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The Leader Follows AGAIN!

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Since the column below was posted, new information provided by the City Clerk's office alters information initially provided. Because former Board of Ed. member Paul Krekorian did not file as a candidate, City Clerk Margarita Campos says that the extension on filing DOES apply to school board seats as well. Candidates for school board may file as candidates by Dec. 6 at 5pm

This confusion was apparently caused by the fact that Krekorian vacated his seat before the end of his term in order to assume the seat on the State Assembly that he was elected to on Nov. 7. Material below has been altered from that which was originally published to reflect that new information.

Over the years I've had a bone or two to pick with Burbank's unofficial newspaper of record, the Burbank Leader. But for the most part, I've tried either to keep the jabs lighthearted, or to myself. For today, however, that self-censorship is going to have to stop. This time the Tribune's/LA Times' Burbank Leader has screwed up so significantly it can't be overlooked or laughed off.

Because I left the Leader after a dispute with a former editor about three years ago, folks assumed I'd happily host an endless string of criticisms here, some valid, some off-base, and some that were just bizarre conspiracy theories. There came a time that "feedback letters" sent to this site were largely limited to criticisms of the Leader, and we had to impose a moratorium on them.

The editor for whom I had so little respect was dumped not long after I left, and I never stopped understanding the challenges faced by those who put out the Leader. Besides, I didn't see a lot of nobility in taking shots at the Burbank Leader after I left for some shortcomings that were the norm back when I was cashing checks from the LA Times.

But the problem with the Burbank Leader published for Dec. 2 went far beyond the problems that arise with employing too few inexperienced, overworked reporters, and having too few effective editors, with the ones they do have stretched too thin. It may be another symptom of problems anticipated when the newspaper group publishing the Leader closed its office in Burbank two years ago.

As was noted in a previous edition of the Leader, incumbents and new candidates in the upcoming race for the offices of city council and school board had until Dec. 1 to file papers announcing their intent to run. On Dec. 1, and if the

incumbents had not declared their intent to run, state law extended the filing deadline to Dec. 6.

The logic behind this is simple. A potential candidate might not want to go up against the advantage incumbents have, or would prefer to defer to an incumbent. The rule allows relative outsiders five extra days, in this case three of them business days, to collect the necessary signatures and take the plunge.

This year there was an unusual development. When 5pm rolled around on Dec. 1, neither of the council incumbents whose terms are expiring had filed to run again. The terms for current Mayor Todd Campbell and council member Jef Vander Borcht will expire April 30, and both men will leave office.

It's not unheard of for incumbents to decide they've had enough (or to conclude voters have had enough of them). But it is unusual, and I can't imagine one would argue it's not newsworthy. Moreover, one would think it's part of a newspaper's responsibility to the community it serves to get out the word that the incumbents are leaving, and so the opportunity to file as a candidate has been extended.

On the following day, the Burbank Leader didn't publish a word about the development. Not even buried on a back page was there a report that incumbents had chosen to leave their seats, and so the filing period for interested candidates had been extended to Dec. 6.

What we got instead was a story about the City Hall holiday tree lighting ceremony held Dec. 1. That is, a reporter and photographer were at City Hall an hour after the filing deadline closed, and what they covered was the lighting of a Christmas tree. The Leader also covered in that edition controversy surrounding proposed construction of a new market, a matter that will go before the council in January. Also prominently covered in the Dec. 2 edition was a story about a new sculpture headed to the city, a purchase approved by the council in early November.

Because the Burbank Leader is published only on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the next issue will appear on the new deadline day for candidate filing, Dec. 6. But even that one can't have a final list of all the candidates, because the newspaper's deadline will come a day before the City Clerk's.

I suppose one could argue that insiders are well aware of the election deadlines, and so they don't really need the newspaper's coverage. I'd answer that the same could be said of literally any City Hall matter, and so the Leader may as well stop covering the beat entirely. Some say that's effectively what has happened already.

But the fact is, even insiders counted on the Leader to meet the minimum standards. I attended two community events Saturday evening, and at both a hot topic of conversation was amazement at that day's Leader. Many people, including several city officials, had assumed they'd open the paper that morning to finally learn who the candidates were going to be, and whether there was more time for others to come in.

It didn't help that a letter published in a recent edition misspelled the name of Burbank's last City Manager, a man after whom a new city park is being named. The error may have been the author's, but it seemed another telling sign that no one in the Leader's Glendale office noticed the mistake. Add to that an editorial aimed at urging an incoming assemblyman to work hard, a muddle of words that led some to speculate an editor was trying to fill a very big empty space at the last minute, and there were no kind words said for the community's own paper among a couple of hundred well-informed locals.

A newspaper's obligation is to keep the entire community informed to the best of its ability, especially of important developments in city government. Even given the limits in place today, the Leader can do much better than it has in this instance.

I can also argue that City Clerk Margarita Campos should have posted an announcement about the lack of incumbents filing on the city's web site, and perhaps issued announcements via City Hall's cable television broadcast. But her failure to do that, or her decision not to, would be yet another subject of interest for the local newspaper – one which is supposed to serve as a watchdog for the community.

Unfortunately, I'm just one person (ably assisted by a staff appropriate to one person), and have been wrestling with travel and other deadlines and obligations in recent days. But I belatedly offer you what should have been publicized days ago.

In the race for two vacant city council seats, according to the Burbank City Clerk's office, the following individuals have already filed papers to be candidates:

Carolyn Berlin

Phil Berlin

Gary Bric

Vahe Hovannessian

Whit Prouty

Anja Reinke

Margaret H. Sorthun

In the race for three school board seats (one of which was vacated by Paul Krekorian when he was elected to the State Assembly) these are the people who have filed as candidates:

Ted Bunch *

Dave Kemp *

Roberta Reynolds

* = incumbent

If you'd care to join candidates in pursuing a seat on the Burbank City Council or the Board of Education, it's necessary to pick up filing papers from the City Clerk's office in City Hall and return them completed by 5pm on Wednesday, Dec. 6. For more information on what's required, see the [City Clerk's web site](#). You'd better hurry.
