverse of what we hear today. He believed "normal" should be an elevated state of high expectations of the love and self-discipline that is possible if we gear our hearts and lives in the right direction. Our nation has in many respects lost its vision and optimism, and it is time for the leaders of this nation and state

to reinvigorate that vision, so it will be resurrected in the lives of our high school graduates.

The U.S. Congress just released a report that is representative of America's lack of vision. The report makes it clear that this nation had lost its vision for space exploration. The review bemoaned the fact that NASA is so underfunded that the U.S. can no longer expect to safely land humans on Mars without the help of China or another cluster of economic powers, and called for the release of more funds for NASA. An abundant number of today's technologies were made possible by space exploration. In 1962 John F. Kennedy gave his famous Moon Speech at Rice Stadium in which he declared, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

An inspiring vision like this is now a distant memory. His words were spoken when the U.S. trailed the Russians in the space race. Nevertheless, Kennedy stated, "To be sure, we are behind. ... But we do not intend to stay behind, and in this decade we will make up and move ahead." Kennedy continued by asserting, "I realize that this is in some measure an act of faith and vision." We again need that faith and vision today.

Our young adults are the nation's future and quantitative research indicates that high expectations are one of the most important predictors of future success for students. This research indicates that the most salient component of pa-

rental involvement is high and reasonable expectations. Similar studies indicate that one of the reasons why the achievement gap is narrower at faith-based schools than at public schools is due to high expectations. At faith-based schools



AP

A NASA test vehicle holds equipment for landing large payloads on Mars in the Missile Assembly Building at the US Navy's Pacific Missile Range Facility in Kauai, Hawaii.

there is a common adage spoken: "God doesn't make junk" and the students know they have a purpose.

As Americans and Californians we need to redefine "normal" to mean raised expectations, not lowered ones. We need to ask our leaders to do the same. Young adults will tend to rise to the level that the bar is set for them, and we must have the vision to believe that this nation and its people can again rise to the occasion and accomplish much and move forward in every sense of the word.

It is time to return to Watchman Nee's heightened sense of normal that rises above the current discouraging use of the term. Our graduates can do it if they lay hold of their purpose and learn how to have high expectations and aspirations and realize them.

William Jeynes is professor of Education at CSULB.



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