

MY LIFE IN PERSPECTIVE – THE CLIMATE AND THIS ELECTION

By Roger Straw, The Benicia Independent

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For the first 35 years of my adult life, my priority was on peace and freedom, justice and equality under the law. That and helping folks in need.

Sometime in 2007, a friend and colleague spoke convincingly to me about the planetary threat of climate change, global warming. I was skeptical, but I didn't argue with her. I listened, and somehow, I came to understand that everything – EVERYTHING – is at stake, that creation itself is in the balance. The science is indisputable.

My life since then has revolved around environmental causes, and I've taken seriously the mantra, "Think globally, act locally." I've helped elect Benicia leaders who share my views; I've campaigned against bulldozing development on Seeno land; I've helped organize Benicians to successfully deny giant Valero's dangerous and dirty crude by rail proposal; I've helped awaken Benicia to the serious need of better air monitors in and beyond the refinery.

These concerns are front and center as I consider my vote for City Council this fall.

One candidate has repeatedly spoken out in favor of toxic and potentially explosive oil trains: Lionel Largaespada. He's a nice guy but he doesn't belong in a position of power at the heart of our city.

Another candidate was a deciding vote in 2016 to stop Valero's oil train proposal in its tracks. Christina Strawbridge will get a lot of votes for that, and she should. I hope Christina wins, but it's hard to overlook so many of her votes. She frequently voted with her business-friendly and environmentally insensitive colleagues. For instance, she voted in favor of Seeno development, in favor of a nearly million-dollar give back to Valero, and in favor of a budget that discontinued employment of Benicia's Climate Action Coordinator.

The one candidate who stands out as a shepherd of the planet's future is Kari Birdseye. Thoughtfully independent and caring, she now presides collaboratively over Benicia's Planning Commission, where she voted in 2016 to send Valero's oil train proposal down the tubes. Her professional work is for an award-winning environmental non-profit. She's also a mom, with a long history of involvement in Benicia's schools – where she has raised funds for good causes and led everyday moms and dads to unite for constructive outcomes. Those abilities will be needed in our future as we work together to build economic diversity and sustainability in our beautiful art town by the Strait.

I have come to know Kari personally. She's a straight shooter, tough and yet nurturing, open to conversation and compromise, but with eyes always peeled for the good of mother earth, the air, land and water.

She is my number one priority in this election. And I hope she will be yours as well.

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