

JOB'S CARS CLASSIFIEDS SUBSCRIBE MARKETPLACE

Opinion
Woodland, California
The City of Trees

PRIUS
Get all the answers about the Toyota Prius. [click here](#)  moving forward ▶

HOME NEWS SPORTS FEATURES BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT OPINION OBITUARIES SPECIALS SEARCH

July 11, 2005

Woodland, CA

Site Search

Enter search term



Advanced Search

[Link To Article](#) [Print Article](#) [Email Article](#)

Article created: 07/10/2005 09:50:15 AM

Public Officials Play for Land

It really is all about money and manners

Daily Democrat

Senior Yolo County Supervisors say money is not driving their Conaway Ranch eminent domain action, their legal assault on Woodland's Gateway Project and their move to grab more tax revenue from Davis' Covell Village project. They say environmental reviews are inadequate, that they are preserving agriculture and that the price the county is paying for protecting agriculture is costing them too much money. Actually only Supervisor Chamberlain can be counted on to support agriculture.

The supervisors' own documents prepared for them by staff or contract consultants tell another tale. So do their statements. Public records indicate the sale of Conaway Ranch assets including land; water and gas are all possibilities for sale by the county as they embark on seizure of private property on an unprecedented scale. It is clear the county is, at least, considering becoming a "dirt merchant" (to use a supervisor's term) as well as a water and gas merchant. The supervisors' disclaiming knowledge of information they authorized and paid for is not credible. I hope the Superior Court demands these documents when considering the County's eminent domain suit.

As to the county attempts to wrest tax revenues from cities, Supervisor Thomson is quoted as saying, "Taxes and tax sources have changed since the 1986 Master Plan (for tax revenue sharing with cities) was created and the County, strapped for cash these days, would like to revisit it." Extort is a more apt description as evidenced by the county suing Woodland to get more revenue from the Gateway Project.

A more telling and specific disclosure of the money driven power playing of the County is found in a County document titled, "Principles of Negotiation." This defines the counties' revenue sharing intentions with Yolo County cities. The "principles" blatantly states, "the County shall retain a sufficient share of property tax revenue to reduce the structural underfunding of the County general fund in recognition of the County's commitment to the preservation of open space and agriculture." In other words, the County's fiscal mismanagement is, from now on, to be paid for by our cities.

The County's plan to leverage the cities has a carefully crafted, one-sided extortion mechanism. The provision allows either the County or a city to re-open the tax sharing agreement "if tax revenues increase." The document gives the County effective veto power over any city's land-use decisions. Unless a city agrees to what tax revenue the County demands the city may not be able to achieve a project approval. This emulates the County's dominance of voting on the temporarily defunct Conaway Ranch Joint Powers Authority and is but another power play for revenue.

Yolo County is in financial trouble. Supervisors are looking everywhere for money. Tax revenue is certainly a significant factor in county budgets. So is state support. In this area all California supervisors have my sympathy. Counties historically have been the aggrieved and ripped-off stepchildren of state government. Over the years too few in Sacramento have had sympathy for counties. Nevertheless, "structurally" ripping-off cities or private landowners (one supervisor thinks Conaway Ranch owners should sell to the county at a two-thirds discount) is no answer to the lack of state help.

Local fiscal stewardship is also a factor. Herein our supervisors could do better. Dismissing their \$4 million deficit as "structural," as in it isn't our problem, doesn't give them adequate discredit. Butte and Tehama counties pulled out of worse situations.

Now the Esparto School District has a case of Yolo County's eminent domain fever. Administrators launched a takeover of David Denebein's property before informing the trustees emulating the secrecy and power playing now preferred by our County leaders. Later and dutifully, the trustees rubber-stamped the land grab. Private property just isn't important to some elected officials anymore. Private property owners should remember them next election.

Another trait surfacing in some supervisors is arrogance and rudeness. Anyone disagreeing or even speaking out at board meetings are rudely treated. Supervisor McGowan even found cause to disparage the founders a week before Independence Day. I



Home

News

Area News
Agriculture
Business
For The Record
Weather

Sports

Columnists
Gary Traynham
Hank Vereschzagin

Opinion

Editorial
Columnists
Jim Nielsen
Jim Smith
Our Town
Guest Opinions
My Two Cents
Letters

Features

From Our Files
Goodlife
Religion
Weddings
Births
Motorway

Obituaries

Entertainment

Horoscopes

Community Events

Agendas

Special Sections

Customer Service

Contact Us
Subscriptions
Forms

Marketplace

Search

offer a quote from one of these founders. George Washington's Rules of Civility admonishes, "In disputes, be not so desirous to overcome objections as to not give liberty to each one to deliver his opinion."

When the public began showing up at Conaway Ranch Joint Powers Authority meetings, meetings were suspended. Flippant remarks in response to sincerely expressed public comments are becoming common. Supervisor McGowan, disrespected all private farmland owners when he said of Conaway Ranch owners, "It's ludicrous to me that people will say "Oh, I think they can do a better job (than government). That's just silly." The Conaway Ranch and most other Yolo County farms have done just fine over the last century without the County owning them. If the County's fiscal stewardship is a guide to their ability to manage a farm I sure don't want to partner up.

Former Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh once said, "Money is the mother's milk of politics." Some of our supervisors are intent on proving him right.

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

 [RETURN TO TOP](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)