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## **Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation**

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*Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.*

**PRESENTATIONS BY  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor, 3rd District  
Los Angeles County**

**April 5, 2012**

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### **Overview of Los Angeles County**

Chairman Barcelona greeted Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky for Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and welcomed him while turning it over for Chairman Yaroslavsky to speak to the Economy and Efficiency Commission.

### **County Overview**

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that he is a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, representing the western part of Los Angeles County and a constituency of two million people. He stated that he was elected to the board in 1994 and has been re-elected four times, most recently in 2010.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that more than three decades ago, in his mid-20's, he took his first oath of office as a member of the Los Angeles City Council (1975-94) to which he was elected and re-elected six times. He stated that he is currently in his 60's and one of the County's longest-serving elected officials. He stated that he'd like to think that constituents have given him the privilege of serving them on the council and the Board of Supervisors because they know he has consistently put their needs first. He stated that there is no doubt, many of them find the world of government, particularly L.A. County government, forbidding and complicated, a place where the rich can pay lobbyists to push the levers of power while the poor are forced to rely on the integrity of a system that, to them, seems unremittingly rigged against them.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that Los Angeles County government is sometimes frustratingly flawed, with consequences that can mean life or death for those who rely on its safety-net services. He stated that it also can be powerfully effective, even transformative, in the lives of those it serves, from vulnerable children to the frail elderly. He stated that from his vantage point in the arena, he knows that the real story of Los Angeles County government is more layered than the image that often emerges in the news accounts that shape public perceptions. He stated that in recent times, that picture has become even more one-dimensional as the rise of the Internet has delivered a serious financial blow to the mainstream media, forcing them to thin the ranks of reporters, including those who cover our local political institutions. He stated that for the

most part, the coverage they continued to offer is important but is simply too sparse to provide a true understanding of the breadth of issues that confront us or of the people who take to heart their roles as public servants.

### **Homelessness in Los Angeles County**

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that in a tucked-away conference room in the Hall of Administration, in March of 2011, history was being made. He stated that years of splintered efforts were giving way to a commitment among more than a dozen Los Angeles County agencies to end together our civic shame of homelessness.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that the occasion was the inaugural meeting of the Interdepartmental Council on Homelessness, a body created through the Board of Supervisors' motion authored by Mark Ridley-Thomas and himself. He stated that despite the bureaucratic-sounding name, the council will make a measurable impact on homelessness because, for the first time, we're pursuing a clearly defined county strategy of providing permanent supportive housing with vital services to those most likely to perish on our streets. He stated that in other words, if you want to end homelessness, then you must provide a home.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that the Board of Supervisors knows from their own experience that this "housing first" approach works. He stated that back in 2007, in that same Hall of Administration conference room, the Supervisors launched a pilot program called Project 50, championed by his office to house and provide supportive services to Skid Row's 50 most chronically homeless people. Unlike earlier, narrower efforts, this one required coordination among multiple county agencies with varying responsibilities for this extraordinarily difficult population. He stated that the goal was not only to save lives, but to save money, too, by reducing the high public cost of emergency room care and incarceration historically associated with chronically homeless individuals.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that since the successful launch of project 50, the concept has been replicated throughout his 3rd District in Santa Monica, Venice, Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley. He stated that the United Way has adopted the approach for its ambitious "Home for Good" campaign, as has the Department of Veterans Affairs with its own Project 60 in collaboration with his office. He stated that in all, more than 500 people have been placed in permanent supportive housing since the initiation of Project 50.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that now, with the establishment of the interdepartmental council, Los Angeles County is finally aligning its will and existing resources behind the housing-first model, offering real hope to the most vulnerable among the 51,000 souls in our county without homes. He stated that there were top officials from such crucial departments in the fight against homelessness such as Mental Health, Children and Family Services, Probation, Health Services, Public Health, Social Services, Community Development, the Superior Court and Sheriff. He stated that we face a huge challenge here, in the nation's epicenter of homelessness. He stated that our vast county bureaucracy is not naturally inclined toward this kind of multi-agency plan of attack, one that eliminates barriers and accelerates the time between an idea and its implementation.

### **County Overview**

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that for the past several years, all of our county labor unions have gone without a pay raise. He stated that in the case of our sheriff's deputies, firefighters, lifeguards, probation officers and public defender investigators, it's been three straight years. He stated that with the Board of Supervisors' approval this week of another one-year contract extension with our public safety labor partners, he thought it was time to pause for a moment and say thank you. He stated that the County's employees' willingness to step up to the plate in these difficult times is one of the reasons our county finds itself in much better shape, relatively speaking, than most other municipalities throughout California, as well as the state itself. He stated that the County's unique and healthy partnership with labor, together with the long-running fiscal discipline shown by the Board of Supervisors, is paying dividends as we continue to weather a difficult economic environment. He stated that he is not saying that it's been easy, or painless, but the County has gotten through the financial crisis to date without having to lay off or furlough a single employee. He stated that this is particularly important in these tough times, when demand for the county's

safety net services so as. He stated that thanks go as well to his Board colleagues and to the County's Chief Executive Office, together with our labor partners. He believes the county created an atmosphere of mutual trust, one in which relatively modest sacrifices today help avert far more painful consequences tomorrow.

Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that now, as we see other local and state governments in tumult around us and as we continue to grapple with hard choices in our own budget we can take satisfaction in what we've been able to accomplish together. He stated that all of the County's employees are still working, they're still putting food on their families' tables, and they're still serving the people of Los Angeles County. He stated that in this economic environment, that's a remarkable thing.

## **Questions**

Commissioner Safier asked what the E&E Commission can do to address some of the issues that keep the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors up at night. Chairman Yaroslavsky replied that he doesn't want to give the Commission direction or ideas without really thinking about it before hand. Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that the Commission has done some amazing work throughout the years. He also stated that he would like the Commission to take on projects with intellectual integrity, and not make it political. He stated that one thing the E&E Commission can do is call it as we see it because that is the greatest value of the E&E Commission because the Commission can say things that politicians can't say. He stated that the E&E Commission has a tremendous creditability to the Board and the public.

Commissioner Wolowicz stated that he was a Council Member and Mayor of Rancho Palos Verdes. He stated that there were a number of people that went to Sacramento and chat with the Governor's staff about the devils in the details of the dissolution of the Redevelopment Agencies (RDA's). He stated that as a career-long CPA he knows about the comments about those details by dealing with tax laws and similar issues. He stated that guidance related to that is going to be paramount for a lot of us in the room. He also stated that he finds the County is in a unique position in regards to this and he stated that he would hope that there is fast action on this. He stated that he would encourage any conversations where the County of Los Angeles is large enough to have the Governor's ear and put forth some suggestions on that issue. He stated that he would like to encourage and wish Chairman Yaroslavsky well on that dialogue. Chairman Yaroslavsky replied that that would be his hope. He stated that he is not sure when the appropriate time to do that will be. He stated that this will have to run its course and that he is unaware of how many lawsuits there will be. He stated that Commissioner Wolowicz's point has been well taken--the only fear is that this can go on for a long time. Chairman Yaroslavsky stated that there should be an effort in Sacramento to redefine or to create a new redevelopment concept but it has to be less liberal in flexibility on how to use the money. He stated it should really be used for blighted communities.

Commissioner Safier asked if there are any low hanging fruits the Commission can take on for the Board. Chairman Yaroslavsky replied that he wouldn't say there are any low hanging fruits and if there are, the Board can take care of that but he will think of something he would like to see from the Commission in the near future.

Commissioner Mindlin stated that he would like to thank Chairman Yaroslavsky for his four decades of service. Commissioner Mindlin stated that with respect to the homeless issue, it seems the County takes one step forward and then one and a half steps backward. He stated that there is a building that he has looked at for possible development in Downtown which used to be a Salvation Army building with approximately 70 to 80 bedrooms, and about 2 beds in each room. Chairman Yaroslavsky replied that he is unsure of which building Commissioner Mindlin is referring to, and he asked Commissioner Mindlin to email him the address of the location. Commissioner Mindlin stated that he will gladly send the information because that is where he could see private and public partnerships working.

Chairman Barcelona expressed his appreciation to Chairman Yaroslavsky and invited him to come back to speak to the EEC in the near future and the Commissioners applauded.

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