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'A Fair Shake for Communities': Reactions to Filner's First Budget

BY: LISA HALVERSTADT
([HTTP://VOICEOFSANDIEGO.ORG/AUTHOR/LISAHALVERSTADT/](http://voiceofsandiego.org/author/lisahalverstadt/)) | APRIL 17, 2013

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Photo by Jamie Scott Lytle

This National EMS Week, American Medical Response salutes AMR's caregivers in honor of Kurt Williams, who was beloved by the AMR San Diego family.

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Mayor Bob Filner released his first proposed budget

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(http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/government/article_4bd3c470-a608-11e2-9417-001a4bc168/a.html)

San Diego will be a better place to live than ever this week and

We asked a few to share their impressions of the budget. **Section**

Investigations
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Their responses have been highly edited. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)

Erik Bruvold, president, National University System

Institute for Policy Research

(<http://www.nusinstitute.org/About/Staff/President.html>)

There are three important themes that emerge from reading Mayor Bob Filner's first budget.

The first is just how difficult it is to shift directions in the city. There are a few elements (a new bike czar, \$300,000 freed up for traffic bollards in Plaza de Panama) that show Filner's new priorities but these are small potatoes in a general fund budget of \$1.2 billion. There is so much of the budget that is cooked in *years* prior to its unveiling. Trying to make a noticeable change in just four months is problematic and serves mostly to illustrate how hard it is to shift course. This is especially true since the city, in the end, is largely *people* and its cost structure reflects the staffing and compensation systems that have grown up over many decades of policy making.

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The second theme is more uncertain. Filner has placed a \$25 million bet on getting the bargaining units to agree to a five-year freeze in their pension pay. Absent such an agreement (and absent the

on the idea that his personal relationship with labor leaders and his long history of championing progressive causes would be critical in getting such an agreement. Over the course of the spring, San Diegans will get a chance to see whether personal connections really do matter or whether self-interest trumps all.

The third, the snipe at the city attorney's budget, seems misguided. San Diego has seen, sadly, what happens when the mayor-city attorney relationship is dysfunctional. The city charter, right or wrong, invests both these offices with independent power and authority. For the city to move forward *both* offices need to work together. Targeting the city attorney's office for the only personnel cuts seems petty, unlikely to succeed and a further step toward poisoning a relationship that needs to be civil.

Opinion


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Narrative

Timeline

Morning Report
<http://voiceofsandiego.org/report-arbitration-report/>
 7 hours

Justice for
<http://voiceofsandiego.org/for-sale-part-one-arbitration/>
 8 hours

Why the District
<http://voiceofsandiego.org/the-district-election/>
 8 hours

How to Play
<http://voiceofsandiego.org/to-play-need-in-the-c/>
 17 hours

Morning Report
<http://voiceofsandiego.org/report-homeless-center-net/>
 2 days

Chris Cate, interim president, San Diego County Taxpayers Association (<http://www.sdcta.org/About/Jobs.asp>) (Cate has filed initial paperwork to run for City Council in 2014):

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~~Voice of San Diego is a member-based news organization (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>) set of priorities for our city. Mayor  by Saunders'  issue was primarily focused on implementing  fiscal reforms to  correct mistakes of the past. Mayor Bob Filner has been  intent on reinvesting in neighborhoods, but his proposed  our community. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>) [Raise your voice. Join](http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/) [Donate Now \(<http://voiceofsandiego.org/donate/>\)](http://voiceofsandiego.org/donate/)~~

The mayor's proposed fiscal year 2014 budget does include an increase in positions for the city's police department — and rightfully so given the City Council's past commitment to increasing staffing to ensure neighborhood safety.

But the mayor's decision to hire (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/infrastructure/article_1391df40-a615-11e2-89a9-001a4bcf887a.html) nine new employees, at a cost of \$3 million, is puzzling given his decision to eliminate a substantial amount of money needed to repair city streets, roads and buildings.

The start of Filner's term saw a council committed to reinvesting taxpayer dollars to address a core neighborhood issue: fixing our crumbling infrastructure. In 2012, the council adopted a five-year infrastructure funding plan (http://www.sandiego.gov/iba/pdf/reports/2012/12_13.pdf) with the goal of increasing funding each year until the city can maintain quality streets, roads and buildings.

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The council directed Voice of San Diego is a member-based news organization. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>) (<http://dockets.sandiego.gov/sirep/submtgframe.aspx?meetid=1318&doctype=Minutes>) S... ts to dedicate \$8.3 million in surplus funds to wan... rred capital

(<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>) Raise your voice. Join proposed eliminating... (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>) Donate Now (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/donate/>) (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/pdf_5aed5f38-a7a8-11e2-9a96-0019bb2963f4.html) that funding. Filner also proposed reducing (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/pdf_be5257d6-a7a8-11e2-9fdb-0019bb2963f4.html) the fiscal year 2014 funding plan for deferred capital by \$1 million.

The fiscal year 2014 Capital Improvement Program budget has only \$400,000 (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/pdf_231d342e-a7a9-11e2-a56b-0019bb2963f4.html) in general fund dollars dedicated to projects, a stark contrast to the \$11.5 million (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/pdf_7a457af4-a7a9-11e2-b151-0019bb2963f4.html) the city invested this fiscal year.

The City Council, and its new Infrastructure Committee, should restore the funding necessary to address needs throughout our city.

Jeff Jordon, vice president of the San Diego Police Officers Association (<http://www.sdpoa.org/>):

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Diego Police Department an extra \$1 million for <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/members/> 
equipment and 16 new officers beyond those already <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/members/> 
authorized for the upcoming fiscal year. SDPD is <http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/members/> 
<http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/members/>  Raise your voice. Join
significantly understaffed. There are 300 fewer officers
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has increased dramatically. The cause of this understaffing is a result of recruiting challenges and high attrition rates.

The money can be allocated more prudently by providing incentives to reduce attrition among current officers while increasing our ability to recruit new officers. Simply providing more money to pay new officers at the same pay and benefit scale is a Band-Aid solution that lets the underlying issue linger — or even worsen.

Currently, SDPD has a 29 percent attrition rate (http://www.voiceofsandiego.org/fact/article_5b5aba08-932e-11e2-8fb7-0019bb2963f4.html) for new hires. Thus, four of the 16 additional officers hired will likely be lost.

In fiscal year 2009, SDPD lost about seven officers to other law enforcement agencies. This rose to 13 in fiscal year 2012. The trend is expected to continue upward in fiscal year 2014, as agencies throughout San Diego County lure officers from SDPD to their respective agencies with better compensation packages.

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the San Diego Police Officers Association that helps (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
rectly the department's recruitment and retention (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
problem, simply allocating more in (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
for more officers (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
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our community. (<http://www.sandiego.gov/citycouncil/committees/pns/pdf/pnsns120710.pdf>)
being met. Despite the best efforts to increase staffing in
the past three academy classes, the department only
gained a net of nine officers.






























































Diane Takvorian, executive director, Environmental Health Coalition
(<http://www.environmentalhealth.org/index.php/en/who-we-are/mission/environmental-justice>):

The mayor's first budget since taking office is in line with his goals to prioritize urban neighborhoods with services and planning, and to fuel local efforts to help increase renewable energy and energy efficiency.

The mayor's "Neighborhoods First" and his new Civic and Urban Initiatives Program (<http://www.sandiego.gov/fm/proposed/pdf/2014/vol1/v1executivesummary.pdf>) which isn't yet fully defined, both provide an opportunity for focus on neighborhood issues that improve quality of life for all San Diegans including underserved neighborhoods that often suffer from outdated community plans. Filner's budget reflects an understanding of the importance of community planning as an important opportunity for residents to participate in the visioning and development of their neighborhoods.

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The Barrio Logan Community Plan, which was more than 30 years old when the update started in 2008, for example, is in desperate need of resources. The completed plan will be considered by the City Council.

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inequities that impact children's health. Let's continue working to support funding community plan updates for all of our neighborhoods.

The mayor's funding priorities reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability and improving quality of life through fully integrated sustainability efforts. Addressing climate change through investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy is included alongside enabling school students to utilize mass transit and enhancing the city's bike program. On the energy side, the budget includes energy efficiency and solar energy projects. Priority for these projects should focus on communities that need it most; areas with older, less efficient housing that will feel the impacts of climate change first.

We look forward to ensuring that the communities that have been shut out of City Hall for so long, have a strong and effective voice in the process.

Corinne Wilson, acting executive director of the Center on Policy Initiatives

<http://onlinecpi.org/about/about-cpi/>):

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protecting basic services while making <http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>  some 2000
investments in our neighborhoods <http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>  budget attempts
to provide a fair shake for communities within the city <http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/> 
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that have been neglected in the past and were hit hard by
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the recession.

Over a year ago, the Center on Policy Initiatives helped found the Community Budget Alliance, which seeks an understandable, open and fair city budget. The 40-plus organizations in the alliance agree that investments in neighborhood infrastructure, services and programs are vital for San Diegans' quality of life and our future economy.

Among the mayor's smart investments are:

- Bus passes for low-income youth, which remove a barrier to education for these students.
- More staffing and equipment for police, fire and lifeguards, which is badly needed to keep residents and tourists safe
- Transitioning the emergency winter homeless shelter into a year-round program, which acknowledges the reality of the need in San Diego

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Another good investment is a five-year agreement with Voice of San Diego is a member-based news organization. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
city workers. City services and infrastructure are essential to residents and businesses. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
workers who provide these services. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
our community. (<http://voiceofsandiego.org/members/>)
in recent years. A multi-year agreement provides stability for the city and the workers, and will save an anticipated \$141 million over the five years. That savings can be reinvested into neighborhoods to provide healthy communities, good jobs and a better quality of life.

This is just the start to a neighborhoods first approach to city finances and administration. But it's a good start and, with further similar investments, will create a fair and prosperous San Diego.

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Pat Zaharopoulos, president, Middle Class Taxpayers Association
(<http://middleclasstaxpayers.org/Mission.html>):

Middle Class Taxpayers supports the mayor's plan to negotiate five-year contracts with the unions representing city employees for four important reasons.

1. It brings certainty to city finances
2. Saves time and money of annual negotiations
3. Puts Proposition B into effect, freezing pensionable salaries for five years, a Republican initiative in the budget of a Democratic mayor
4. It would save \$25 million in 2014 and another \$25 million in 2015 that can be used to improve infrastructure and public services.

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