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In today's pages: A new police chief, new school rules and neocons

November 4, 2009 | 10:06 am

The Times editorial board and columnist Tim Ruten both throw their support behind Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's choice of Charlie Beck to lead the Los Angeles Police Department. The board likes Beck's credentials as a reformer, but notes the work still to be done on that front. Ruten echoes that sentiment, and throws in a few more issues that matter to the City Council.

On a less sanguine note, Edward H. Crane, founder and president of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, argues that neoconservatives transformed the Republican Party into an interventionist, big-government operation with no conservative policy agenda. Their's fighting words! Good thing they came out of Crane's word processor and not, say, Ruten's.

And Jeff Bleich, chairman of the Cal State University Board of Trustees, laments the slow death of the California dream. No, not the one about having a house on the beach. That died a long time ago. He's referring to "the promise of low-cost education that brought so many here, and kept so many here":

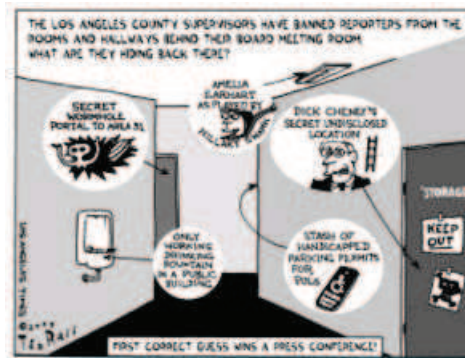
In response to failures of leadership, voters came up with one cure after another that was worse than the disease -- whether it has been over-reliance on initiatives driven by special interests, or term limits that remove qualified people from office, or any of the other ways we have come up with to avoid representative democracy.

As a result, for the last two decades we have been starving higher education. California's public universities and community colleges have half as much to spend today as they did in 1990 in real dollars. In the 1980s, 17% of the state budget went to higher education and 3% went to prisons. Today, only 9% goes to universities and 10% goes to prisons.

Speaking of schools, the editorial board criticizes a bill by Sen. Gloria Romero (D-Los Angeles) that combines some common-sense reforms to the public system with ill-considered ones. And, although it agrees that colleges and universities could do a better job controlling costs, it defends the decision by some to pay top dollar for top-drawer presidents.

-- Jon Healey

Illustration: Ted Rall / For The Times



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