The Phyllis Schlafly Report

California Up in Smoke, Thanks to Liberals

By John and Andy Schlafly

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The cost of the fires in Los Angeles County is estimated to range up to $250 billion, far more than the damage done by the Great Chicago Fire which destroyed that city in 1871. The losses from the Chicago Fire, considered one of the worst in history, were a smaller inflation-adjusted $5.7 billion.

The cost of rebuilding Chicago, which was done quickly, was contained because it was funded by its own residents, businesses, donations, and architects determined to build a great city. By 1893 it held a most spectacular World's Fair with 27 million visitors from around the world over six months, and Chicago quickly became the railroad hub for America.

New lumber began arriving in Chicago for its rebuild while there were still hot embers in burnt buildings. There was not a smoldering feeling of entitlement as seen among liberals in Los Angeles today, or demands that the federal government serve as the gravy train of handouts.

President Trump made a remarkable trip to Los Angeles to implore its residents to reclaim their property and start their own construction as soon as possible. Time is money, and extensive delay in rebuilding the devastated areas of Los Angeles could be as costly as the immediate loss in value from the fires.

But California is a regulatory nightmare where radical environmentalists obstruct construction projects at every turn. More than a decade ago Californians enacted Proposition 1 (2014) by a landslide vote of 67% to create new reservoirs to supply more water to the arid Los Angeles basin, which could have doused the fires.

Billions were allocated for the promised new reservoirs, and Congress kicked in hundreds of millions of dollars more at American taxpayer expense. Yet no new reservoirs have been built in California since 1979.

Environmentalists file lawsuits to delay or stop construction, while liberal California judges too often rule in favor of the Left there. The California Environmental Quality Act allows lawsuits to contest findings by California agencies that are required to assess the potential environmental harm of infrastructure projects.

The Palisades and Eaton fires near Los Angeles destroyed 40,000 acres, which is 20 times larger than what burned in the Great Chicago Fire. Rainfall is pouring down on Southern California in late January but nearly all of it flows into the ocean because of the lack of reservoirs there.

Currently there are only three routes to bring water to southern California, which has very little of its own. The first route is the Los Angeles Aqueduct built by the great William Mulholland in the 1900s, which brings water from the Owens River valley on the east side of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Next is the Colorado River Aqueduct built in the 1930s, which brings water from the Colorado River at Lake Havasu, but that diminishing water supply is also needed by fast-growing Arizona. Finally, there is the California Aqueduct built in the 1960s, which is the only route to bring water from north of Sacramento where water is abundant, but that water must be shared with the enormously productive farms in California's fertile Central Valley.

The coastal city of Rancho Palos Verdes embarked on a multi-million dollar project of "dewatering wells," which has removed more than 112 million gallons of water to protect million-dollar homes against instability in the earth. Now that the vegetation is gone due to fires, the risk of mudslides from sudden downpours is getting worse.

While recently touring the carnage near Los Angeles, Trump, himself a builder of magnificent skyscraper apartments and hotels, and golf courses, rightly criticized the interference by liberals with the owners of burned-out property gaining access to their own land to clear the wreckage and start rebuilding now. Not next year, not next month, but immediately, Trump urged local officials to allow it.

California liberals want the rest of America to pay for their costly regulations that impede sensible construction and affordable living. The notorious California Coastal Commission asserts its own veto power over all human activity near the ocean, where much of popular California is.

Environmentalists obstruct the routine clearing of underbrush necessary to avert disastrous wildfires from spreading so quickly. When Tom Daschle was the Democrat Senate Majority Leader from South Dakota, he inserted into legislation a special provision to prohibit federal judges from interfering with the removal of underbrush in his state.

An illegal alien, already convicted of a felony, was arrested and is considered a person of interest in connection with the start of one of these conflagrations, the so-called Kenneth Fire. He was caught carrying a blowtorch near where that fire started.

California has plenty of money, and it is time for its many billionaires to pick up their oars and row their own boat to aquatic self-sufficiency within the next decade. Rural America elected Trump over fierce opposition by wealthy California Leftists, and rural Trump voters should not be burdened with the expense of restoring the liberal lifestyle that just went up in smoke.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and lead the continuing Phyllis Schlafly Eagles organizations with writing and policy work.