

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

# Editorial: Big government bipartisanship

## GOP-led Fullerton council set to approve onerous redevelopment plan.

### An Orange County Register editorial

The Fullerton City Council is set to vote today on a noxious redevelopment plan that will undermine property rights, promote the use of eminent domain, encourage taxpayer subsidies for favored businesses and require the creation of more low-income, subsidized housing. The council has a 3-2 Republican majority, yet one of the Republicans, Don Bankhead, has been strongly supporting this big-government plan, while another one, Dick Jones, has spoken favorably about redevelopment at council meetings. The obvious question is whether the local Republican Party, which invested a large amount of money in the recent Fullerton council race, cares about limited government, or whether it only uses such ideas during election time.

California council races are, technically, nonpartisan thanks to Progressive Era reforms. But, as Martin Wisckol reported in Sunday's Register, the local parties often invest heavily in

these races, mostly for ideological reasons. That brings us back to Fullerton: the O.C. GOP spent \$19,000 on GOP candidates in the November races, with \$13,000 spent specifically to attack Democratic challenger Karen Haluza. One memorable ad included the headline, "Stop Urban Planner Karen Haluza From Turning Fullerton Into Another Santa Ana!" That was a fair characterization, given that Ms. Haluza works full time as a top planner for Santa Ana, which had been promoting a Renaissance Plan designed to drive many existing residents and businesses out of the city's central core. It embodies central planning at its worst.

But now the Fullerton council is prepared to endorse a similar type of plan. So far only Republican Councilman Shawn Nelson is opposed to it, which would expand the blight designation to an 1,165-acre area, most of which in no way seems blighted, at least under any normal understanding of blight. Blight is a legal fiction under state redevelopment law. As county Supervisor Chris Norby, a longtime foe of redevelopment abuse and onetime Fullerton councilman, explains, the 167 businesses that would be included in the expanded plan need to "realize that a blight designation automatically makes them subject to possible eminent domain. ... Expansion means the agency will divert even more property tax funds from local government."

Recently, as a local Fullerton blog pointed out, the city redevelopment agency spent \$6 million in tax dollars to relocate a McDonald's closer to Fullerton High School. That action was supported by the two Democrats, Sharon Quirk and Pam Keller, and by Republican Don Bankhead. Mr. Nelson opposed it, as did Mr. Jones, who argued correctly that this was a waste of money.

That's a good Republican – and libertarian, for that matter -- principle. What are the chances a

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Republican-dominated council can do the right thing and reject this noxious redevelopment plan for similar reasons? If they can't, then the local GOP might do well to spend its election money elsewhere.

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