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Government

Budget Will Again Dominate in News 2011, Supervisor Gioia Says

Jerry Brown's Leadership and growing public awareness of budget process dysfunction will be highlights, Gioia says.

By Betty Buginas January 2, 2011

The budget crisis will continue to dominate the news in California for all levels of government – cities, schools, and counties, as well as the state – in 2011, said John Gioia, who has served District 1, which includes El Cerrito, on the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors for the past 12 years.

Amidst the bleak news, Gioia said what makes him most hopeful is that he believes incoming Gov. Jerry Brown will bring a "laser focus" to the budget crisis. Gioia said Brown in being realistic about just how much he can accomplish will devote his attention to the budget deficit. Gioia believes the new governor will work toward more permanent solutions, rather than the temporary fixes that have been attempted by the outgoing administration.

"He's been around a long time. He's realistic and practical and knows he can only get a certain number of things done, and he'll tell the truth about how serious and difficult the situation is."

Gioia warned that Contra Costa, faced with reduced revenue from property taxes combined with less money from the state, will face its share of cuts. At the same time the county is taking in less money, it is seeing higher costs for such big-ticket items as health care and pensions, as well as a greater demand for services.

"We're faced with another year of reduced services," he said, adding that the board will do its best to spread the pain across all areas so that the impact is as equitable as possible.

Although the mix of revenue sources varies somewhat among the county, cities, and schools, he said other agencies are basically in the same boat.

In addition to his confidence in the governor-elect, Gioia said, another positive thing that may come out of the budget crisis is the fact that California may finally face up to an underlying and ongoing problem with its budget process.

"This is going to be the year that more people recognize that there is a total dysfunction in the relationship between state and local government," he said.

Gioia, whose office is on San Pablo Avenue in El Cerrito, is currently the board's chair.