

**THIS ARTICLE  
BROUGHT TO  
YOU BY:**



POLITICAL CONSULTING  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

(562) 212-0230  
RANDY@RANDYTERRELL.NET

## Defeating a Political Machine

*The story of how Political Know-How and \$8,000 defeated the Long Beach Infrastructure Parcel Tax Measure.*

\$696,532.76 is what the city of Long Beach's political machine spent on pushing through a parcel tax measure—nearly \$200,000 more than the Mayor estimated it would need to get 2/3 voter approval and pass. 72%, 59%, and 64% were what three other successful tax increases on the ballot garnered in Long Beach: Measure G (Utility Tax Extensions), Measure K (School Bond), and Measure R (County Transportation Sales Tax Hike), respectively.

Measure I seemingly had the most going for it. Unlike Measure G, it was billed as a bond measure, and not a tax hike. Unlike Measure K, it had been over forty years since a bond of its kind had been passed in the city, and there was a hunger for streets and sidewalks to be fixed. Unlike Measure R, it had bipartisan support from Republicans like Former Governor George Deukmejian. Unlike them all, it would only cost \$120 per household, compared to the other tax increases with higher amounts.

The end result was 52% in favor, or just 70,746 votes.

The amount spent to defeat it: \$8,000.

The opposition started as a way that local political consultant, Randy Terrell, then with Golden State Campaigns, could make a name for himself in the greater Long Beach area. Working campaigns for the past fourteen years, Terrell was skeptical about the plan, as were many business representatives who were also justifiably afraid of taking a stand against the popular first term Mayor known for his hardball tactics.

In the weeks leading up to Terrell's involvement with the No on Measure I campaign, there was a steady avalanche of news, endorsements, and other signals meant to snowball Measure I towards



Photo: Measure I supporters were diverse and confident as they kicked off their campaign.

victory. One by one, unlikely supporters like Governor George Deukmejian, the California Business Roundtable, and the Long Beach Convention and Visitor's Bureau were signing up to support the tax measure.

In order to stop the avalanche, Terrell knew that there were a set of moves that could be set in place, and in retrospect, a set of important lessons for achieving a victory from behind.

**Use everything you have, even if it isn't much.**

From the start, Terrell's strategy had been to do everything possible to pull the Yes on Measure I side into a full fledged, competitive campaign—a win-win situation in his eyes. On the one hand, if they were successful, the Yes side had already lost by providing enough doubt in voter's minds to prevent the needed 2/3 vote. If the Yes side decided to ignore their opposition, then Terrell and his campaign

were free to take lobs at the Mayor and his machine without any retort.

Fortunately, both of these things happened, but for Terrell and his lack of resources, it was still a challenge to fully utilize the situations.

Two months away from the election, the only organized opposition came from the barely three month old Long Beach Taxpayer's Association. Headed by local residents Kathy Ryan and Tom Stout, they were



political neophytes without any name recognition or standing to pull more credible opponents their way.

Kathy Ryan was the only signer to Measure I rebuttal on the ballot booklet, while Measure I had signers like Deukmejian and reps from the Sierra Club, Firefighters, amongst other prominent organizations—an aspect that worried many.

*What was done was done*, thought Terrell. There was no changing the lack of signers, or the lack of name recognition of that signer. The Long Beach Taxpayers Association, and the other opponents who came after, were presented as the most important alliance of people ever formed.

**Act like a winning campaign.**

If using everything you have was one lesson from the campaign, acting like a winning campaign was a natural offshoot of that message. Ignoring the fact that zero current elected officials publicly

opposed Measure I, a slew of ex-commissioners and former City Council candidates, and one former Long Beach Mayor—Eunice Sato—were presented to the press.

The local press was the biggest asset for the underdog campaign. Knowing that they were interested in a fight, Terrell sent out press releases on a regular basis, presenting the opposition in glowing terms, and ignoring the many challenges that come from an underdog campaign. The largest and most influential newspaper in the area, the Press-Telegram, was interested in selling papers, and thus, telling a compelling story.

At every opportunity, Terrell was on the phones with Paul Eakins, the paper's city beat reporter, to pitch stories that could get his side's statements in the paper. Each statement was crafted beforehand to give the illusion of a multitude of grassroots supporters working night and day to defeat Measure I.

As mailer after mailer dropped, and commercial after commercial aired, all Terrell could do was figure out how to make up the difference with smaller resources. Funds were spent on literature that was walked by volunteers from the Long Beach Taxpayers Association and the Long Beach Republican Party. Yard signs were posted throughout Long Beach to counter the Yes side's name id. Web ads were placed to help spread word of mouth.

### Listen

Due to its size and its scope, people could scour the measure's language—or listen to the Mayor speak—and come up with dozens of reasons for opposing it, each slightly different than any other person's.

Terrell walked a fine line between spreading the message that Measure I had many flaws, and looking like they were unjustifiably nitpicking a measure to death. He listened carefully for several weeks to key opponents, each with their own agendas, and culled the list down to the "5 Reasons to Vote No on Measure I". The list projected a dual message that Measure I was seriously flawed, but that the varying reasons of opponents could be encapsulated in those five.

One ubiquitous strength *for* Measure I was this:

regardless of how voters felt about its negative aspects, nearly everyone wanted to vote for *something* that would fix their streets and sidewalks. Many people even erred on the side of supporting it, despite its errors, fearful that another proposal to fix their streets would never come along again.

The Mayor heard this fear as well, and used it to maximum effect at public speaking engagements, in direct mail, and in the press. There was only one way for the No on Measure I to combat this.



Former Mayor Eunice Sato, speaking at a No on Measure I rally.

**Propose positive solutions to the problem, and undercut your opponent’s arguments.**

From the start, Terrell knew that Long Beach voters would be hungry for their street repairs, regardless of their feelings about City Hall. In order to take full advantage of the press—who could be merciless as much as they could be helpful—a positive, alternative message was crafted under the banner of “A Better Plan for Long Beach.”

A blog, ABetterPlanForLongBeach.com, was launched to give the public an opportunity to add their ideas, and thus it was eaten up by the Press-Telegram, who covered it in the paper. Like the “5 Reasons to Vote No on Measure I”, the website listed three of the broadest problems as things that would be changed in a better plan: 1) Smaller size, 2) Money Protected, and 3) Fiscal Responsibility first.



For many of those neighborhood influencers leaning on the fence, the promise of a legitimate alternative solution turned many people over to voting no.

**Turn your opponent’s strengths into weaknesses.**

Mayor Bob Foster’s approach to selling Measure I derived from his popularity, which itself stemmed from his take-no-prisoners approach to politics in a city yearning for tough leaders. He promised an infrastructure measure in his January State of the City Measure, and during the next seven months, crafted a measure with City Management staff that he thought was most palatable.

The one thing that helped doom Measure I was that by being the face of the campaign, he didn’t make it about infrastructure or fire stations—he made it about him. That made it easier to attack the Mayor, instead of infrastructure. For being too strong, the Mayor ignored the opposition, and allowed unfettered criticism on the web, and in the media. ■