

# OPINION

PASADENA STAR-NEWS

Opinion Page Editor Steve Scauzillo ♦ (626) 962-8811, Ext. 2237 ♦ letters.star-news@sgvn.com

Friday, December 9, 2005

## *Ouster a gift*

Re "County health director resigns":  
As one of the many who have called for Dr. Garthwaite's ousting I say thank you for this early Christmas present.

As a health-care expert, I know who the appropriate party is to blame for the many recent DHS failures, and that person is Garthwaite.

The Los Angeles County Supervisors should be blamed for lacking the political fortitude to gather the necessary votes among themselves to have fired him the day the county was made to enter into an MOU with the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services to outsource the day-to-day management of King/Drew Medical Center and the loss of KDMC accreditation.

Garthwaite had the opportunity to directly impact KDMC almost one year before the advent of the CMS agreement and KDMC's loss of JCAHO accreditation, and yet under his watch the problems at KDMC seemed to only escalate.

The county's civil-service system should have not proven too complicated for a seasoned 30-year public servant, and yet it did.

These are all examples of his failure to provide leadership. Instead, his quote in the Star-News article, "I think when you're in a job that has a history of turnover, you need to keep your options open," speaks volumes.

Perhaps if Garthwaite hadn't been busy "keeping his options open," he would have actually committed himself to the job of leading DHS instead of using us as a stepping stone to his next job.

For the upside, it's not too late for the supervisors to show some management acumen. They need to ask Garthwaite to leave now, not in January, and most importantly, have no hand in selecting his replacement. Then they should focus their energies on the development of an independent health authority and leave the hiring of a Director of DHS to the Health Authority.

**Genevieve M. Clavreul**  
PASADENA

# County health director resigns

BY ALICE WALTON  
CITY NEWS SERVICE

**LOS ANGELES** — Los Angeles County's embattled health director, who came under fire for his handling of problems at Martin Luther King Jr.-Drew Medical Center, resigned Tuesday.

Dr. Thomas L. Garthwaite announced his decision to the Board of Supervisors in a closed-door meeting Tuesday afternoon.

He has accepted a position as chief medical officer with Catholic Health East, which is headquartered in Pennsylvania and has facilities all along the East Coast.

"I think when you're in a job that has a history of turnover, you need to keep your options open," Garthwaite said in an interview. "So I've looked at a few jobs that would meet my career goals when I've had the opportunity.

"This one came open last summer, and this fall a search firm called and asked if I had any interest," he said.

"Their process dictated the timing more than anything else."

Garthwaite, who has been

the top county health official since Feb. 1, 2002, said the timetable for his departure was unclear.

But board members said they expected him to remain with the department — the nation's second-largest such agency — until some time in January.

The announcement was met with mixed reactions by the board.

"I wasn't expecting it, but it wasn't a surprise," Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky said. "I think there's been a lot of criticism of him. There's been a lot of scapegoating of him."

Garthwaite has been criticized repeatedly during his tenure over serious problems at King-Drew, and how he has dealt with them.

In the last few years, the Willowbrook hospital has lost accreditation, had a nearly complete change of senior management and been the subject of a Los Angeles Times investigation.

A turnaround firm, Navigant Consulting, was also brought in to help DHS fix problems at King-Drew.

"I would certainly say that the King-Drew issues have distracted us from other things

that we would have liked to have done," Garthwaite said. "However, fixing King-Drew Medical Center has been one of our highest priorities because it's one of the most important things we can do."

Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke represents the area around King-Drew.

"I would have rather seen him stay until after all the (accreditation) issues were resolved at King, but I recognize he was in a very difficult position and I knew he was looking for other positions," Burke said.

"I'm not particularly happy with some of the decision(s) he made at King ... but I recognize that it was a very difficult situa-

tion that he came into," Burke said.

"I feel as though he came in under very difficult circumstances and he did accomplish a great deal. It was an impossible job."

Yaroslavsky agreed.

"There's only so much that a human being can withstand in this job," he said.

"In a sense it's unfair. No one person can be given the credit when things go well, and no one person can be blamed when something goes wrong."

Knabe said he was only "somewhat surprised" by Garthwaite's announcement "in the sense that I knew he was out looking (for another job). I think we can move forward with or without him."