

FORMAL GRIEVANCE AND CORRECTIVE ACTION REQUEST

To: Editorial Management & Standards Director, Spectrum News 1 SoCal

From: Ron Berinstein, Director, Southern California Aviation United Working Group (SCAUWG.ORG)

Date: July 26, 2026

Subject: Formal Grievance and Request for Corrective Coverage: Structural Bias on July 22, 2026, Segment "Safety Guidelines Pacoima"

Dear Editor,

While Spectrum News 1 SoCal generally enjoys a reputation for objective, non-sensationalized, hyper-local reporting, Lydia Pantazes' July 22, 2026, feature, "Safety Guidelines Pacoima," failed to meet those fundamental journalistic standards. The 3-minute segment demonstrated clear structural bias through selective sourcing, presenting a highly connected political campaigner as an objective, neutral "everyday resident," while actively minimizing vital counter-perspectives and omitting critical local governance data.

Well-founded motivation falls short when the data received from inspirational voices assumed to be truthful proves to be nothing more than sugar-coated fiction. In the words of a legendary Los Angeles journalist, Whiteman Airport deserves "the rest of the story."

To restore journalistic balance and provide Southern California viewers with an accurate baseline of facts, Spectrum News must pursue an objective, multi-faceted investigative series. We challenge Spectrum News 1 to investigate and produce follow-up coverage across the following individual story threads:

- **The Corporate and Non-Profit Pipeline:** An investigation into how local 501(c)(3) organizations secure millions in grants by promoting neighborhood distress, while simultaneously remaining open to corporate donations from verified industrial polluters.
- **The Speculative Gentrification Paradox:** Data revealing how airport closure advocates risk forcing current minority residents out via rapid gentrification, rising land values, and predatory real estate redevelopment that increases landowner net worth at the expense of current tenants.
- **The Political Contribution Trail:** An audit of campaign contributions from developers who stand to profit directly from the closure and remediation of the 184-acre airfield.
- **The Power Line Gridlock and Administrative "Sabotage":** A factual breakdown of how local city and county leaders—not the federal government—actively stalled and shelved over the available FAA grants intended to underground high-voltage utility lines near the runway approach.
- **The Proportional Safety Reality:** A statistical comparison analyzing regional aircraft safety data against local freeway and automotive accident rates, alongside the lopsided municipal responses to both.
- **The Accountability Deficit:** An examination of governmental lack of due diligence, political flip-flopping, and the weaponization of local safety incidents to bypass long-term community infrastructure needs.

1. The Failure of Disclosure Regarding Interviewee Emma Abramyan

The core of the July 22 segment's bias rests on the framing of interviewee Emma Abramyan. Portrayed simply as a concerned lifelong neighbor complaining about aircraft noise, the segment entirely concealed her extensive professional and partisan ties to the exact political machine engineering the anti-airport movement:

- **Direct Legislative Employment:** Abramyan is an active caseworker for Los Angeles City Councilmember Imelda Padilla (Council District 6). Councilmember Padilla is deeply entrenched in anti-Whiteman politics, is a former employee of Pacoima Beautiful, and is the sister of that organization's Executive Director, Veronica Padilla-Campos.
- **Partisan Leadership:** Abramyan serves as the Programming and Events Deputy on the executive board of the San Fernando Valley Young Democrats (SFVYD).
- **Active Pro-Development Lobbying:** The SFVYD is an official co-sponsor of a May 5th petition to the Board of Supervisors explicitly demanding the closure of Whiteman Airport to clear the land for designated, speculative mixed-use development and housing. Furthermore, fellow SFVYD Board members include Teodora Reyes and Walter Garcia—both former affiliates of Pacoima Beautiful.

By giving an institutional campaigner an uninterrupted platform to recite a scripted narrative, while limiting pro-aviation voices to dismissive footage, the segment engaged in narrative manipulation.

2. Technical and Factual Rebuttals to Broadcast Claims

To demonstrate the lack of editorial due diligence in the segment, we present a direct contrast between the unchallenged claims broadcast and the verified public record:

- **Claim: “We are a small community and we don’t even utilize the airport...”**
 - *The Reality:* Whiteman Airport is a vital economic, educational, and public safety engine. It hosts the Glendale Community College Aviation program, a local Youth Aviation Explorer Program (Post 747), and the Civil Air Patrol Cadet program (San Fernando Cadet Squadron 137). The on-field Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA Chapter 40) has provided over 10,000 free flights to local youth aged 8–17 through monthly “Young Eagles” outreach initiatives.
- **The Air Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) & Barton Heliport Dependency:** Critics frequently argue that the airport is unimportant and that only the adjacent Barton Heliport—a critical LA County firefighting base—needs to remain. This is logistically false. During the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) panel discussions, Chief Gaynor from Barton explicitly testified to the critical dependency Barton has on Whiteman. Without Whiteman's operational Air Traffic Control Tower to control the local low-level airspace, urgent wildfire dispatches for the County's Firehawk helicopters would be severely delayed. Instead of immediate tactical departures, firefighting pilots would be forced to wait on the ground for manual radio clearances from the distant, heavily congested Burbank Tower.
- **The Future Noise Irony & Threats to Barton:** If activists succeed in shuttering the airport and replacing the runway with speculative high-density residential housing, the noise problem will worsen exponentially. Future residents in those newly constructed homes will experience heavy Firehawk helicopters taking off at full throttle directly above their rooftops. This structural oversight lends credibility to growing community rumors that the Barton Heliport itself will inevitably come under political attack by developers next, systematically dismantling regional wildfire defenses.

- **Claim: "Planes constantly fly over my house throughout the night, throughout the day, and it's um very lots of noise disturbances..."**
 - *The Reality:* Nighttime traffic is constrained by an active voluntary curfew. Furthermore, technical data from the county-sponsored FAA Part 150 Noise Compatibility Study (published October 2022) completely invalidated this narrative. Out of more than 17,000 residential units in the surrounding Pacoima community, the independent study concluded that only 335 homes (fewer than 2%) experienced decibel levels high enough to qualify for federal noise mitigation, with the bulk of aviation noise contained within the physical boundaries of the airport. The study noted that adjacent Metrolink railroad tracks, train whistles, and heavy commercial truck traffic on San Fernando Road generate significantly higher ambient noise levels than aircraft.
 - *Further Administrative Verification:* County Aviation Manager Jason Morgan has explicitly stated in Aviation Commission meetings that there are very few overnight flights into or out of Whiteman. The monthly averages come to around 2-3 flights on any given night during the curfew hours, with most being exempted aircraft from emergency responders and news media excluded from the voluntary curfew parameters.
- **Claim: (Narrator voiced in between on-camera segments with Emma) "...but, it's the fear that is harder to live with. Those are two of five [one of them a gear failure] crashes [video shown of the accidents] since 2020, two of them fatal."**
 - *The Reality:* While every aviation accident is serious, joint federal and media data analyses show that 4 to 6 incidents over a multi-year period is a baseline characteristic shared by busy general aviation hubs operating within densely populated Southern California airspace. Nearby Fullerton Municipal Airport recorded 6 accidents in the same timeframe. Van Nuys Airport (VNY) recorded at least 4 major accidents, including incidents resulting in four fatalities and a gear collapse. Crucially, all fatalities associated with Whiteman Airport involved the pilots themselves; there have been zero resident fatalities on the ground.
- **Claim: "What Pacoima residents want to see is a shutdown completely of the Whiteman airport..."**
 - *The Reality:* The phrase "shutdown" is a coordinated marketing term manufactured by Pacoima Beautiful. In direct contradiction to this claim, every single adjacent Neighborhood Council has formally voted to keep Whiteman Airport open, supported by petition signatures that vastly dwarf the efforts of Pacoima Beautiful's paid political solicitors for a "shutdown" petition. A notable, recent example of public support for Whiteman Airport is the [June 24 letter](#) from the Kagel Canyon Civic Association addressed to the Board of Supervisors, stating clear opposition to closure.

3. Misrepresentation of County Infrastructure and Political Accountability

The segment featured footage of LA County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath promoting municipal safety measures, yet failed to contextualize her remarks or audit her administrative record:

- **Preempted Safety Mandates & Pre-existing Programs:** The segment highlighted the County's support of Supervisor Horvath's June 30, Motion 16, which aims to make the additional aviation safety measures proposed necessary for Whiteman. The broadcast failed to note that during the June 30 BOS discussion, making quarterly seminars

mandatory was expressed as desirable and would continue to be looked into, despite the fact that mandatory local pilot seminars violate Federal Regulations, which legally preempt local mandates. Furthermore, it was not made clear that robust safety education programs have already been organized on the field for years. As Director of SCAUWG, and also in my capacity as a lead representative of the FAA Safety Team, I have in the past regularly produced over 40 weekly safety seminars a year at Whiteman Airport.

- **Diverting Federal Resources:** The broadcast failed to mention that diverting FAA inspectors from their assigned, critical safety inspections of commercial flight activity or other major operational areas to randomly ask pilots at Whiteman if they have valid documentation does not serve the broader safety picture. Additionally, county officials used the term "licenses" on air on June 30. Under federal aviation frameworks, pilots are not issued licenses, they are issued "**certificates.**" Stating pre-existing federal safety services as a new County innovation is highly disingenuous, and the structural safety measures previously proposed but blocked by local actors (see Commander Miller's Statement) would have eliminated the dangerous web of overhead wires that directly caused two recent accidents.
- **The Funding Freeze Contradiction:** While the Board of Supervisors recently publicized a runway slurry project to appear safety-minded, Supervisor Horvath documented on her own website in 2024 that she contributed to a Federal Funding Freeze. This freeze blocked millions in FAA Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants that would have funded 90% or more of the cost for comprehensive runway rehabilitation, the undergrounding of hazardous utility lines along San Fernando Road, and acoustic remediation for residential units. Anti-airport groups lobbied against accepting this federal money, for fear of another 20-year grant assurance, actively leaving nearby residents without sound protection.
- **Lopsided Regulatory Logic:** Supervisor Horvath and U.S. Representative Luz Rivas also used were cited in the broadcast blaming the FAA for a lack of pilot regulation and accident response. This local government reaction is entirely disproportionate. There are far more than five automobile accidents a year on local county roads and U.S. freeways, yet neither politician has proposed mandatory driver seminars or random qualification checkpoints before a citizen is permitted to drive on a county-maintained thoroughfare like Santa Monica Boulevard. Imagine not being permitted to drive on county-maintained Santa Monica Boulevard unless you have attended a local seminar and accepted the possibility of increased random qualification checks.
- **The Marginalization of the Civil Air Patrol:** Out of the three-minute feature, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Miller, Commander of the Whiteman Civil Air Patrol, was afforded a mere 83 seconds of heavily edited camera and voiceover time—much of which simply showed him walking away from the camera. The critical point he raised was obscured: that the County should be *"finally carrying out a decades-old Master Plan that called for areas on each end of the runway to be cleared of houses and roadways so that if a pilot has a problem on takeoff or landing a pilot has a safe place to put the aircraft down..."* He was referring to Runway Safety Areas (RSAs), an infrastructure safety measure the County itself failed to execute.

4. Omission of Legal Perpetuity and Fiscal Mismanagement

The most glaring omission in Spectrum's coverage is the legal reality of Whiteman Airport's operational status. Whiteman Airport operates under federal grant assurances that grant it **perpetuity**. It cannot be closed without explicit FAA permission, and FAA guidelines stipulate that an airport with perpetuity cannot be closed to further any non-aviation purpose. This rule has been upheld by established precedent.

By failing to articulate this perpetuity benefit, local politicians have been allowed to mislead the public and their municipal peers into believing closure is a viable legal option. This lack of transparency has led to severe fiscal mismanagement:

- LA County spent \$1.3 million of public funds on a "Land Use and Closure Study" through Trifiletti Consulting.
- Following a January 2026 letter from the FAA to the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) explicitly confirming the airport's perpetuity, the County subsequently spent an additional \$200,000 to delay the release of that study's results until after the recent Board of Supervisors elections.
- This expenditure occurred despite the fact that the Board of Supervisors was formally noticed of Whiteman's guaranteed FAA perpetuity by SCAUWG.ORG, AOPA, NATA, NBAA, and VAI before the initial \$1.3 million study was ever approved. Furthermore, the funding sources for that study were partially diverted from monies originally designated for other civic and community equity purposes.
- Compounding this fiscal disregard, even during the June 30 BOS Motion 16 discussion, Supervisor Horvath explicitly referred to proposing yet another expensive FAA Part 150 noise study to follow.

Conclusion and Request for Performance

Spectrum News 1 owes its viewers a transparent, fact-checked, and complete account of the structural forces shaping the Northeast San Fernando Valley. We request a formal response to this grievance and an opportunity to speak with your editorial team to coordinate a balanced, corrective follow-up feature that investigates the political, financial, and legal realities outlined above.

The courtesy of a response is requested. Independent verification of all content and technical data presented in this report is invited. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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This report was prepared from data published at SCAUWG.ORG and compiled with AI structural assistance.