



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on June 10, 2011

Burbank Considers Putting Golf Course Before Fire Service

If taxpayers were allowed to propose ways to cut government budgets, it is probable that the result would be very different from what politicians chose.

Reducing entitlements and federal salaries by five percent, for example, would have an immediate and salutary effect on the federal deficit and the hardship on those receiving Social Security or in the Federal Civil Service would be relatively modest. What is true in Washington is true throughout government. Statism, a system that operates outside the market, does not require a normal cost-benefit analysis that any business in the free market would need to undertake. The costs and the benefits of government decisions are governed by political power, not economic value to consumers.



State governments filled with government employee unions who “elect their bosses” have, of course, bankrupted a number of states like California and Illinois, and when chief executives like Governor Christie in New Jersey or Governor Walker in Wisconsin attempt to bring state compensation packages in line with realistic revenue, public employee unions attack these officials personally and pretend that, say, reducing teachers’ salaries and pensions in Wisconsin by five percent (while most Wisconsin citizens face daunting unemployment numbers for much lower paying jobs) would produce some sort of catastrophe or that eliminating some school administrators would end education in Wisconsin.

The closer government is to the governed, the less likelihood of these sorts of games, but all government, by its very nature, relies upon political power rather than market decisions to determine budgets (and a wide range of other issues as well, like environmental regulations.) The City of Burbank has given us one such example.

Cities provide services to their citizens. Fire departments are important to any city. It is a testament to the goodness of Americans that a large percentage, [71 percent](#), of fire services around our country are provided by rural volunteer fire departments. Although public employee unions insinuate themselves into metropolitan fire services through vehicles like the I.A.F.F. (International Association of Fire Fighters), there is no denying that these men risk their lives to make us safe. Reducing fire services affects public safety very directly.

Public libraries are also valuable to the entire community. It is a sad fact that libraries have been targets of successful ideological infiltration, so many of these systems will have almost no books by once-famous and popular authors like Alan Drury (because of the brilliant dissection of the pro-Soviet



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Left in his novels) or literary giants like Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The very choice that library systems allow patrons will allow the discriminating reader to locate C.S. Lewis, George Orwell, or Whitaker Chamber — all of whom open horizons of political thought outside the Groupthink of statism.

So when the [Burbank City Council](#) has to find ways to economize, where does it look? It looks to cut fire services and libraries, even as it considers providing a \$2 million loan to Debell Golf Course, a municipally owned operation. Mayor Jess Talamantes said at a May 26 budget hearing about Debell Golf Course, "As far as I'm concerned, there's a jewel up there that's too big to fail in my opinion." The loan would mean that the municipal golf course would come at the expense of \$566,878 in proposed budget cuts to the fire department, libraries and other services. The golf course is losing revenue. In fiscal year 2009, that revenue was at a 10-year low, and the projections are that revenues will drop another 11 percent in fiscal year 2010. The clubhouse for the municipal golf course just received a \$7.5 million renovation, and City Councilman David Gordon is skeptical that the loan proposed could be repaid by Debell Golf Course, as he said: "A decrease in operating revenues with the rounds being played couldn't make the \$2-million loan; what magical turnaround in utilization is going to occur to pay back a \$4-million loan?"

What could the Burbank City Council do instead of extending an unpromising loan to a municipal enterprise like a golf course? Why not sell the golf course? At the right price, any real estate, especially in a location like Burbank, California, can be sold. The private owner would hire staff now employed by the city, and it would pay property taxes and sales taxes as well. Debell Golf Course, as a private venture, would operate in the world of market prices and market costs, which maximizes efficiency. The people of Burbank would still enjoy a golf course (no good investor is going to turn that real estate into a glue factory), but they would only pay for that service when they used it.



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