

Supervisors reflect on new year

By Rick Radin

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County supervisors' major concern in the coming year will be to work with county Administrator David Twa to cope with the state budget meltdown. They also have their own priorities for 2010:

John Gioia, District 1

Gioia wants to promote more partnerships linking the county and cities and nonprofits to help in law enforcement, health care and the development of youth centers.

One of his objectives in his West Contra Costa district, where crime is an issue, is re-entry reform to help people on parole and probation find help with jobs, health care and housing.

"These kinds of programs lower the recidivism rate," he said.

He also favors eliminating ineffective programs. For example, the county inspects rental housing units regularly even though 90 percent of the time inspectors find no code violations. It may be more cost effective to respond only to complaints, he said.

"Does it make sense to inspect everything when only a few properties aren't in compliance?" he asked.

Gayle Uilkema, District 2

Uilkema, a former Lafayette mayor, says cities can share in the cost of prosecuting misdemeanors, taking some of the load off a depleted staff of county prosecutors. After the District Attorney's Office said it could no longer prosecute many misdemeanors last year, supervisors agreed to use reserves to hire more attorneys.

"The cities could have stepped up to do that," she said. "There are creative ways to address these kinds of partnerships. We've done it with the libraries."

Uilkema wants to limit employee pension costs by negotiating higher contributions from employees and lowering benefits for new hires.

"We're risking that the county is going to be spending all its money on pensions," she said. "We've capped our health care costs, now we need to shine a light on pensions."

Mary Piepho, District 3

Piepho lives in Discovery Bay and is especially interested in issues that affect communities in the far East County part of her sprawling district. She has actively

lobbied for the county's interests at the state level over preservation of the Delta and over the threat she sees in a proposed peripheral canal.

"My priority will continue to be water," Piepho said. "The state's Delta policy package is poised to devastate the Delta."

Piepho has promoted increased safety along Vasco Road and is trying to extend a barrier along a critical stretch to reduce head-on collisions.

Piepho wants to cut costs by reducing the county's support for retiree health care and pensions. Other savings can come through negotiations with county unions, she said.

"There should be no guarantee of retiree health care for new employees and we need changes to pensions," she said.

Piepho wants to identify basic levels of service in the sheriff's and fire departments, ambulance service, road maintenance and the county hospital to use as guidelines for budget cuts.

Susan Bonilla, District 4

Bonilla says communication can help people cope with the budget cuts that are coming.

For example, she wants the county to let the nonprofit contractors who help provide welfare services, such as aid to new mothers or homeless shelters, know sooner than in the past if funding cuts are on the way.

"We want to give these community-based organizations a larger window of opportunity to see if they can find the money elsewhere," she said. "When there is money, no one feels the same need to communicate."

She also wants to expand outreach to attract businesses to Contra Costa by identifying and promoting sites to companies that are considering a move. The county recently lured AAA, with 1,000 employees, from San Francisco to Walnut Creek.

"We are going to be proactive in trying to attract businesses," she said.

Federal Glover, District 5

Glover says his constituents are most concerned about the mortgage crisis, code violations and law enforcement. His district has been hit hard by foreclosures and neglect of abandoned properties. He also hears complaints about commuting and rush-hour traffic jams on Highway 4.

"I want to improve delivery of services, such as health care, financial and food assistance, cleaning up abandoned properties and illegal dumping," he said.

For example, Glover's office is applying for grants to buy a camera system to monitor Bay Point sites where illegal roadside dumping occurs.

Glover says cooperation among county agencies and nonprofit groups can help save money. He said the county health department is meeting with nonprofit clinics to eliminate duplication of service.

Job development is key to solving a number of problems, Glover said. He wants to help develop more programs in which community colleges work with private businesses to teach key skills. He helped create a program at Los Medanos College to train technicians who are being hired to work in oil refinery control rooms.

"If you don't make that original investment in finding a job for someone, or getting them job training or helping them get over a financial hump while they transition, we as a community will end up paying for it later," Glover said.

The supervisors

John Gioia, District 1
Richmond, San Pablo, El Cerrito
Supervisor since 1998
Term ends: 2010

Gayle Uilkema, District 2
Lafayette, Orinda, Moraga, Hercules, Pinole, Martinez
Supervisor since 1996
Term ends: 2012

Mary Piepho, District 3
Danville, San Ramon, Alamo, Brentwood, Walnut Creek
Supervisor since 2004
Term ends: 2012

Susan Bonilla, District 4
Concord, Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek
Supervisor since 2006
Term ends: 2010

Federal Glover, District 5
Pittsburg, Antioch, Oakley
Supervisor since 2000
Term ends: 2012

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