

A few Thoughts on “Endorsements”

By Craig Snider, October 3, 2018

Having lived in Benicia since 2003 I've had ample opportunity to observe local political endorsements. In particular, I've noticed a disturbing trend regarding endorsements from the Napa and Solano Counties Central Labor Council (NSLC). This group appears to support any project that has the potential to create jobs regardless of the health, safety and environmental impacts on the local community. Case in point – the NSLC supported Valero's "Crude by Rail" project despite overwhelming concerns about "bomb trains" rolling through the Benicia Industrial Park, blocked roads, air pollution, and otherwise putting residents in danger of a catastrophic explosion. Add to that the NSLC's endorsement of Vallejo City Council candidates Malgapo and Dew-Costa, who continue to buck the Vallejo Planning Commission, citizen groups, and others in order to green light the ill-advised Orcem cement plant proposal. That project would send 500 diesel trucks a day through Vallejo neighborhoods, past schools, and spew fine particulates into surrounding neighborhoods as far as Benicia. Conspicuously absent from the NSLC endorsements are any candidates who don't support unbridled development. Apparently "jobs" trump concerns about health and safety for this group.

Recently concerns were voiced by Tom Campbell regarding the Progressive Democrats of Benicia (PDB) endorsement process – a simple majority vote of the members. Christina Strawbridge came within two votes of receiving the PDB endorsement. Had she or two of her supporters joined the group and voted for her, she also would have received the PDB endorsement in addition to Kari Birdseye.

Contrast the PDB process with the endorsement process used by the Napa Solano Labor Council. The steering committee of that group interviews and makes decisions on whom to endorse. The Labor Council includes the Benicia labor unions representing teachers, police and fire. But the endorsement process for labor is top down; their steering committee decides whom to endorse, and then instructs all of their member unions to make the same endorsements. I would be curious to know if any Benicia teachers, for example, were actually asked who they preferred to endorse, or were they simply told that the unions would be endorsing Largaespada and Strawbridge?

It is more than a little misleading to say that "Benicia teachers, fire and police" endorse a particular candidate when the membership of those unions is never given a chance to validate the endorsements being made in their name. In fact, I wonder if any Benicia citizens actually weighed in on those endorsements?

Don't get me wrong. I love labor unions. I think we need more of them. They're great for negotiating worker rights, worker safety, wages, benefits and the like. However, the NSLC has consistently backed candidates that are soft on environmental protection and community well-being regardless a candidate's actual stance on labor issues.

Why else would the International Brotherhood of Electric Workers Local 180 PAC put \$500 each into the Largaespada and Strawbridge campaigns? Why would the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulator and Allied Workers Local 16, AFL-CIO PAC fund put \$580 into the Largaespada campaign and \$330 into the Strawbridge campaign?

Fortunately, we have a candidate for Benicia City Council who is not backed by outside special interests nor taking donations from corporations. Kari Birdseye won't be swayed by big business, real estate developers, construction unions or the NSLC. We need City Council members who are independent and not willing to swing votes toward ill-advised developments. I watched while our community narrowly "dodged bullets" with the "Crude by Rail" proposal and the "Seeno" property development due to a "development at any cost" attitude by some City Council members. We shouldn't have to raise a ruckus to halt ill-advised projects that compromise our health and safety. Kari is a sharp, independent-minded woman who wants to see development in Benicia that benefits Benicians without risking our safety and lifestyle.

Whenever I return to Benicia from elsewhere I'm so thankful for the small-town atmosphere, beautiful surroundings and my many friends. I want to keep it that way and that's why I'm supporting Kari Birdseye for city council.

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Benicia