Los Angeles County **REGISTRAR-RECORDER/COUNTY CLERK**

DEAN C. LOGAN
Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

April 22, 2013

TO: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer

FROM: Dean C. Logan, Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk

UPCOMING BOARD AGENDA ITEM – REQUEST TO PERMANENTLY CONSOLIDATE NEWHALL COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

Newhall County Water District is requesting that your Board authorize the consolidation of its Board Member elections with the Statewide General Elections held in November of each even-numbered year.

Your Board's policy since 1981, reaffirmed by resolution in January 1987 and by subsequent Board action throughout 2005, has been to deny requests for consolidation of local elections with Statewide Primary or General Elections. This policy is based on the finite ballot capacity of the County's past and current voting systems (i.e. Votamtic punch card and InkaVote optical scan systems, respectively).

Because these systems have limited space for election contests and ballot propositions and because Statewide General Election ballots are long and complex, allowing other jurisdictions to consolidate their regular elections in even-numbered years invites the very real probability that there would be insufficient space on the ballot to accommodate all the election contests from numerous requesting jurisdictions.

Jurisdictions are urged to consolidate with the November odd-year election cycle (UDEL) because it guarantees sufficient ballot space as statewide contests are not scheduled during that election cycle.

The 88 cities, 85 school districts and numerous other jurisdictions within the County cannot all be accommodated on even year election dates; your Board's policy of denying specific requests for consolidations has preserved fairness in the County's relationship with the jurisdictions within its boundaries.

Additional critical factors impacting our recommendation that you deny such requests includes:

- The InkaVote Plus voting system uses a ballot that is a modified version of old IBM punch cards, introduced in Los Angeles County during the 1968 elections. While these ballots are compact and facilitate speedy tabulation, they also offer very limited ballot capacity. The ballot cards have only 312 vote positions. This translates into a ballot capacity of just 12 vote recorder pages; which must be formatted to ensure readability and distinction between contests and measures.

- An analysis of November even year election ballots demonstrates that county ballots currently feature an average of 145 different election contests with as many as 748 candidates and 45 measures.

- On average, a significant share of the County is using 75% or more ballot capacity in November even year elections. Given the age of the voting system and ballot layout limitations, the Department strongly recommends not over stressing the voting system by overtaxing it's capacity.

- Given the compact size of our ballot, the layout of vote recorder pages provides limited ballot layout options that generate a lot of page turns. Requiring voters to go through as many as ten page turns to get through the ballot generates under voting or vote drop off in down ballot races. More importantly, we have to consider the impact of complex and lengthy ballot styles on lines at the polls, as we saw in a number of states during the 2012 Presidential Elections directly attributed to the length and complexity of the ballot.

- Potential permanent consolidation of so many districts on to the November ballot, which already has federal, state, and county districts will create an estimated 20 additional ballot groups (ballot styles). This means voter polling places may change and more variations in the ballot would be required.

- Recent legislation may further increase the demands on ballot capacity. Legislation signed by Governor Brown has moved all state measures to the November ballot. In addition, legislation has been introduced this session that would require greater consolidation when it comes to charter amendments and/or changes in public pension programs. This legislation would require that such measures be consolidated with November even year elections further limiting capacity.

- Preserving an adequate level of available ballot capacity to allow local jurisdictions, including the County, to add local special elections and ballot measures (to fill vacancies or place an emergency local measure) is important. The more ballot capacity used up as a result of permanently consolidating local elections, the less opportunity available for jurisdictions to place a special vacancy election or ballot measure before the voters.

- Ballot capacity considerations should also contemplate and even anticipate the fiscal impact this will have on shared districts. Currently all districts share election costs in the November odd numbered year as part of the Unified District Elections (UDEL). If these districts move their election date and consolidate with the even year cycle, election costs for the remaining districts will increase proportionately because they will no longer share election costs with the districts.

These critical factors and statistics are provided to give you additional insights and details into the existing limitations to permanent consolidation with even year November elections. As you know, the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk is strongly committed to modernizing our elections infrastructure in order to continue to conduct elections in a fair, accessible and transparent manner as well as to provide the greatest number of voting options for voters and districts. The Department is currently engaged in a project to modernize the County's voting system within the next five years. Increasing the capacity of the ballot and flexibility in ballot layout are among the core principles identified for a new voting system.

It is, therefore recommended that your Board make a finding that the ballot style and voting equipment used in Los Angeles County will not accommodate consolidation of Newhall County Water District and that the request for consolidation of their regularly scheduled elections with the statewide General Elections be denied, and that your Board instruct the Executive Officer to notify the district of the Board's findings.

If you have any questions or require additional information, I can be reached at (562) 462-2716.

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