

Benicia Deserves Better

By Andrés Soto

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Valero Benicia recently paid for a “Push Poll”, a political hit piece masquerading as a poll. This tactic demonstrates Valero and its allies’ belief they must rely on deception, subterfuge and social division to win the Benicia City Council race. Team Valero is spending tens of thousands to destroy Kari Birdseye and benefit Valero’s hand-picked and loyal candidates, Lionel Largaespada and Christina Strawbridge.

I have seen this movie before. It is called “Corporatacracy”, or rule by the corporation.

I moved to Benicia from Richmond, another refinery town. When the good people of Richmond came to understand how Chevron was not going to clean up its refining processes until we had a city council that was not bought and paid for by Chevron, the people organized an independent political force to challenge the corporatacracy. In Richmond, Chevron’s strategy was to pollute our politics as well as our air.

Chevron used to be able to control city hall with \$100,000 per election using their corrupt allies in the police, fire and building trades unions as attack dogs. Beginning in 2004, Chevron felt it had to increase its spending in each election until infamously, in the 2014 cycle, it spent nearly \$3.5 million in a city of 100,000 people with only 40,000 voters. In that election all of Chevron’s candidates lost!

They lost because the people of Richmond became educated about Chevron: its pollution and its politics of division. Chevron’s obscene spending alienated voters and the poor quality of the candidates it supported caused the universal rejection.

Now the Texas based Valero corporation has seen the good people of Benicia stand up and stop its dangerous and greedy Crude By Rail project. After the May 2017 Valero Flaring Disaster, the good people of Benicia who want safety and accountability, suggested Benicia adopt an Industrial Safety Ordinance, so Benicia would no longer be the ONLY refinery town in the Bay Area NOT protected by an ISO.

Valero recognizes it no longer can automatically pull the strings at Benicia City Hall. So now the gloves are off.

Let face the facts, Benicia does have its divisions despite the veneer of civility. A recent article in the Benicia Herald courageously written by Hanna Jones, a member of the Benicia High School Band, describes divisions in the Benicia band. Her letter was cry for help to have open and deep discussions about critical issues like racism and police violence. Instead the band director and the school decided to sweep the issue under the rug and the band no longer will perform the

national anthem at the football games. Even worse the divisions that were revealed still exist and are now even deeper because of the failure to resolve this issue in a mature manner.

Benicia deserves better.

Valero realizes the people of Benicia are no longer going to just accept Valero's word on issues about the refinery, especially after the latest fines totaling nearly \$300,000. So now Valero is using the Chevron's political play book in Benicia. Valero is using the politics of division and personal destruction targeting Kari Birdseye and boosting Largaespada and Strawbridge. Valero's polluting politics should be rejected by Benicians along with Valero's candidates.

If the Texas based Valero's candidates are elected, the council majority would ensure Benicia buries its head in the sand in dealing with one of the worst polluters in the Bay Area.

Benicia deserves better.

Kari Birdseye's career of service to the community and our children, and her commitment to independent science demonstrates Kari's integrity, honesty and fairness. Kari will work to heal these real divisions and make Benicia a better place for our families.

Valero's dirty tricks in this election deserve to be rejected by voting for the only candidate to earn our vote – Kari Birdseye. I will be voting for only one candidate in the 2018 Benicia City Council race – Kari Birdseye – and urge others to do so as well, because Benicia deserves better.

*By Andrés Soto
Benicia*