



# The kids need our support

BY JEFF VONKAENEL / jeffv@newsreview.com

**Everybody loves kids, especially those** kids who share our DNA. We make many sacrifices for our children: sleepless nights, trips to the doctor, thousands of dollars spent on food, shelter and clothes.

But other people's kids? Well, that's a different story.

Youth have plenty of needs. They need education. They need health care. And they need things to do when they're not in school—parks, gyms, music programs and sports, for example. But these needs have to be considered in the context of all the community's needs—housing, police and fire, transportation—and how much we're willing to pay in taxes.

While there are about 120,000 people younger than 18 in Sacramento, they can't vote, and they don't contribute to political campaigns. So they can be ignored. Otherwise, there would be no need to have a petition drive for the Sacramento Children's Fund Act, a proposed initiative for the March 2020 ballot requiring that 2.5 percent of the city's unrestricted funds, or about \$12.5 million a year, go to youth programs.

What cannot be ignored is several hundred teenagers showing up on repeated nights at Arden Fair mall causing chaos—a wake-up call for Sacramento, pointing to the lack of low-cost youth programs.

At a January 3 press conference at the Urban League in Del Paso Heights, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and City Council members praised Sierra Health Foundation for funding 14 youth "pop-up" events the following weekend. Sierra Health Foundation CEO Chet Hewitt and council members Allen Warren, Rick Jennings and Jay

Schenirer all spoke about the need to have more youth programs every day, not just one weekend.

Some money for youth programs could come from Measure U, which voters approved in November to increase the city sales tax by a half cent, enough to bring in an additional \$50 million a year.

But we've already set many goals for Measure U revenues, including housing, jobs programs and more. For this to work, Measure U will need to be like Jesus feeding the multitudes with just a few loaves of bread.

And before the city can fund additional youth programs, it first must figure out how to pay for higher CalPERS pension obligations,

which are estimated to rise by \$62 million by 2022-23.

There really are only two choices. The city could ask voters for another tax hike to fund youth programs. Or it can become more efficient.

Most of the city's general fund budget goes to police and fire.

Replacing one firefighter with a civilian paramedic in ambulances, and switching from four firefighters to three on most engines would save more than \$6 million a year, according to a recent city study.

But here's the problem. Unlike youth, firefighters vote and their union contributes mightily to political campaigns. This makes this common sense proposal a political nonstarter.

We need to come up with a plan. Our kids need us to lobby and vote for them. Then they can gather for sports and music, not have brawls at a mall. □

Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.

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