



## Increase Voter Turnout – Move Elections To November



■ By **GERRIE SCHIPSKE**  
Contributing Writer

According to an extensive study conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), “timing is the single most important factor in determining voter turnout in municipal elections.” In *Municipal Elections in California: Turnout, Timing, and Competition*, authors Zoltan Hajnal, Paul Lewis, and Hugh Louch found that when local elections are held “off-cycle” – meaning at a time there are no other elections such as for governor or president – voter turnout is significantly lower. When local elections are moved on-cycle, voter turnout increases around 30 percent.

Long Beach holds its primary elections every two years in April and general elections in June. State and presidential primaries are in June and general elections are in November of

even years.

In the 2014 April primary in Long Beach, only 14.2 percent of registered voters both-ered to vote. The 2012 primary vote was an even lower 11.3 percent.

The City Charter fixes the time of elections. Voters were asked in 2012 with Measure O to change the charter and make elections coincide with state elections. Measure O was rejected 70,295 (54.31 percent) with No votes to 59,148 (45.69 percent) Yes votes at the strong urging of incumbents who fare much better in lower turnout elections. Arguments against were also made by several Long Beach City College and Long Beach Unified School Board members who did not want their elections moved from the low turnout April and June cycle.

Over in Orange County, all city and school board elections are held in November. Instead of two costly elections – primary and general – voters get to participate in a “winner-take-all” election. This eliminates the costs of a primary election for the city and boosts turnout. It also saves the voters from a lengthy election cycle. Primary elections are a holdover from the time that elections were partisan. Primaries provided political parties the opportunity to select a nominee who would then face the other party’s nominee in a run-off or general election. Since city elections are non-partisan, it makes little sense to continue holding primaries.

There is no real reason for Long Beach to keep its April and June election cycle. Originally incorporated as a city of the “sixth class” in 1888, it disincorporated in 1896, and was reincorporated in 1897, again as a city of the sixth class. (Sixth class refers to cities who have their own freeholder charter under the 1883 Municipal Corporations Act.) When the city was first chartered by the legislature in 1907, the elections were set for

the second Tuesday in May with elected city freeholders and the board of education members taking office in July. Other sixth class cities held their elections in early April. Somewhere along the line, Long Beach switched and kept its elections in April. Out of the 1,039 school districts in California, only 45 hold elections in April.

Perhaps it is time to move Long Beach elections entirely to November and eliminate a primary.

Next column: Why Is the Smell of New Taxes In the Air?

(Gerrie Schipske is a native of Long Beach, an attorney, registered nurse practitioner and full time instructor at CSULB Department of Health Care Administration. She was elected to both the Long Beach Community College Board of Trustees and the Long Beach City Council. She is the author of several books on Long Beach history and her blog, [www.longbeachinside.blogspot.com](http://www.longbeachinside.blogspot.com).) ■

BOARD PRESIDENT RESPONDS

## Schipske’s Column On College Board Of Trustees ‘Riddled With Inaccuracies’

Business Journal contributing writer Gerrie Schipske is certainly entitled to question whether Long Beach City College is best governed by a locally elected board, or by a state board appointed by the governor (“Do we need a Community College Board of Trustees?,” LBBJ, October 27 – November 9). However, her column is riddled with inaccuracies about the governance, current practices and history at LBCC that must be corrected.

First, Schipske’s assertion that a “state Community College Board of 17 trustees controls how community colleges operate,” is simply not true. The state Board of Governors sets and monitors state regulations and sets priorities for state funding for the state-wide system. Meanwhile, California delegates considerable authority to local community colleges for nearly all major budget, administrative and academic decisions – everything from facilities to curriculum.

A joint statement of the Board of Governors and the California Community College Trustees Association provides that locally-elected governing boards exercise general supervision over their local districts and provide leadership through planning and policymaking to ensure that local education programs and services meet the educational needs of the communities they serve, as well as regional and state needs. For example, in Long Beach, the nationally-recognized Long Beach College Promise and its implementing program, Promise Pathways, have been developed exclusively locally and have transformed the culture of college expectancy in our greater community. Local boards are the eyes, ears, and mouthpieces for the communities they serve.

Second, Schipske is grossly inaccurate in her description of the benefits granted to members of the Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees. Long Beach trustees do not receive unlimited medical benefits for life after 12 years of service. That was not true when Schipske was a trustee from 1992 to 1996, and it is not true now. Once a trustee’s service ends, his or her medical and other benefits also end. Further, trustees are not given unlimited travel accounts. Travel funds are budgeted each year as part of the transparent, publicly-noticed budget approval process and trustees must adhere to the approved budget. In addition, trustee stipends are not \$400 a meeting. Total remuneration is \$400 a month for all Board and other meetings, which includes any committee meetings, special workshops, retreats and other duties. The amount is prorated down if a trustee misses a board meeting during the month. A trustee’s community college service can easily average 15-20 hours per week, with no sick days, vacation, or sabbaticals.

Third, and perhaps Schipske’s most egregious misrepresentation of fact, is her assertion that the District promoted its 2008 bond measure, which was passed by 72 percent of the voters, solely on the grounds that it would provide new aviation maintenance facilities. The 2008 bond measure, together with an earlier bond measure, provided badly needed funds to upgrade and modernize dozens of aging facilities at both the Liberal Arts and Pacific Coast Campuses. The aviation maintenance program was discontinued after careful and prolonged consideration, in consultation with LBCC faculty leadership, because it was no longer a significant growth industry in the region, and on average the program was producing between 6 and 7 degree graduates a year and 9 certificate graduates. Further, similar programs were offered by several area colleges. During the recession, the trustees chose to focus the College’s limited resources on educating students for 21st century knowledge-based careers, such as advanced manufacturing and green technologies, in close consultation with an extensive network of private industry partners, including the Port of Long Beach. The space vacated by the aviation maintenance program is now occupied by our cutting-edge and ever-growing alternative fuels program.

Business Journal readers should be pleased to know that the College’s locally-elected Board of Trustees has helped LBCC make great strides since Schipske was a trustee. Thanks to the leadership of dedicated trustees, committed and talented faculty members, administrators and staff, LBCC has been identified as one of the state’s best community colleges and has become a national model for establishing programs that help students achieve their educational goals. None of that would have occurred if the LBCCD was governed by the state’s Board of Governors.

**Doug Otto, President, Long Beach Community College District Board of Trustees  
Vice President, California Community College Trustees Association**



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