



CITY OF OXNARD

CALIFORNIA

November 4, 1975

OFFICE OF THE
MAYOR
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Copies sent to:

Senator Omer L. Rains
Assemblyman J.K. MacDonald
Assembly Ways and Means Committee
Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.
Board of Trustees, California State
University and Colleges
Coordinating Council for Higher Education

Members of the Oxnard City Council have asked me to write on their behalf and express strong opposition to Senate Bill 928 (Stiern) which would authorize the sale of the property previously purchased for a State College in Ventura County. This bill was approved by the Senate in 1975 and is scheduled for consideration by the Assembly during next year's legislative session.

As we understand it, the intent of the bill is to dispose of those campus sites upon which no development is anticipated in the near future, and to allocate the funds generated by these sales to existing college campuses. The apparent effect of the passage of SB 928 would be an indefinite delay in the development of a State College campus in Ventura County, and the retraction of State funds previously committed to the improvement of educational opportunities for residents of this area.

As you know, the State purchased some 428 acres in the Las Posas Valley area as the site for the future Ventura County State College. The decision to purchase this property followed an extensive study by the Coordinating Council for Higher Education in 1964 which found, in part, that "A substantial segment of Ventura County is now isolated from State College facilities and the enrollment potential estimated for a possible new State College in Ventura County shows that enrollment growth would meet the minimum standard considered desirable and would later grow to substantial size." As a result of that study, legislation was enacted in 1965 approving a State College for Ventura County and initiating an exhaustive site selection process which culminated with the purchase of the Las Posas Valley parcel. If the schedule developed at the time of that purchase had been followed, development of a State College in this area would now be well underway. Instead, the State Legislature is giving serious consideration to the possible disposal of this site.

The passage of ten years since the decision was made to develop a State College in Ventura County has confirmed the wisdom of the Coordinating Council's finding that there would be a definite need for such a facility. The population of the County has grown dramatically since that time, rising from some 305,000 in 1965 to 432,407 in 1975, a 42% increase. In fact, Ventura County was the fifth ranked county in the State in numerical population growth from 1960 to 1970. A continuation of this trend is anticipated as evidenced by recent population projections which expect the County population to grow to 496,600 by 1980, 623,100 by 1990, and 793,050 by the year 2000.

Another indicator of the present and future need for a State College is the local school enrollment. Total school enrollment (K-12) has increased by more than 20,000 students in the period since 1965. The growth in community college enrollment during this same period has been even more dramatic, rising from 9,338 to over 30,000 students this semester, a 225% increase. Although this increase in community college enrollment is partially a result of county population growth, it should be noted that the percentage of the county population attending community college has risen from 3.1% in 1965 to 7% at the present time. This remarkable increase is probably due to several factors. For one, the addition of two new community colleges since 1965 has increased the opportunities for post-secondary education. Many local residents who did not previously have the qualifications to obtain self-satisfying and economically rewarding jobs in the expanding county economy have been quick to take advantage of these new educational opportunities. The result has been better jobs and a higher standard of living for many families who had previously depended upon the relatively low wages of agricultural related employment.

Although the expansion of the local community college program has been of tremendous benefit to county residents, the need for a State College remains unfulfilled. A special census in 1975 revealed that 78% of Ventura County families had a "head of household" who had not completed college, and 52% had no college work at all. If local residents are to be successful in obtaining the many professional jobs which are becoming available in this area, it is essential that greater numbers have the opportunity to attend a four-year institution of higher education.

At present, the nearest public college campuses are the University of California at Santa Barbara and California State University at Northridge. Although many local residents now commute to these distant campuses, it is simply too costly for a great many others to do so, especially as the cost of gasoline continues to increase. This has the unfortunate result of depriving those who are in greatest need of additional education from attending a four-year college. A significant percentage of Ventura County residents fall within this category as evidenced by the fact that some 37% of county families had a gross income last year of below \$10,000 with nearly 20% of them depending upon an income of less than \$6,000. It should be noted that a disproportionate number of Ventura County families who fall within these lower income categories are members of ethnic minority groups.

In addition to the expenses of commuting long distances to attend four-year college, we believe thoughtful consideration must be given to related environmental concerns. In light of this nation's decreasing fuel resources, it seems desirable that every effort be made to bring major facilities, such as State Colleges, to locations where they are needed now, and will be needed in the future, rather than to require students to commute long distances to existing facilities. This approach is also more supportive of our nation's effort to improve air quality by reducing the numbers of miles travelled by private vehicles.

Some local residents who cannot afford the expense and time required to commute to one of the distant State campuses have recently enrolled at the Ventura Learning Center. This Center, which brings together some Bachelor and Master's Degree programs offered by various State Universities and Colleges, has been very well received during its first year in operation as evidenced by the 500 students presently enrolled. Although we view the innovative Learning Center program as a real asset to our area and are very pleased to have it here, there are some definite limitations to this program. For one, classes offered at the Center are not tax-supported as they are at State Universities and Colleges, so the students must personally bear the full cost of their education. This situation runs contrary to the basic philosophy of the State's system of higher education, and results in a grossly inequitable treatment of Ventura County residents. Another limitation of the Center is that it does not offer the full range of degree programs and basic facilities available at the typical State College campus. In light of these limitations, we feel the Ventura Learning Center must be viewed as a very imaginative, but interim, response to the higher education needs of Ventura County residents.

After considering the above information, and reviewing other background material on this subject which you may have available, we sincerely hope you will conclude that the State should not sell the Ventura County college site and, therefore, will help to defeat SB 928. We further hope you will lend your active assistance in initiating the steps necessary to get the construction of a four-year State College on the Ventura County site underway at the earliest possible date. We will be looking forward to your response to this request.

Sincerely,

A. E. Jewell
Mayor

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cc: City Council