

# Vorderbrueggen: Contra Costa supervisors keep a positive attitude

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After all these years of bad fiscal news, an optimistic county politician should be as rare as a snowman in San Francisco. But Contra Costa County supervisors, during the group's annual reorganization meeting and luncheon last week, were a surprisingly upbeat bunch. Granted, they acknowledged, even listed and enumerated, their woes.

The county budget has a \$50 million hole. Its central and eastern fire districts are almost bankrupt.

A review of the county hospital's operations will be released this year. Labor contracts are up for renewal and the county wants to cut pension costs.

Gov. Jerry Brown wants to "realign" the state-local government funding relationship, and no one knows exactly what that means.

And the board must redraw its supervisorial boundaries, an inherently political task that will likely pit one supervisor against another in a quest to keep districts and voting bases intact.

On the other hand, voters have no patience for whiners and the supervisors know it. Here are excerpts and summaries of each supervisor's year-ahead comments:

Chairwoman Gayle Uilkema, Lafayette: "We are a strong county with a strong people, and we have experienced severe economic problems before. We need to be creative, hopeful and persevere." She called for a greater county focus on outside grants, a balanced budget and green technology jobs.

Vice Chairwoman Mary Nejedly Piepho, Discovery Bay: "To my colleagues, we need to be the change we wish to see in the world." She vowed to focus on job creation, pension reform, agricultural sustainability, Delta advocacy and development of the Byron Airport.

Supervisor John Gioia, Richmond: "While we (his fellow board members) have sharp differences in how we see the role of government in providing services and whether there should be new taxes, we have the good fortune to live in a political system that allows and encourages us to discuss these differences in public. As we move forward into what will be a challenging year, I hope we can set an example here and keep our vigorous discussion at the highest level." He expressed support for Brown's approach to balancing the state budget, including the proposal to eliminate redevelopment agencies.

Supervisor Federal Glover, Pittsburg: "As I started my role on the board of supervisors, my slogan has not changed, which is to turn challenges into opportunities. We will continue to have to be creative." He called for labor unions to work collaboratively with the county.

Supervisor Karen Mitchoff, Pleasant Hill: "A lot of people have said to all of us, 'Do you really want to do this?' My answer is yes. If not us, who will do it?" She called out the prospective development of the former Concord Naval Weapons Station as an example of where the county can work with communities and create jobs.

SHUFFLE: The newly elected Mitchoff flexed her muscles behind the scenes and won a concession in the board leader's annual committee appointments.

Mitchoff successfully argued that her predecessor, now Assemblywoman Susan Bonilla, had held one of the board's two seats on the Contra Costa Transportation Authority and she should, too.

As a side note, people who dislike meetings should never run for public office: The five supervisors fill 101 seats on committees of all types, everything from internal subcommittees to countywide organizations to Bay Area groups. Not counting seats as alternates, Supervisors Gioia and Glover are tied with the most assignments at 18 apiece, followed, respectively by Uilkema, Mitchoff and Nejedly Piepho.

Does a week contain enough hours to accommodate so many meetings?

NAME DROPPER: Mitchoff mentioned during her comments that her former boss and one-time county Supervisor Sunne Wright McPeak was expected to attend the festivities.

The board chamber in Martinez is named after McPeak, who later served as former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's appointee as California business, transportation and housing secretary.

But that morning, McPeak was rushed into emergency appendicitis surgery and couldn't make it to see her friend and former chief of staff take the oath to an office she once held.

Surgery won't slow down McPeak, Uilkema joked. "She'll make it by lunch," Uilkema said.

McPeak, who now leads a group charged with expanding broadband access in California, is renowned as a woman with boundless energy.

On a serious note, McPeak's husband, John, said his wife is recovering nicely and expects to be back at work Monday.

Monday? I want the vitamins she takes.

COINCIDENCES: "When I was a student at Cal," said Gioia during his speech this week, "Jerry Brown was governor. Now, my son, Christopher, is at Cal and Brown is governor. Brown signed my diploma and, now, he will sign Christopher's diploma."

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Watch video from the Contra Costa board of supervisors' reorganization luncheon.

Hercules Mayor Ed Balico abruptly resigns but recall proponents serve him with the petition anyway.

AND FINALLY: OK. It's settled.

Tom Torlakson is the first Contra Costa resident to win statewide office. He was elected in November state superintendent of public instruction. On Facebook, I wrote that Torlakson was second after John Swett, who also served as state superintendent of public instruction. But Swett lived in San Francisco when he was elected in 1890. He moved to Contra Costa after he retired in 1895 onto an Alhambra Valley farm next door to John and Louise Strentzel Muir, according to a California Historian article kindly forwarded to me.

Torlakson never was one to settle for No. 2.

