

Chapter 2

THE NEW COUNTY MOVEMENT

The very next morning, December 17, 1971, *The Signal* led with the idea of new county formation. It was a tremendous coincidence. The story had been written and put to bed before Ruth Newhall had left for Lancaster to attend the meeting of the Planning Council.

While the idea had been the subject of numerous bull sessions in the newspaper's offices on Sixth Street (and quoted my remark that "it's an intriguing idea"), it was not original with me. I was standing in line for lunch in the San Fernando High School faculty cafeteria when a counselor, a Mr. Nathan, asked me what I thought about the San Gabriel Valley's talk of forming a new county. That was the first I had heard of the idea, but I liked it immediately, because I had heard from a number of people in the Santa Clarita Valley that they liked county government.

Charles R. Martin, who served as city attorney for seven cities in the San Gabriel Valley, circulated the idea of a San Gabriel County to the twenty-nine mayors in the valley and had obtained resolutions of support from thirteen cities. Three were opposed, Pasadena was divided, and the others had taken no stand in the two months since the idea surfaced. The biggest problem was that state law made new county formation difficult. Imperial County was the last to be formed, in 1907. However, legislators were considering changing the present law, which required 65% of the registered voters in the proposed county, as well as half the registered voters in the existing county, to sign county formation petitions.

Charles Martin had also suggested that Los Angeles County be divided with the formation of a county including Long Beach and Lakewood, a western county extending from the Palos Verdes peninsula to Santa Monica, a San Fernando Valley county, and one or more counties in the north. Supporters of new county formation cited Los Angeles County's high tax rates (more than double the rate in Orange County) and high rate of county employment (one out of ninety-nine persons compared to one out of one hundred and seventy-nine in Orange County). At the time Los Angeles County was listed as larger than forty-two of the fifty states, with one and a half million more people than Cook County, Illinois.

On January 5, 1972 *The Signal* published a map of a proposed new county which looked a lot like the final Canyon County proposal, minus Gorman. By this time I had a collection of the *Financial Transactions* for cities, counties and school districts, publications which I had requested from the State Controller's office in Sacramento. I began to make comparisons, leading from Ruth Newhall's comment that our 55,000 population was larger than twenty-five of California's fifty-eight counties. It seemed obvious to me that our own county was a possibility. I did not know what light Los Angeles County would try to cast on a formation effort, but I did know that other counties with our tax base and resources were successful, and enjoyed much lower tax rates.

On February 22, 1972, Dr. Bill Bonelli died of cancer, leaving a vacancy on the Governing Board of the Santa Clarita Community College District. I had decided that running for political office would be a positive step. I had not considered it until one night during a Del Prado board meeting I was berated by Don Lewis, a fellow board member, "The only reason you want to form a city is so you can be mayor." That seemed to be a ridiculous idea, but it made me think that perhaps serving in elective office would be a good idea, that it might build my credibility.

Bill Bonelli had been a real positive force in our valley. When the high school board had decided we needed to have our own community college district, he got behind the idea and ran for the college board, but died during his second term. I remembered Bill best from a dinner held in honor of some people from Cal Arts at the Newhall's home, the Cooke Mansion in Piru. There were probably twenty-five seated at the dinner tables, and a good meal was followed by a concert in the drawing room, a Beethoven trio performed by Cal Arts faculty members. I had been seated next to Bill's wife, Joyce, and must have bored her with my pitch for self-government. Later, I overheard her ask her husband, "Who is this guy?"

"He's going to be the mayor of the city," was Bill's answer.

I was surprised that Bill Bonelli considered it a given that a city was going to be formed, and astounded at the idea I would ever be mayor.

I was the first to file for the vacancy on the board. Four weeks later, I joined Mike Carey in announcing that our plan to incorporate a three square mile city was dead. We could not get the county to give us precise figures on police and park expenditures for the proposal, and therefore could not guarantee that there would be no tax increase. By April 21, there were eleven candidates for the college board seat. Four of us were considered to be the front runners. Kenneth C. Wullschleger, an assistant district attorney who had worked in the valley for six years; Larry Wade of Newhall Land; Jay Rodriguez, public relations director of KNBC Television, and I had enjoyed a lot of ink.

On June 14 I received the endorsement of *The Signal*, and *The Clarion* ran my article on school funding. I did not campaign. The coffees held by some candidates seemed very inefficient, and I was no good at one on one on the street with strangers.

On June 20 the election was held. We gathered in the boardroom in a portable building at the college to watch the results come in and be tallied on a chalkboard. 1,949 people had voted, about eleven per cent of those registered. Francis T. Claffey, the Saugus postmaster won with 398 votes. Six of his children had helped him deliver 10,000 flyers door to door. Don Allen, the student body president at College of the Canyons at age 39, placed second with 327. Larry Wade scored 305, and I got 297 votes. Ken Wullschleger came in fifth with 248, and the others each received 86 or less.

Late in July I was chosen president of the Federation of Homeowners, by a 4-3 vote over Dick Haak, who had succeeded me the previous year as president

and was named vice president. Vasu Hayek was chosen second vice president, Wayne Crawford of Valencia Glen was elected secretary, and Mel Wynn of Sierra Hills was selected as treasurer. It was a small meeting of about seven representatives of homeowner associations sitting around a table filling offices.

We voted to ask Assemblyman Russell why the valley received minimum state aid in spite of our excessive school tax rates. We then discussed local water problems, billboards, the community college board, a possible town meeting, the north county master plan, and city/county organization.

A week before the federation election we had decided to seek some action on county formation. I had polled all the elected school and water board members and had found no opposition to the idea. Ruth and Scott Newhall had already invited about ten of us to dinner in Piru, where we had discussed county formation. No one, including Tom Lowe, who was then Chairman of Newhall Land, voiced opposition. Dan Hon, a local attorney, was very much in favor. I dreamed of a chartered county, a county municipality, which, unlike the County of Los Angeles, would have the power to provide municipal services efficiently and would avoid the "extra layer of government" I was having a hard time defending.

Meanwhile, Ray Zeman, an astute political reporter, wrote a story, "Move to Split Up L.A. County Stirs Debate," which the *Los Angeles Times* published on May 22, 1972. He recited the history of counties being formed out of Los Angeles County, which had contained about 35,000 square miles when it was formed in 1850. At that time it stretched from the Pacific Ocean to what is now Arizona, and contained all of the present counties of Los Angeles, Orange and San Bernardino, and part of Kern, Inyo and Riverside Counties. The biggest loss of territory came in 1853, when the original San Bernardino County was formed with 24,000 square miles, including parts of Riverside and Inyo Counties. Kern County was formed in 1866, and Orange County was created in 1889.

Zeman related that the mayors of a few San Gabriel Valley cities had responded to a 6.2% pay raise that the Board of Supervisors approved on May 19, 1971, for 62,000 of the 70,000 Los Angeles County employees, and rising taxes, by meeting secretly for a strategy session. Then the San Gabriel Valley Mayors Association appointed a committee to study the formation of their own county.

Charles R. Martin drafted a bill to make county formation possible, with Louis T. Gilbertson and James R. Helms, Jr., the mayors of Temple City and Arcadia respectively, pushing the process. The bill, introduced by State Senator H.L. Richardson, passed the Senate on May 19, 1972, by a margin of 24-8. The proposal was to allow 10% of the voters in the affected area to put new county formation on the ballot. The bill left intact the requirements that the county be approved by 50% of the voters in the remaining county, and 65% of those in the proposed county, and called for a minimum population of 750,000 in both counties.

The people involved were not criticizing the Supervisors. Martin said that "the job they are being asked to do is enormous.

“A Congressman represents only 400,000 people. A supervisor represents three times that many. Day to day problems of government are simply too much.

“Each supervisor represents an area totally lacking in cohesiveness. The supervisorial districts are just lines carved on a map with no meaning or significance.”

Helms suggested that Los Angeles County be split into five counties, each one of which would have more people than any other in the state. Los Angeles County was larger in population than any of the states excepting California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, Ohio and Michigan, and was larger, by eight hundred square miles, than Delaware and Rhode Island combined.

Zeman said that the proposed new county would include twenty-eight cities from South Pasadena west to the San Bernardino County line. It had the support of thirteen of the fourteen cities where the councils had voted, with only the City of Industry voting no.

Gilbertson said that a tax base of \$2,000 per capita was necessary for a viable county, and the San Gabriel Valley enjoyed a base of \$2,250.

On the same day that the Zeman article appeared, *The Signal* editorial, “Whatsitsname Gets a Bad Deal,” dealt with the burdens of being a “stepchild of a giant political organization,” and said that we have to fight off the “fast-buck developers.” We also have to put up with billboards because the county cannot pass any law that applies only to one locality, and we cannot get any meaningful statistics. We are taxed for a nonexistent bus service we will never see, suffer a lack of emergency services, and have no official name.

I wrote to Assemblyman Newt Russell asking for a law that would permit us “to form a new county with a minimum of difficulty.” I suggested that it could apply to an area of not less than 50,000 people and not less than 300 square miles, but not more than perhaps five per cent of the total population of an existing county. The intent was to allow both the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys to form their own counties.

Later in August 1972 *The Signal* began running some articles about local problems that I had submitted for publication. I was “filling space” left by Arthur Hoppe, a satirical columnist who had gone on vacation from the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I opened by identifying our problems as lack of identity, remote government, unbalanced housing, and regressive taxation. I continued with columns on pollution, an unbalanced economy, using Newhall Land as the whipping boy, inadequate health care, the need for more parks, the lack of a daily paper and any radio station, family breakdown, and the need for tax reform for education.

In October, Ken Gosting did a two-part article in *The Signal* about roads in wilderness areas hurting wildlife and hiking, and asking why development in the Antelope Valley was used as an excuse to build roads through the national forest. While it might have been argued that an extended discussion of this particular issue was warranted, *The Signal* was showing real leadership in problem-solving efforts with their educational articles.¹

In the spring of 1973 we held a town meeting on incorporation without gaining significant support. One comment was that we were not projecting excitement. We were not politicians, and were not given to making claims.

Dan Hon testified before the Council on Intergovernmental Relations, which Governor Reagan had appointed to study local government, at Burbank City Hall on May 25, 1973. Carmen Sarro, who preserved the minute books of the Canyon County Formation Committee, kept a copy of his remarks.

The following statement is not that of an official body. It represents a consensus among individuals and groups in the Santa Clarita Valley, who have no official body to endorse such a statement. What we seek is viable self-government. The stated purpose of this Council seems to be an answer to our long-discussed problems.

I shall describe briefly the situation of the Santa Clarita Valley:

1. Geography. It lies in the northwest part of Los Angeles County, as marked on the facing map. It is the portion of the watershed of the southern Santa Clara River which lies within Los Angeles County, and includes the unincorporated communities of Newhall, Saugus, Valencia, Canyon Country, Castaic, Agua Dulce and Val Verde. It is separated from the rest of Los Angeles County to the south by the San Gabriel and Santa Susana Mountains, through which there is only one access – Interstate 5. It encompasses about 450 to 500 square miles.

2. Population. It has recently been one of the fastest-growing areas in the State. Between 1960 and 1970 the population of the Santa Clarita Valley grew from 15,000 to over 50,000. In the past five years the voter registration has more than doubled; last November it was 27,000. We are 60,000 people, soon to become 80,000.

3. Political Structure. The ill-defined communities of the Santa Clarita Valley are built on small plains or wide canyon mouths separated by jumbled hills, which make for a highly fragmented residential pattern, as shown in the population distribution map above. The valley is an economic unit. We share a single high school district which is coterminous with the Santa Clarita Community College District. Its only other political entity is the Castaic Lake Water Agency, the contractor for water from the State Water Project. In all other respects, local government is vested in the Board of Supervisors of Los Angeles County, 30 to 50 miles away. The Santa Clarita Valley is part of the Fifth Supervisorial District.

The following facts apply:

— Our Supervisor (who acts as Mayor and City Council as well) has a constituency larger than any state legislator, any Congressman, and larger than 46 United States Senators.

— Despite this, he must take responsibility for every sewer, street light, roadway, Little League diamond, subdivision, emergency hospital, flood control channel and planning decision in our distant valley.

— Since the Santa Clarita Valley population is only 4 per cent of his constituency, and one per cent of the entire county, we 60,000 people cannot legitimately expect much attention. And yet there are 23 counties in California with fewer people than live in the Santa Clarita Valley, and most of the people in those counties have both city and county governments.

4. Taxes. We have the dubious distinction of having in our valley the community with the highest property tax rate in Los Angeles County, one of the highest in the state. In one part of our area the present tax rate is \$16.35. We have no voice in how half of these taxes are spent. Our sales taxes, as well as State and Federal subventions, all pour into the faraway county general fund and disappear. We have no voice in the expenditure of these funds. Though we live in a separate watershed with its own water supply and its own floods, most of our flood control taxes have been poured into the concrete channels of the Los Angeles River over the years. One of the sorriest results of remote government has been random planning, done largely by people with little knowledge of the area. The result is scattered subdivisions that are costly in terms of municipal services, utilities, roads and schools, with constant deterioration of community cohesiveness. It takes almost superhuman effort to be heard on these problems. The county is now putting final touches on a General Plan. Though this plan will have a serious effect on our future, our taxes, land values, and the total quality of our life, no significant citizen input has been asked for. The county is too big and the planners are too far away for effective communication. We are non-participants in our own affairs.

5. City Incorporation has been thoroughly investigated as a solution to our problems. It falls short for four reasons: First, it is hard to convince our citizens that another layer of government would reduce taxes. Second, the area lacks the normal characteristics of a city because of its geography. Third, we would still lack control of our own affairs in many matters which are irrelevant to the rest of the county. Fourth, the limited boundaries of a city would not include the whole drainage and surrounding open space areas, the regulation of which is necessary to community well being.

We request a change of law at the State level allowing us to establish an independent city-county structure which would truly serve our local needs. This kind of city-county plan appears to meet with general interest and approval in the Santa Clarita Valley. Present law makes new county formation impossible.

I would like to make it clear that we ask for a structural revision and possible new-county formation to obtain our right of self-government, not to evade our responsibility to the general Los Angeles or southern California community. We strongly support regional efforts in matters

that know no political boundaries – smog control, transit, regional parks. This is not a maneuver to shed the responsibilities of the inner city; possibly some of the costs of welfare and cultural activities should also be handled regionally.

In summary,

1. Our complaint is that the present structure of California law as it pertains to local government deprives areas such as ours of reasonable control of local affairs.

2. We ask that new options be opened to us in form of local self-government.

3. We believe that strong, special purpose regional structures should be created to handle matters of the wider community.

Just as citizenship begins in the home, so does democracy begin in local government. We hope that the Legislature will move to revise the Constitution and the law to give regions such as ours some control of their own destinies.

On December 1, 1973, some of the people I had worked with met at Tiny Naylor's Restaurant, which used to be located on the north side of Lyons Avenue, east of the 76 station near I-5, for the organizational meeting of CIVIC, Inc.

One of the problems of trying to incorporate a city was getting our committee incorporated. People had kept saying they did not want to be involved if we did not have a corporate shield. Even when we did incorporate we were too broke to be able to buy a corporate seal.

I had learned how to incorporate a non-profit by being involved in the formation of the Santa Clarita Valley Community Health Council, which had hired me for the summer of 1973 to organize their office, hire a secretary, conduct a survey and begin the grant application process. Herb Oberman of the County Department of Public Social Services, Charles Rheinschmidt of College of the Canyons, James Foster of the Saugus Elementary School District, and Connie Evans were the founding board members. Lester D. Cleveland, a one time Democratic candidate for Congress, became the Executive Director, and Russ Cochran was also deeply involved.

By the time county formation was developing as a serious possibility the turnover of reporters had created problems with what was being printed about the history of our efforts to attain self-government.

Incorporation had been proposed, according to a mention in *The Signal*, in 1920. The idea had fallen on deaf ears. In 1954 it was being discussed by the chamber of commerce with the idea that incorporation could be completed before the Local Agency Formation Commission was established. In September 1963 the County-City Services Office of Los Angeles County issued a Report on the Proposed City of Newhall at the request of Ray McFarland of 23645½ San Fernando Road. The proposal studied was 7.5 square miles with a population of 6,300. It contained 2,300 dwelling units and 2,559 registered voters. It listed some of the costs and sources of revenue.

A report by James Stevenson of his privately-owned Los Angeles Bureau of Municipal Research dealt with 6,242 square miles with a population of 9,858, and 2,762 dwelling units with 3,286 voters registered for the 1962 election. The Stevenson report was far superior, but the county report was official. According to Andrew Martin the people never got to vote on the incorporation of Newhall because at that time landowners owning large holdings could protest and block the proceedings. Newhall Land and Standard Oil protested and stopped the process.

In response to a *Signal* editorial we had asked for a county study that was published in 1970 with incorrect data from the Sheriff's Department. In December the idea of county formation surfaced. A second county study of cityhood contained incorrect road figures that were corrected after the damage had been done. Of course we never tried to circulate petitions based on the 1970 report.

The League of Women Voters held a meeting in 1974 at which local self-government surfaced as being really desirable, but our efforts were redirected as a result of passage of the Cortese-Knox Act, which made county formation possible.

In 1976, at the county formation hearings, Meg Gilbert of Supervisor Baxter Ward's office let it slip that the county had stopped the proceedings both in 1962-1963 and 1970-1971, when it reported on a 2.5 square mile proposal for a city of Newhall.

In 1974 the law concerning new county formation had been revised extensively. It went into effect on January 1, 1975, and at the stroke of midnight we circulated and signed the first petition in a meeting in the restaurant at Lyons Bowl.

County formation was seen as preferable because of the fact that the city must provide fire services, which limited its area, and thus the significant number of people outside of any possible city. We were confident that our own county was feasible because of our knowledge of the financing of counties of similar populations, and the stream of reports we had from the State Board of Equalization concerning sales tax revenues.

"County was a happy idea."

The *Los Angeles Times* of January 5, 1975, revealed that about 500 people in Mendocino County celebrated New Year's Eve by starting an altogether different movement that we could not top. They were for the formation of the State of Mendocino out of the nineteen northernmost counties of California. Novelist Robin White, the leader of the Grand Army of Mendocino, said, "At minimum, we'll have some fun and notify Sacramento that we're not happy with the way the state is being governed. At maximum, we'll establish a new state." Years later the counties of Northern California did conduct an advisory vote, and the people of all of them except Sacramento favored formation of a new state, while the people in Sacramento County voted not to favor it, but to join Northern California if it were formed.

Indeed, measures to split the state had passed in the State Senate in 1965 and 1969. This effort was a little more fun.

On January 20, however, the *Times* took a dim view, editorially, of our efforts. In "A Message from 66,000 Indentured Serfs," Scott Newhall had his say.

The day that the almighty Los Angeles Times, or the people of the Santa Clarita Valley, or any other force now known to exist on the face of the earth can reform the great, slobbering, feudal domain known as Los Angeles county, is the day the Angel Gabriel will blow his golden trumpet and the chief editorial writer of the Times will be sitting in God's great judgment seat. Los Angeles County is not about to reform its mendacious, predatory, comfortable, colonial political system, or certainly not before the next Ice Age. And so today Los Angeles county is a vampire among California counties, gorging itself on a banquet of blood from weary and desperate taxpayers who are trying to scratch out a living for themselves from the sun-baked soil of remote border marches....

Los Angeles County is so monstrous, so unwieldy, so awkward and cumbersome, that it simply does not work anymore.

"People are crawling out of the woodwork over this thing," said Dan Hon to *The Signal*. We had a significant number of community leaders working on the effort. Bill Light projected completion of the signature drive on March 31. We had each segment of the community organized.

At the January 22 meeting at the Straw Hat Pizza Parlor on Lyons Avenue, Dan Hon was able to announce that the Canyon County Formation Committee had incorporated itself, with Jo Anne Darcy, Lester Hiebert, George Wells, Connie Worden and himself as the incorporating directors. Art Evans projected that the initial phase would cost \$2,600.

At the election of the board the original board members resigned, and a cumulative ballot was circulated, with each member to have seven votes to distribute as he saw fit. Carl Boyer, Jo Anne Darcy, Dan Hon, John Gally, Chuck Rheinschmidt, George Wells and Connie Worden were elected.

The directors then elected officers, with Dan Hon as President, Connie Worden Executive Vice President, Jo Anne Darcy as Secretary and Carl Boyer as Treasurer. Gally, Rheinschmidt and Wells were named as vice presidents. We voted to open an account at Santa Clarita National Bank, and John Gally was charged with developing a logo.

Those who could met on the morning of Tuesday, February 18, to organize a new election, as it was discovered cumulative voting was not permissible under the law. While the results of the new balloting on Wednesday, February 26, were not found in the extant minutes, John Gally replaced me as Treasurer, and Peter Huntsinger was on the board in my place. I could attend only so many morning meetings during the week, and the board began to held morning meetings more regularly.

Ruth Newhall wrote a series of articles, published by *The Signal* in February and March, which helped to educate the public. She reviewed how the number of counties in California had grown over the years, and how in 1930 a group of legislators and municipal government experts said that the forms used in 1910 were not keeping up with the need. Finally three bills by Assemblyman John Knox were passed in 1974. One, AB 4271, enhanced the prospects for new county formation, another allowed two counties to consolidate into one, and a third provided a procedure for changes in boundaries between counties. What concerned us were the new Government Code sections 23300 to 23398.

Reporter Christy Park was getting a tremendous education herself about county services in responding to her assignment to explain to the public how they worked. Her story of "Jane Smith," aged 68, trying to transfer her Social Security check and Medicare coverage was a classic. It was a woeful but all too true tale of long distance calls, confusing directions, the need to visit a number of offices in different towns, very limited hours, and the lack of public transportation, which Mildred Paul described as "our biggest problem." A huge problem was that many people in Canyon Country had to drive forty miles to Lancaster to get services. Such was our most local government, for while Social Security and Medicare are federal functions, it is "city hall" which is responsible for directing people to appropriate offices and providing a public transportation system which works.²

The signup slips preserved by Carmen Sarro list the people who volunteered to help with county formation at the organizational meeting, when we called ourselves the "New County" Formation Committee. These people represented a cross section of the community, including merchants, Los Angeles County employees, engineers, computer managers, typists, developers, attorneys, a realtor, an automobile dealer, artists, salesmen, brokers, an electrician, an entertainer, a college administrator and housewives.

By March 10 we had passed the 3,000-signature mark and we were planning a drive-in effort along Soledad Canyon Road. We had enjoyed a big plug from Johnny Grant, the long-time honorary mayor of Hollywood, on his talk show on KTLA, channel 5. A week later we passed 4,000 and were moving quickly, we thought, towards our goal of 7,033 valid signatures, even if the drive was flagging somewhat.

We continued to stress that we favored the formation of a commission to study county formation, and only after their report was published might we favor the formation of Canyon County. However, by March 25, our goal for the completion of the petition drive, Bill Light reported that we only had 4,340 signatures. The problem was that some of the precincts had been organized but not canvassed. The meeting was lightly attended. I argued forcefully to abandon the door-to-door precinct approach and work the shopping center parking lots, even if the invalid signatures ranged from 25% to 33%.

When the committee met on April 10, Bill Light reported 5,225 signatures. On April 23 Moana Steinberg reported a slowing of signature gathering in the shopping centers due to saturation, but Bill Light reported success with mailing

petitions out in answer to telephone requests. By May 1 the signature count was 6,299. The mailed petitions were coming back at a 14% rate after a two-week delay. Lee Turner reported on a visit with Governor Jerry Brown, who was "concerned and interested." By May 14 the petition-return rate by mail was over 40%. Our deadline was June 30 by law, and we had to have the petitions in shortly after June 1 for checking. Ruth Newhall suggested that we prepare direct questions for the Governor's Commission.

On June 13 we had 8,133 signatures in hand, not all of them verified. A major blitz was necessary, but the troops got the job done.

On July 4, 1975, some of us celebrated Independence Day by taking our petitions to the Registrar-Recorder's office, then in Los Angeles. Mr. Beck of the Registrar's Office gave up a part of his holiday to receive them. We turned in 1,056 petitions with 9,532 signatures. Of those 1,341 were thrown out, leaving 8,191 as valid. It had been determined that we needed 7,015 at that time.

By July 29 we had only \$334.05 in our account. We nominated Jereann Bowman, Ken Krayenhagen, Ed Muhl, Robert Rockwell and Walt Wayman for service on the Governor's Commission. Frank and Lee Turner resigned due to heavy travel commitments. On September 7 Connie Worden resigned from the board, but promised to stay with the Executive Committee. Bill Light was elected in her place four days later.

A dinner dance on September 20 at Cal Arts, with tickets at \$5 each, raised \$394.33. It was obvious that we would never have adequate funds, and by December 12 we knew we had to work harder to meet the demand for speakers. The fact that the Los Angeles County Fire Protection District would continue to provide services to the area within that special district was raised, but most of the proposed county was not within the district. Watershed areas would have to be protected out of the general fund.

At first things went smoothly. The Registrar-Recorder certified the petitions and the Board of Supervisors took the appropriate steps to put the process into the hands of Governor Brown. However, the Governor stalled us. The law was defective; it put no deadline upon the governor for the appointment of the governor's commission on Canyon County formation.

Finally the legislature stepped in with SB 8279, which related to interim financing, an extended study period for Canyon County, and a ninety-day deadline for Governor Brown to appoint the members of his Commission.

Then Supervisor Baxter Ward began to raise all sorts of doubts about our ability to handle the expenses of running our own county. He said we could not afford air ambulance service. We would not consider reducing it, and cited a number of different ways of providing the service. Ward was probably surprised that we knew enough to challenge his assumptions, or those of some county bureaucrat who was feeding him ideas. He raised the specter of county service areas adding still more taxes. I cited a single district tax rate of \$20 per \$100 of assessed valuation right in Los Angeles County, a water district tax in the Las Virgines area. Any special interest could ask the county to provide a facility and

pay for it with a heavy tax bill, fully deductible from federal taxes. It took a lot of work to counter these arguments as we lacked professional staff.

Baxter Ward was making all sorts of generalizations about our being unable to afford our own county. I wrote, "Fortunately this question will be decided by the Commission and not by Supervisor Ward."³

Art Seidenbaum caught the spirit in his column, "Divorce, County Style," which would have been presented here in full had not the *Los Angeles Times* simply ignored my requests for the necessary permission. He caught our feelings of failing to "identify with home rule from such a faraway home."

Most telling was his statement that the "biggest question may be whether we need big new institutions of government or smaller better ones."⁴

During the hearings by the County Formation Review Commission we made extensive use of new tables I had drawn up in January. They incorporated material from *1971-1975 Fiscal Trends in County Government*, published in 1975 by The California Taxpayers' Association and the California Farm Bureau Federation, and the 1976 edition of *Tax Payers' Guide*. They were very similar to the earlier tables done three years before while we were considering county formation.

We had to deal with county estimates. The Chief Administrative Officer issued a report assigning 25% of the entire Los Angeles County fire budget to our proposed county. He included large areas of watershed outside of our area, and conveniently omitted pointing out that only 9% of the stations and 6% of the personnel were in our valley. His report estimated our public assistance budget at \$7 million when we were currently paying \$1.95 million to support 140 employees, of which only sixteen worked in the Santa Clarita Valley. We were charged with a staff of eighteen in the District Attorney's office, but could only find two attorneys and two secretaries. However, the report stated that revenues from the Canyon County area were \$24.9 million and expenditures totaled only \$23.2 million!

With the Commission finally appointed by Governor Brown, we began the hearing process in the Laboratory Building at College of the Canyons on April 23, 1976. Donald G. Hagman, a law professor at UCLA, served as Chairman and a representative of Los Angeles County. Rosemary Tribulato, a prominent Democrat from Los Angeles County, who was engaged in administration and public relations, and Gabrielle Pryor, a city council member from the young city of Irvine in Orange County, were the other people from outside of our area appointed by the governor. Brown appointed Les Hiebert and Charles L. Weeks, a banker, to represent the proposed Canyon County. Meg Gilbert, Baxter Ward's "local" field representative from the San Gabriel Valley, was our nemesis.

The major bone of contention was the cost of government. Meg kept providing the commission with "estimated actuals." We derided Los Angeles County style and kept talking about how the other counties ran themselves. While we were not as small as some counties that combined several duties under one employee, we knew how money could be spent wisely.

The debate between Meg Gilbert for the county and a host of us primed to represent the proposed Canyon County kept the Commission's executive secretary, Eugene Goodrow, and his staff member, Madelyn Glickfeld, busy.

Don Hagman went before the Board of Supervisors with the Commission's report on 17 August 1976. He made the point that we were the first to petition for county formation under the new state law. He also stated that the commission, although allowed six months extendable to a year to make their report, had done it in less than four months so county formation would be on the November 2, 1976, ballot. This would eliminate the need for a special election at a cost of \$2.5 million.⁵

The report wrestled with a number of problems presented by vague law. What was indebtedness? Did it mean bonded debt, or did it include leasebacks, which were a way of avoiding floating new bonds? The commission settled on a figure of \$393,291,660, which was the bonded debt plus principal obligations on leasebacks less offsetting revenues. Assessed valuation figures came from four sources, marked Controller, Board of Equalization, Auditor-Controller and Hufford. The first two sources were from the State, while the second two were from the county, Harry Hufford being the Chief Administrative Officer at the time. The dollar amounts of the difference looked big, but the percentages were very close. The figure was a little more than \$22,095,000,000. Hufford computed the assessed value of the proposed county at \$261,900,000, or 1.039% of the total.

The method of determining what we would be spending on county government made good sense to us. I had already done the comparison tables so surprises were few, even if Meg Gilbert kept saying they were not in line with her "estimated actuals." The commission's tables were different in that they included figures from El Dorado County, and omitted Placer County.

Our viability as a county was summed up on page 51. The Commission stated that our total revenue would be \$25,146,216, and that our adjusted low expenditures would be \$25,076,201, comparable to Shasta County. Los Angeles County's estimated actuals totaled \$35,146,645, leaving us with a 28.5% shortfall. The figures the Commission accepted included almost a million dollars for contingencies, and included room for a cut of about 10% in the property tax.

The Commission mapped out supervisorial districts. The first included Saugus, Castaic, Val Verde and Gorman. The second included Valencia and the area west of I-5 and south of the Santa Clara River. The third district was essentially Newhall. The fourth was eastern Canyon Country, Agua Dulce and Acton. The fifth was a compact central part of Canyon Country.

The Commission altered the county boundary in insignificant ways, removing seven square miles in the southwestern area valued at \$90,000. The proponents had attempted to draw a boundary as close as possible to the drainage basin with some concessions to school district boundaries.

The transition envisioned by the Commission was initially a shock, allowing the County of Los Angeles to govern Canyon County as if it had never been pro-

posed until February 1 following the November 2 election. While this may have seemed necessary, the experience we had from the incorporation of Santa Clarita indicates that some functions, such as planning and zoning, should cease immediately upon the report of the Commission to the Board of Supervisors of the existing county.

On February 1, 1977, Canyon County was to have control of one per cent of its budget, enough to pay the Board of Supervisors, Chief Administrative Officer and staff. The full transition was to take twenty-six months, with the steps figured according to the total budget amounts.

We liked the method of transitioning staff. Los Angeles County employees that lived in and worked in the proposed county on July 7, 1975, and stayed through the transition, would stay with Canyon County. The second preference would be for those who worked in the area through those dates. The third preference would be for those who lived and worked in the area on November 2, 1976, and stayed through the transition, and fourth would be for those working in the area during the transition. We wanted happy employees and believed that this would be perceived as fair by all.

The Commission recognized the controversy over contracted costs for county services in a transition according to a preset calendar. Therefore Los Angeles County was to receive the bulk of the revenues while providing services. No one knows from one year to the next what the costs and revenues will be, but the *status quo* must prevail. If this meant that Los Angeles County was providing a subsidy, at least new county formation was the quickest way to end the subsidy, which otherwise might never end.

The Newhall Judicial District was to be realigned with the Canyon County boundaries if the county was created. The county superintendent of schools, treasurer, county clerk, auditor, sheriff, tax collector, district attorney, recorder, assessor, public administrator and coroner would normally have to be elected in a general law county unless the Commission allowed for the consolidation of offices, allowing savings. However, they would not be on the initial ballot because the Board of Supervisors should have the power to consolidate offices before they are filled by election. The Board could appoint professionally qualified people until the November 1978 election. Even officers of the old county, or their deputies, could serve in the interim.

The county seat was to be located between I-5 and the Antelope Valley Freeway in the area south of Township 5 North. We were glad there was no argument over that.

The Commission voted to set the maximum property tax rate the same as it was at the time in Los Angeles County, at \$4.8713 for general purposes, \$0.3224 for library purposes, and \$0.2432 for road district purposes.

Rosemary Tribulato, a commissioner from Los Angeles County, dissented to some of the determinations. She felt the new county should collect its own revenue from the beginning, and that the new county was not economically viable. The lack of viability was made manifest by the new Board of Supervisors

being able to draw a percentage of the trust fund, and that Los Angeles County should not have to provide services for which they were not reimbursed. In addition, she said the maximum tax rate was too low.

Her attitude was obvious. What we did not know was that Don Hagman believed that Canyon County should not be formed. He believed the solution was to incorporate a city. However, he never said so until after the election, when he invited six of us down to lunch at UCLA to discuss the alternatives.

All the commissioners had earned their pay, which was \$50 per day. Donald Hagman had been a magnificent chairman, and his death not long after, while he was in his prime, was a great blow.

Also helpful to us was a paper, "Economic Viability of Canyon County," by Kent Dolan, James Greer, Richard Shephard, Dick Spies and Neil Thompson of the UCLA Graduate School of Management, dated July 9, 1976. They cited a statistical correlation of .988 between population and the level of revenues and expenditures in the forty-one California counties with a population of less than 250,000. Counties with a population of 66,000 may be expected to have a budget between \$19,092,967 and \$20,790,682 at least 90% of the time. Extremes might run from \$12,209,735 to \$27,673,915.

Even though they worked with an assessed value which was far too low (confirmed by W. Greg Ross of the Los Angeles County Tax Assessor's Office and Richard Dickson, County Cadastral Engineer), they calculated a property tax rate of \$3.70 for the new county. Martha L. Willman, writing in the *Los Angeles Times* of July 22, pointed out that the L.A. Co. CAO had previously said the tax rate would have to be \$8.95.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors continued to do their duty and put Canyon County formation on the ballot as Proposition F. We published a fact sheet saying that Los Angeles County taxes were the highest in the state, and that a lot of money was wasted providing services to outlying areas. Further, stealing the idea from Baxter Ward, we said that Los Angeles County subsidized our area by \$10 million per year, but that the Governor's Commission found us to be viable. We did argue that Ventura County provided fire protection to three times the territory and four times the people for the same amount of money Los Angeles County said it spent in our area. "Canyon County is a dynamic effort to meet the needs of the people and to create a new, smaller, independent and modernized government."

The Los Angeles County firemen put up \$214,000 to fight county formation. Someone had suggested we might use volunteer firemen in Val Verde. The professionals were not going to let that pass. We raised a little over \$10,000 to spend on media ads, mostly radio.

I did not realize the gravity of our position until the day before the election, when one of my students at San Fernando High School brought me a postcard that his family had received in the mail. It asked if people were aware that the creation of Canyon County would cost Los Angeles County \$283 million of its tax base. Mayor Tom Bradley of the City of Los Angeles, and Stephen Reinhardt

of the Democratic Party had signed the card. I knew that most people would think this meant \$283 million in taxes, and we were dead. It did not matter that the Commission had said in the ballot pamphlet, "Because both the population and assessed value of the proposed county is only one per cent of Los Angeles County, the permanent impact on revenues and expenditures is negligible."

Indeed we were dead. The countywide result was 701,279 for, and 1,496,896 against. We had done pretty well in the Antelope Valley and Palos Verdes.

In the races for seats on the Canyon County Board of Supervisors, Gil Callowhill had won in the first district over Harry Fedderson. They had spent virtually no money. John Marlette, an attorney from Valencia, was handed the second district victory without opposition. Again I spent about \$350 in my campaign, and won in the third district. I walked to every address I was allowed to, and made a mailing to Friendly Valley. Bob Silverstein of Friendly Valley was my only serious competition, although Bob Endress spent a lot more money.

Don Jennings of Sand Canyon won his race in the fourth district over a number of viable candidates, getting 27% of the vote to 17.3% for second place finisher Sam M. Thompson, a local attorney. George A. Wells won in the fifth district.

The Economy and Efficiency Commission of Los Angeles County followed the election with a year-long study, and published "Can We Govern Ourselves?" They invited my input.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to thank you for this opportunity to say a few words on the subject of new county formation, particularly as it relates to the proposed Canyon County.

I hope you will take our movement very seriously, for in spite of the fact that we were overwhelmed in Los Angeles, the vote in Canyon County, a majority of 54% in favor of county formation, should indicate to you that there are very serious problems in this, the largest county in the world, a county larger than most states and many nations.

Keep in mind that our 54% majority was in spite of a consistent campaign by the opponents, throughout the proposed and affected counties, pointing out that it had been said we would face a \$10 million shortfall if Los Angeles County figures were correct. Also, the opponents of Proposition F were well financed (we were naively hoping the election outcome would be based on the issues, not on money), and firemen went door-to-door in Canyon County with their campaign of fear, saying taxes would double and fire insurance would be impossible to obtain (therefore people with mortgages would lose their homes).

We have some very real grievances. When I met with Mr. Roche and Mr. Campbell earlier I turned over to them all my notes, including the various drafts of our grievances. Perhaps some of you have already evaluated how they evolved.

Our grievances include: no possibility of local government for our area to represent all our people except county government, remoteness

from Los Angeles County's seat, county employee lack of knowledge of our area, reaction time to our problems counted in years, ignorance of traffic problems, and waste of funds.

I believe that efforts aimed at regional financing and administration of truly regional problems, such as welfare and watershed fire control, would be a progressive step for Los Angeles County to support at the legislative level. The county's reactionary efforts at the present time are pretty sad indeed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, immediately after the defeat of Proposition F we sat down with Dr. Hagman in the faculty cafeteria at UCLA to discuss the alternatives to county formation. They included creation of a Municipal Advisory Committee which was rejected by our people because it would consist of elected people who would have no power and no funds. The second alternative, an Area Planning Commission, is resisted by Supervisor Ward, who has been very honest with us about his reasons. A Community Service District, or County Services District, has been rejected because of the lack of state subventions – in essence it would provide some power but no funding other than possibly through property taxes. We asked fourthly, for an opinion from the staff of Assembly Local Government and Legislative Council about forming a new type of Municipal Improvement District (to be placed on the ballot by the Legislature) – in short the answer was negative. City incorporation remains a possibility (legally), but our people don't really want a city because it would leave so many of us out. What remains as the only popular alternative? County formation.

I want to address your concern about the many Canyon County residents who commute to Los Angeles and use city and county services there. We would love to eliminate the problem because the long commute, with parents being away from home for long hours, is a major cause of juvenile and social problems. But, as I have mentioned, we have no power of planning, zoning, development and job creation.

Now is the time for the members of this task force to come to grips with the real problem, the fact that Los Angeles County is rapidly becoming as out of date, and as out of touch with the people, as the English 'rotten borough' system.

The *Times* was right when it said in an editorial last week, 'Secession's popularity is growing as quickly as property taxes.' Los Angeles County, as it now exists, is not long for this world.

Do you want to sit back and watch it break up? Or would you rather take the lead, be creative, and come up with something positive and new which would still preserve what good there may be in our present system?

They looked at our frustration and suggested a federated system in which a regional government would be formed out of a merger of Los Angeles, Ventura,

San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange Counties. This massive entity would handle smog control, transportation, health, welfare and the courts. The cities would be reorganized to improve their ability to deliver municipal services, with “the political decision-making authority over the service function of government – vested in community-based cities.” Municipal Advisory Councils would be created in areas where cityhood was not possible. The county would contract with cities to have cities provide services in unincorporated areas.

Sadly, the answer was no, we could not govern ourselves. The Economy and Efficiency Commission did not have a clue that the problem was big, remote government.

¹*The Signal*, Feb. 5, 1975.

²*The Signal*, Oct. 6 & 9, 1972.

³Boyer letter to Daniel Hon, Jan. 4, 1976.

⁴*Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 21, 1976.

⁵County Formation Review Commission for Proposed Canyon County, *Report of the County Formation Review Commission, Proposed Canyon County*, August 17, 1976 (including *Errata*).