

Supervisor candidates eye issues

By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer

WOODLAND — The big issue facing the candidates running for 3rd District supervisor on Nov. 7 is Conaway Ranch.

That's what people wanted to talk about when they visited politicians' booths at the Yolo County fair, which ended its five-day run a week ago.

On Thursday afternoon, they returned to the fairgrounds to tape the second of two debates for WAVE TV in Woodland. Again the topic was Conaway.

The first question facing the two candidates concerned the county's attempt to buy the 17,000-acre ranch between Woodland and Davis by eminent domain, the force of government.

Eminent domain

"People do not like eminent domain and I have no trouble understanding that," said Frank Sieferman Jr. "But those same people want Conaway Ranch water to stay in Yolo County and they also want the land to stay in agriculture. So even though they oppose eminent domain, they will vote for me."

Former Woodland Mayor Matt Rexroad said that while he understands the need to use eminent domain for schools and roads, he thinks it was abused in the Conaway Ranch case.

Last fall, the Yolo Superior Court ruled that the county had a right to buy the ranch from unwilling sellers, the Conaway Preservation Group. On Oct. 31, the matter is due to go to a jury trial to settle on the value of the ranch. Attempts to settle the case out of court have not been fruitful.

Rexroad has insisted he could negotiate a settlement that would meet the county's objectives of preserving land and water. He says he thinks a deal is in the works.

Settlement?

"I think this will be settled before the election ... and Frank Sieferman will declare it a victory even though he wasn't involved (in the negotiations)," Rexroad said.

"The county has no choice but to cut a deal for political expediency," Rexroad added. "I only hope they can get back the \$1.8 million they have spent in legal fees and be made whole again."

Said Sieferman, "There are lots of rumors about a possible settlement," Sieferman said. But he is not a

member of the two-man negotiating subcommittee made up of Supervisors Mike McGowan and Helen Thomson.

Sieferman said a court-imposed gag order means none of the principals are allowed to discuss the case publicly.

Essentially, both candidates want to see the land and water preserved. Neither candidate approves of the use of eminent domain in this case, although Sieferman reluctantly voted for it.

Rexroad, however, said he would be the best choice to negotiate a settlement, whether he had a seat on the McGowan-Thomson subcommittee or not.

Lack of leadership

His No. 1 criticism of Sieferman is the incumbent's lack of leadership, generally, and lack of attention to Woodland, specifically.

Sieferman says he's part of a five-person team on the board representing all of Yolo County, including Woodland.

And even though the office of Yolo County supervisor is non-partisan, political lines are being drawn between Sieferman, a Democrat, and Rexroad, a Republican.

District 3, with about 17,000 voters, covers most of the city of Woodland east to the Sacramento River.

Rexroad, Sieferman and business owner Brenda Cedarblade ran for the seat in the June primary, but no candidate achieved 51 percent of the vote: Rexroad received 42 percent, Sieferman 30.5 and Cedarblade 27.5. That meant Sieferman and Rexroad would face each other in November.

Things were quiet over the summer but the race heated up again recently when both men had booths only a few feet apart from each other at the Yolo County Fair. And then the characterizations began.

Ultra-conservative

Rexroad is annoyed by the fact that he has been characterized as an "ultra-conservative."

Last week Katie Villegas, chairwoman of the Yolo County Democratic Central Committee, sent an e-mail to county Democrats announcing the grand opening of a headquarters in Woodland on Sept. 7 and a precinct walk scheduled for the following Saturday.

"Please come join Woodland Democrats and Supervisor Frank Sieferman as we begin the ground

campaign against Republican political consultant and ultra-conservative Matt Rexroad,” she wrote.

This description of Rexroad angered Mayor Dave Flory, a Democrat, who worked with Rexroad when the candidate was on the Woodland City Council.

“I worked with Matt for four years (on the City Council) and partisan politics never showed its face,” Flory said on Thursday.

“I found him to be moderate, very analytical and fair,” Flory added. “It’s very unfair for any candidate in a non-partisan race to be labeled ultra-liberal or ultra-conservative — that’s not what being a county supervisor is all about. It is about helping people and making the county a better place to live.

“And since when have the residents of Woodland let the Yolo County Democratic Central Committee or anyone else decide for us who we want to represent us on the Board of Supervisors?” Flory asked.

But candidate Sieferman says Rexroad’s campaign contributors are Republican faithful and represent the conservatives.

“That is the base Mr. Rexroad has been coming from,” Sieferman said.

Endorses Democrats

But Rexroad endorsed and supported Democrats Flory, Martie Dote, Jesse Ortiz and Bill Herms in their races for council and the school board, respectively.

Rexroad is a Republican — that’s no secret — but his supporters include hundreds of Democrats.

“I have worked in Republican politics,” said Rexroad, who is a principal in the Sacramento public relations firm of Meridian Pacific. “But I have no desire to run for political office beyond supervisor. And I have never brought partisanship into this race and I don’t understand why that’s relevant. I point to things I’ve accomplished in Woodland.

“I will sign an oath saying I won’t run for partisan office for 20 years,” he added. “I care about Woodland, not Vacaville or Davis.”

Rexroad, 38, and his wife Jennifer have a daughter, Abby, and an infant son, Adam.

Rexroad attacks Sieferman for not paying enough attention to Woodland issues. Sieferman frequently describes himself as a supervisor willing to listen to the problems and complaints of residents throughout the county, no matter what supervisorial district they live in.

Sieferman says Rexroad fails to understand that if elected he will represent the whole county, including Davis.

Countywide issues

“Every issue that comes before the Board of Supervisors comes from a different district — like the conversion of the Old Sugar Mill in Clarksburg — and you are expected to take on those countywide issues,” Sieferman said.

“It’s very inappropriate to say you will only represent the city of Woodland,” he added. “The job is a countywide job — the mental health department, the drug and alcohol department, the district attorney serves everyone in Yolo County. You could say that all Yolo County residents are my constituents, but not all of them are able to vote for me.”

“I am not the sixth member of the Woodland City Council,” Sieferman said.

Rexroad says his opponent could have learned something from the Woodland council.

“Every member of the Woodland City Council has been more visible and effective in the community than Frank has been — that’s not debatable,” Rexroad said.

He says the city is not being represented at the county level.

“Woodland doesn’t have an adequate voice on the board of supervisors,” Rexroad said. “And Woodland residents have different interests from the county in general on several issues.”

Rexroad, for instance, opposed state legislation designating part of upper Cache Creek as wild and scenic, thereby constraining Woodland’s choices for a regional flood control solution. Sieferman supported the designation.

And Rexroad says the county should never have sued the city over the Gateway project at Interstate 5 and County Road 102. All five members of the Woodland City Council voted to approve locating a Costco store at that location. Construction will begin in 2007.

Rexroad also says he has been a leader in envisioning a future for Woodland that includes saving prime farmland around the city boundaries. The day he was elected to the City Council he spoke about his desire to pass a permanent urban limit line around the city and four years later the Woodland electorate endorsed that concept when voters passed Measure A.

Campaign funds

The former mayor says he has about \$3,000 in his campaign bank account now but expects to raise \$100,000 shortly, with a major fund-raiser set for Sept. 25.

He has raised and spent more than \$100,000 since he announced his intent to run more than a year ago. He also accepted a large loan from Jim Brulte, former Republican leader of the state Senate.

Sieferman has about \$11,000 in his account now. He hopes to raise about \$90,000 before November.

His biggest donors are gravel companies and he says almost all of his contributions have been from within Yolo County. He said his Western barbecue fund-raiser Wednesday night at the Stallion Station brought in an estimated \$30,000.

“Yes, I’m going to win the election because people in 3rd District know they have the right man in the office,” Sieferman said. “But it won’t be unanimous. I know the former mayor of Woodland won’t vote for me — that’s one.”

Sieferman, 56, is married to Stephanie. He has three grown children: Breanna, Caitlin and David.

Sieferman also said he believed all of former candidate Cedarblade’s votes will go to him. “And the people who didn’t vote in the primary will vote for me,” he said.

“The Democratic Party is not coming to save me. I appeal to a very broad spectrum supporting me,” he said. “The people of Woodland want me in office — it’s their will.

Each supervisor is entitled to hire two staff members and both Sieferman’s deputy and assistant deputy are Hispanic. Sieferman said he hired them not because of their race but because he wants to help youth in the community.

“I’m being responsible to younger people in Woodland who have a desire to work and learn about Woodland,” he said on Friday. “Hiring Deputy Rogelio Villagrana and Assistant Deputy Angel Barajas was not tied to race, but it has made it easier to do the Dia de los Ninos (service fair) for two years and Latino Youth Council for three years.”

Supports Sieferman

Supervisor Mariko Yamada of Davis is a Sieferman supporter.

“Frank Sieferman has shown care and compassion for a whole host of significant county issues including priorities shared by my office involving care for aging adults, adults with disabilities and health and human services,” she said Friday.

“I’ve come to know and appreciate Frank and I don’t see any office as being non-partisan,” Yamada added. “Matt is a well-known political consultant for Republican candidates and causes, and I want someone who shares Democratic values.”

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