

May 5, 2010

Mayor Villaraigosa Tops Up His Piggy Bank With L.A. Public Library Budget

LOS ANGELES- You'd have to be living under a rock not to know that Los Angeles is facing a major financial crisis, with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and the City Council scrambling to balance a budget that's teetering perilously close to the edge.

But many have been shocked to see the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL)—widely assumed to be high on the list of community services to be maintained at all costs -- suffer a devastating series of budget cuts that have already resulted in Sunday closures, reduced weekday evening hours, and the pending loss of hundreds of experienced staff members and popular community programs. Despite thousands of petitions and emails circulated to City officials by library supporters, the cuts continue.

The City Council's Budget and Finance Committee will send recommendations to full City Council on May 17, with deliberations continuing until the budget is passed on June 5. So now is the time to speak out in support of the Library. The message for Mayor Villaraigosa and City Council is clear: **RESTORE LIBRARY HOURS AND FUNDING. DON'T BALANCE THE CITY BUDGET ON THE LIBRARY'S BACK.**

"If the Mayor is successful in his effort to slash the library budget we will have hardly any library services available in any community," said Roy Stone, President of the Librarians' Guild, AFSCME Local 2626. "The Mayor's efforts cannot simply be called 'lack of support' of the library because it has now reached an open and obvious effort to diminish one of the most important and essential services provided to every community in the City. The Mayor will single handedly be the most destructive force in the history of the Los Angeles Public Library System."

It might seem like the Library is just one casualty among many City departments in an unexpected financial crisis. But the reality is that this administration's assault on LAPL began three years ago, with a blatant and ongoing money grab in which LAPL has been forced to pay another department's rapidly growing bills. That department is the

General Fund, the central repository of City money used by a variety of City agencies-- the same General Fund which Controller Wendy Greuel warns is nearly broke, and which is waiting on promised payments of \$73.5 million from the Department of Water and Power. Instead of holding the DWP, with its powerful union, responsible for its civic obligations, the City Library's relatively tiny budget is being gutted to top up the Mayor's piggy bank.

Over the past three budget cycles, Mayor Villaraigosa has turned to the library to make up costs where other departments overspent. In Fiscal Year 2008-09, LAPL was billed \$3 Million in building overhead costs that had always come out of the General Fund; LAPL tightened its belt and paid the bill. In Fiscal Year 2009-10, LAPL read the budget and found it was now expected to pay \$11.7 Million to the General Fund to cover overhead costs for maintaining its buildings; again LAPL made cuts, to book purchases and community services, and paid the bill.

Now, with the General Fund nearly exhausted by an administration that has spent itself into a hole, the Mayor has again turned to LAPL as an easy way of covering other departments' debts. The bill for Fiscal Year 2010-11 is \$22 Million, nearly twice what it was last year. The Library budget just can't take the hit: in mid-April, all L.A. libraries closed on Sundays, weekday hours were slashed, and hundreds of experienced staff members are slated for layoff.

What does the Mayor's proposed budget mean for Library service in Los Angeles?

- Libraries will be open only five days a week, for the first time in LAPL's 138-year history.
- 37% cuts to budget will result in 37% reduction in public services for the community.
- 30% staff reduction (328 positions) will leave every branch understaffed. In 1978, when there were only 62 libraries (there are now 72), there were 1459 staff members and 6 Million visitors. Under the Mayor's proposed budget for 2010-11, there will be 848 staff members to serve 18 Million visitors. Do the math—this is no way to balance a budget or serve a city.

Shannon Salmon, Young Adult Librarian at LAPL and creator of the Save the Library website, says "Our staffing is already down 20% from what

it should be. With the 100+ layoffs to occur on July 1st in the Mayor's budget, we will then be down to 30% of our staffing. The reality for the public is that familiar faces will not be there anymore; the libraries will have to close down to 5 days a week; evening hours may have to be canceled; there will be less literacy programs, history programs, art exhibits and storytimes, because the staff that is left will be so overworked just trying to provide the basic level of customer services that our patrons need. All of this, and we use only 2% of the General Fund budget."

Under no previous administration has the Library ever had to pay into the General Fund to keep the lights on, water running and trash cans emptied in the 72 City branches. With a \$22 Million bill coming due in the next Fiscal Year, LAPL will have no choice but to close branches and eliminate services. But if allowed to keep just \$7.8 Million of that \$22 Million, LAPL could keep all branches open six days a week.

The public is urged to visit the Save LAPL website <http://www.savelapl.org>, where with a single click they can send a message to the Mayor and all members of City Council urging them to restore library funding to its current level, retaining staff, weekend and evening hours, and community programs. For more information on this evolving story, visit the Save The Library website at <http://www.savethelibrary.org>.