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Wheeling and Dealing

Figuring out the Board of Supervisors

By JIM NIELSEN
Daily Democrat

The wheels have come off of the deal for our "wheeling dealing supervisors." Week before last they were basking in the glow of an agreement, terms mostly undisclosed, with the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians. Cache Creek Casino money would be available to the county to fund its eminent domain seizure of the Conaway Ranch.

The only part of the deal publicly disclosed was the inclusion of the Tribe in the county-formed Conaway Ranch Joint Powers Authority as a condition for their financial support. Since the Tribe lacks status to participate in the JPA, state legislation is required.

Assemblywoman Lois Wolk agreed to author this legislation. Assemblywoman Wolk planned to do what is called a "gut and amend" of her Assembly Bill 802 that had, in another form, been defeated by the full assembly.

The intent was to replace the defeated bill's provisions with language to accord the Tribe joint powers status.

Last Thursday Assembly leadership refused to grant the legislative process rule waivers to accomplish the proposed amendments.

This technically kills the JPA part of the deal since Friday was a critical legislative bill deadline. I was informed that local concerns and objections as well as policy and precedent issues and the opposition of local Assemblyman Doug LaMalfa were telling factors.

To quote Yogi Berra, "It ain't over until it's over." Legislative shenanigans can extend until the legislature adjourns.

At least, for now the California Assembly, unlike our supervisors, has chosen to abide by rules.

Late Friday a rumor circulated the bill would be resurrected by parliamentary ploy. I can only hope the Legislature will maintain integrity even if our supervisors will not.

A legislative consultant informed me Yolo County's lobbyist had forwarded a letter of support for AB 802 from the Board of Supervisors.

The lobbyist was asked if the county had authorized this support by resolution and/or with a public vote.

The answer was no!

So yet again our county proceeds on a precedent setting financial commitment of \$60 to \$80 million, with no terms disclosed and with no opportunity for public review and comment and with no vote by our accountable (?) Supervisors. Sadly, it may well be as a Daily Democrat editorial alleges, "most residents don't care" about this issue.

Even if there is apathy or lack of understanding about the significance and consequences of the county taking over the Conaway Ranch, citizens should be concerned about how supervisors have cloaked everything about the Conaway Ranch in secrecy, have committed to major financial obligations without public input, have designed no plan to manage the ranch or its resources and have presented no case for why public ownership is needed and they represented to the Legislature support for legislation without any public debate or vote on the legislation.

A California Gambling Control Commission official informed me that two other California tribes have been previously accorded JPA status, but none as a condition of a multi-million dollar financing deal.

This precedent appears to also be a legislative concern and it should be of concern to Yolo County citizens. While Yolo County is plowing under farmland for a golf course at the Cache Creek Casino they are also plowing some new ground in the one obvious part of their agreement with the Tribe.

The magnitude of this financial commitment by a tribe to gain JPA status is unique. When will we know what other terms the supervisors agreed to?

Over the past weeks a number of important county staff have indicated their departure, most significantly County Chief Executive Officer Vic Singh who announced his resignation last week.

Vic Singh is a man of integrity, ability and acumen. Over time I have discussed my concerns about county policy and direction with Vic. He is ever loyal to the elected officials who set policy in this county, policy he is entrusted to carry out. As I voiced my opinions to Vic I intuited that he was not entirely comfortable with the course Yolo County leaders have set.

I gathered this not from words, but from his careful word choice, and demeanor.

My friendship, respect for Vic and my knowledge of how seriously he takes his responsibilities disposed me to discern that he knew a lot more than propriety and loyalty would allow him to disclose. Vic Singh leaves with his head high having given all of us his very best.

The actions of his bosses, however, do not elicit such confidence. We have intelligent, capable supervisors, they endure thankless

responsibilities and lead the most constrained and neglected of local government bodies, counties. Herein they retain my sympathy, but I'll be darned if I can figure out why they are conducting business as they are.

The Daily Democrat editorialized, "The group is an eclectic one, consisting of multiple personalities with specific political interests." I'm not sure anymore if the county of Yolo is at the top of some of their "political interests." Maybe the wheels coming off of their wheeling and dealing is just the humbling they need.

- Jim Nielsen is a former state senator who writes for The Daily Democrat.