

Glover: Contra Costa County ready to face the challenges of 2013

Contra Costa Times San Jose Mercury News

Posted:

ContraCostaTimes.com

The following is an excerpt from Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover's Jan. 8 speech when he was installed as the 2013 chairman of the Board of Supervisors.

The last few years have been difficult for Contra Costa County and the next year will be no different. Actually, the next few years will remain challenging.

Much of what we do -- and what we can't do -- depends on the economy -- local, state and national -- which are out of our control.

While there are signs that the economy is improving -- more jobs being created and lower unemployment rates, more construction underway -- a full recovery is still a few years down the line.

In the meantime, we are learning to live within our means. We have no choice.

In this effort, we have made significant strides, thanks to the departments and county employees, the county has closed budget deficits that at one time exceeded \$100 million.

We have been able to reduce our OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) liability from \$2.6 billion down to \$960 million with the aim to further reduce that liability to zero over the next few years.

For the first time in a long time, we have a balanced budget.

Despite the funding shortfalls, we have been able to maintain vital services to the public.

Of course, much of the credit for this goes to the collaboration of labor, county departments and the Board.

Public safety realignment

Four years ago, when I became chair, one of the things I introduced was the formation of the Public Protection Committee. As it turned out, it has become a vital committee to air out timely issues affecting fire protection, our jails, courts and realignment, the transfer of low-level offenders in state prisons to county custody.

Contra Costa has been a leader on realignment. Other counties are watching what we do and how we involve the public in our decision-making process. It hasn't always been easy, but in the end, I believe we will have another model of reducing recidivism and getting inmates off the hopeless and sometimes never-ending cycle of committing crimes.

The county was not "lucky" to receive the \$20 million for realignment. It was something we fought for, by developing a funding formula which was fair to Contra Costa, which with the Governor's support through Prop. 30, funding for realignment is guaranteed.

I've been fortunate to be on numerous state agencies to deal with this issue and to assure that the county gets its fair share of state funds for realignment.

Fire

Last month we heard hours of testimony regarding the closure of fire stations. Last November the voters voted down Proposition Q which would have funded the status quo in fire protection.

Since the public said no, the Board now faces the difficult task of closing stations. We will have to close at least four stations right away, and possibly more next year. But, we will do it with the public's safety in mind.

I will urge the fire chief to continue to develop and search for additional revenue in the form of grants to ensure that we maintain the levels of safety we have become accustomed to without endangering the firefighters themselves.

Health care

As the state plans for the implementation of the Affordable Care Act -- otherwise known as Obamacare -- the County is also taking steps to prepare for the changeover.

- Implemented our electronic Health Record system, ccLink: an electronic record of patients' health;
- We are also being more proactive in reducing health disparities and prevention strategies by aggressively reaching out to the affected communities.

The Contra Costa Health Plan is expanding its membership and we are expanding our health clinics, redesigning our existing facilities and working with the nonprofit health clinics to better serve the health needs of our citizens.

The Delta

As you all know, Supervisor Mary Piepho has championed Delta issues on behalf of the County and will continue that role.

She will continue to speak out on the proposed tunnels or canals that will divert water from the Delta, necessary levee upgrades, flood protection and water quality for fish and for our drinking water.

The County will continue to seek partnerships and alliances with other Delta counties, environmentalists, fishing groups and the agencies such as Contra Costa Water District and the sanitary districts to have a louder and strong voice on Delta issues.

Transportation

I am on a number of regional transportation agencies including MTC, CCTA and the East County coalition that found local funding for the widening of Highway 4 and the construction of eBART.

I plan to expand on that role as the County's representative -- along with Amy Wirth -- on the regional transportation agencies to see what we can do to start the planning for a wBART, which would extend tracks from Richmond to Hercules.

We need to look seriously at ferries as another commuting alternative to cars and bring better coordination among the four bus agencies in our county.

Economic development

With the demise of Redevelopment Agencies, the County has taken a more active role in economic development.

Last year, the Bay Point-Pittsburg Enterprise Zone was created.

That, along with the Richmond's Enterprise Zone, will help stimulate businesses and employment in those areas and help strengthen the economy for the entire County.

The selection of the UC Richmond Field Station for a new campus of Lawrence-Berkeley National Lab is going to be a major contributor not only to Richmond but the economies of Contra Costa and the Bay Area.

It will be one of the top research facilities in the entire world and it will bring in students, faculty and researchers and their families to Contra Costa. The planning for the campus is underway. It expects to open its doors in 2018.

Oakley just got approved by the PUC to build an energy plant that will bring jobs and a multi-million dollar payroll to east county.

The Radback plant joins the other energy plants that have located in the Pittsburg-Antioch area producing clean energy for millions of homes and good paying jobs for the local economy.

I plan to launch The Northshore Initiative this year. Planning is already under way.

I want to bring together all the stakeholders on the northern shore of Contra Costa, from Richmond to Oakley, to find out if there are any common projects we can work on together.

That includes the refineries, major industries such as Dow and USS-POSCO, the ports of Richmond and the budding port of Pittsburg-Antioch, the cities, park districts and recreation officials.

- Pittsburg will begin building facilities to transfer oil from ships to storage tanks on shore.
- Richmond is upgrading its docking and oil transfer facilities.

I think if we act as a regional group, we can wield more power than if each of us tried to act alone.

I'm not sure what the meeting of the minds will produce, but it might include issues of dredging, improving our port facilities, recreational water access, attracting more industry or the need for ferries.

The year ahead

Looking ahead to this year. We are off to a good start.

Our projected revenues will match our projected expenditures this year.

Our OPEB liability will continue to be reduced. We might even have a small increase in fund balance.

We already have established a Capital Fund with initial funding of \$5 million to replace or update our aging infrastructure.

We will continue to seek ways to find additional revenue for public safety and the delivery of health care.

As I said in the beginning: It is going to be a challenge. Many of the decisions we will make will not be popular with the public. But if we work together and we seek partnerships with community-based organizations, the cities and private enterprise, we can weather this storm.

I'm ready. The Board of Supervisors is ready. The question is: Is the public ready?

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