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PA 715 R1: Policy Memo #2: Stakeholder Analysis

**No Prison in East L.A.!**

Policy Problem: In the early 1980s, the state of California was having a big problem with prison overcrowding due to tougher sentencing requirements and longer prison terms which had recently been adopted by the state legislature (Varley, 1). As a direct result of these stricter requirements, “the number of felons sentenced to prison [increased] from 14 percent in 1974 to 35 percent in 1984.” (Varley, 2). Because of concerns about the ramifications of such severe overcrowding, the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, among other groups, petitioned the state government for more prisons to be built as soon as possible. They claimed that assault of correctional officers was on the rise and this put its members in an unsuitable work environment. In 1982, the legislature authorized six new prisons with the caveat that at least one of the six be built in Los Angeles. A disproportionate number of the state’s prisons were located in Northern California, even though approximately “35 percent of inmates were from Los Angeles County” (Varley, 2).

A number of sites were chosen within the boundaries of Los Angeles counties, but for various political reasons, each of the sites was rejected. Finally the California Department of Corrections (CDC) settled on a parcel of land in East Los Angeles called “Crown Coach.” It was originally dismissed for being too small, but showed up as the number one choice later on, much to the shock of the community. As will be discussed in more detail later on, a number of community members banded together to fight the placement of the prison in their neighborhood.

Description of the Stakeholders: There were two sides to this issue, one for the prison being located in East L.A., the other against that location. Within each of the two groups are a number of individuals who played different, but important roles.

Proponents: Proponents of the plan to locate one of the prisons on the “Crown Coach” site in East Los Angeles included the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, the California Department of Corrections (CDC), Governor Deukmejian, Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich, Senator Robert Presley, Richard Polanco of the Public Safety Committee and the *Los Angeles Times*. Each of these players’ preference was for the prison to be located in East L.A. because it was required that one of the six prisons had to be located within the boundaries of the county of Los Angeles and all of the other sites had been excluded. There were over 100 other possible sites that the CDC had found initially, and the crown coach site was not considered because it was too small. However, all of the other sites were dismissed for various, mostly political, reasons.

A few of the players were involved in the agenda setting and formulation of the plan to build six new prisons in California. Most closely involved was the California Correctional Peace Officers Association, who felt that the overcrowding of California’s prisons was affecting the safety of the Peace Officers. They were the first to petition the state to build more prisons. The California State Legislature was involved with the adoption of the plan, and the CDC had the most influence during implementation phase by searching for properties. The *Los Angeles Times* was involved in the evaluation phase because they evaluated the policy through editorials on the opinions of readers on the location of the prisons chosen by the CDC.

Opponents: On the other side were those who opposed locating the prison in East L.A., an area they felt already had its share of bad public works facilities. “There were many reasons for the near unanimous anger about the project, but chief among them was the sense that for too long, East Los Angeles had been an easy dumping ground for undesirable projects.” (Varley, 5). In that regard, once the crown site was announced as the CDC’s choice for the new prison, opposition was quick to form. The first to start the process was Gloria Molina, the State Assemblywoman who represented the area. She and her staff distributed information regarding the prison and, as they expected, received a huge response from the community. Two coalitions formed as a result of her efforts. First was the Coalition Against the Prison,

made up of East Los Angeles Businessmen. They traveled up to Sacramento for all major legislative hearings at their own expense. Later on, they recruited the assistance of Father John Moretta, who had been involved in other community issues in the past. He suggested that it would make a more powerful statement and would draw significant media attention if the mothers of East L.A. gathered and marched to the site. As a result, another group became involved, the Mothers of East Los Angeles (MELA). Finally, as all of the parties fought to stop the bill's passage, Senate President Pre Tem David Roberti became involved. Although he had previously backed the bill, he offered the coalition advice to line up "high profile support." (Varley, 19).

None of the players on the opposing side were involved in the initial stages of agenda setting and policy formulation because it did not become an issue to them until they found out that the prison was going to be placed in their neighborhood. The opponents felt that the site was chosen without any prior notification from the State. They became involved significantly during the implementation phase when the state and CDC were pushing for a quick purchase of the site, which meant skipping the usual requirement of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Molina and the two coalitions fought the implementation of Senator Presley's bill that "ratified the CDC's selection of the Crown Coach site." (Varley, 4).

Each side had different powers that they could and did wield throughout the process. Members of the Legislature had a lot of power in deciding when the Presley's bill would go to a vote, and they used this power when in 1985, when Assembly Speaker Willie Brown refused the Governor's request to "fast track the bill past the usual committee hearings to a full vote in the Assembly." (Varley, 11). This was instrumental in giving the opposition more time to campaign against the bill. Molina used her position in the legislature to petition members of the committees, specifically the Public Safety Committee. She "lobbied the committee members and eventually persuaded a majority to vote against the prison bill and to favor...counter proposal to site the prison near an existing county prison in the rural Castaic Lake region. Senate President Roberti wielded power when he defied the Governor's call for the Senate to go

into special session by using a “procedural maneuver” (Varley, 19). Even the citizens of East L.A., who were members of the Coalition had power that they were able to wield through their organizing to fight the bill.

Analysis of the Stakeholders: As we saw in the previous section, there were a number of different stakeholders on either side of the policy. The main conflict between both sides was the location of the prison. No one disagreed about the need for more prisons in California and the problem of overcrowding in the prisons. The conflict was about whether or not the prison in Los Angeles should be located in East L.A., an area that was portrayed by the media as “a gang infested and economically blighted area mostly populated by ‘illegal aliens’” (Varley, 7). All of the other locations that the CDC initially considered were fought down by members of the respective communities who did not want the prison in their backyard. The citizens of East L.A. wanted the same consideration of having their voices heard and they were sick of having bad public works projects dumped on them.

As referenced above, all parties involved could have found a potential common ground by selecting a different location for the prison. If another site was found, the bill likely would not have met any resistance from the citizens of East L.A. However, as a result of the proposed location two coalitions were formed: The Coalition against the Prison and the Mothers of East L.A. These coalitions were formed because Assemblywoman Molina felt this was the only way the voices of the citizens of East L.A. would be heard.

As a direct result of the coalitions’ direct and relentless opposition to the prison, it was never built in East L.A. It took them many years and approximately two million dollars, but due to their efforts and thanks to a “shift in the political landscape,”(Varley 1541.1, 1) in 1992 Governor Pete Wilson signed a bill to kill the East L.A. prison once and for all. (Varley 1541.1,2). The most influential players in this policy struggle had to be the Mothers of East L.A., their weekly marches brought the necessary media focus that gave the issue even more attention. It was after their involvement that the tables really started

to turn for the opponents of the East L.A. prison. There definitely had to be multiple coalitions and players in this case in order for the citizens' voices to be heard. There is no way that one player could have gotten the media attention and focus from the legislature that the coalitions did.