

D5 Analysis: Anybody's Race

April 17, 2018 | by Ward La Valley

The June 2018 election for Supervisor in District Five can only be fully appreciated in context with the political history of Rancho Calaveras which, after redistricting, is pretty much all of today's D5 in Calaveras County, California.

The political party identification rates in District Five are:

Republicans	2,525	46.1%
Democrats	1,346	24.6%
Decline to State	1,177	21.5%
Am. Ind.	268	4.9%

No Supervisor has been returned to office by Rancho voters since the last century -- 1998 to be precise, when Terri Bailey was returned to office for a second term. Ironically enough, the current District Five Supervisor, Clyde Clapp, led an effort to recall the popular Supervisor Bailey in the summer of 2002 (see http://www.recordnet.com/article/20000729/A_NEWS/307299983).

Here is the roster of Supervisors for Rancho Calaveras (and D5) in the last quarter century:

1994	Terri Bailey
1998	Terri Bailey
2002	Victoria Erickson (Bailey did not seek re-election)
2006	Russ Thomas
2010	Darren Spellman
2014	Steve Kearney
2016	Clyde Clapp (winner in November Recall)
2018	Whom will it be???

Kearney's term was undone by what was viewed as his behind-the-scenes maneuvering to permit a new asphalt plant at an existing industrial facility within the District without it undergoing all required County environmental review.

The asphalt plant became nearly as big a political issue in District Five as the unpermitted-but-still-built golf course development *Trinitas* became for the whole region beginning in 2009. But the political reverberations of Kearney's push for asphalt in District Five are still being felt.

Let's look at the results of the 2016 Recall election of then-incumbent Steve Kearney (who beat Spellman, who beat Thomas, who beat Erickson, who begat *Trinitas*, who begat ...).

First, Kearney was recalled by a 60%-40% margin, 2,536 to 1,645. It was not an especially close result.

In the simultaneous winner-take-all election to replace Kearney, Clapp was elected. The results were:

Clyde Clapp:	1,186	33.0%	(Against Asphalt, Against Commercial Marijuana)
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Bob Bowerman:	835	23.3%	(Against Asphalt, For Commercial Marijuana)
Bruce Giudici:	821	22.9%	(Against Asphalt, For Commercial Marijuana)
Dave Tunno:	669	18.7%	(For Asphalt, Against Commercial Marijuana)
Write-ins:	76	2.1%	

For the record, after Kearney overcame his initial opposition to Commercial Marijuana, his Planning Commissioner, Dave Tunno, resigned in protest in May 2016, and as we see, ran for Supervisor finishing fourth.

To replace Tunno on the Planning Commission, in June 2016 Kearney appointed CCWD Engineer Ben Stopper, saying “his experience in water and waste water” qualified him for the Planning position. Stopper, of course – inevitably -- is now running for Supervisor in D5.

We may now understand, seen in fuller context, that this 2018 Primary Election for D5 Supervisor is just the latest skirmish in the Twenty-Five Years War otherwise known as Rancho Calaveras politics.

The candidates for Supervisor in this years’ contest are:

Clyde Clapp, Incumbent	Clapp, who promised not to seek re-election in 2018, is seeking re-election in 2018
Bruce Giudici	Giudici, finishing a close third in the recall election, is trying to be the first Democrat since the Civil War to represent Rancho Calaveras
Greg Gustafson	Gustafson, censured by his fellow Calaveras Unified School District Board members in 2014, is succeeding in keeping his campaign a secret
Ben Stopper	Stopper, the only candidate who has not previously run for office, has evidently been both for and against asphalt and commercial marijuana

Riding the horse-racing metaphor, the election is approaching the Far Turn, which leads to the long Home Stretch. Actual voting will commence sometime in early May, and some believe over half the votes will be mailed in by Memorial Day.

Who’s Ahead?

So far, it has been a three-horse race. The Skull Survey, an average of the estimates of a panel of local political observers, shows the race to be virtually a toss-up between Clapp, Giudici, and Stopper. The latest Survey shows Clapp ahead of Giudici 30.8% to 28.8%, with Stopper right there at 28.4%. Gustafson has slumped to 11.9%. If no candidate gets over 50%, the top two finishers compete in the General Election in November.

On paper, the election would seem to favor Clapp and Stopper advancing on to November. The reasoning is that Clapp, an arch-opponent of Commercial Marijuana, should be in position to pick up those votes in D5 – and that could be a lot of votes. Stopper, although trying to blur his image as a staunch supporter of commercial marijuana, also enjoys the support of the more traditional D5 special interest groups – commercial interests, certain developers, and the real estate industry.

Giudici, however, might upset that equation. He has many attractive qualities as a candidate for D5. Although a liberal Democrat on social issues, Giudici, who supports commercial marijuana regulations, is trying to leverage deep concerns among D5 voters over the issue of the County budget. Calaveras County, like many rural counties, is beset by old and failing infrastructure, under-staffing at all levels of County government including law enforcement, and a growing need to expand services for an aging population. In response, Giudici, a bean

counter by trade, is sounding downright conservative on the need to curb spending and look for ways to increase revenues. Giudici even publicly questioned the Supervisors' prudence in granting a raise to (unionized) County employees in light of the pending loss of revenue caused by the Supervisor's ban on commercial marijuana. If this works, if Giudici succeeds in becoming the candidate who most successfully informs and reassures D5 voters that at least *their* supervisor is on the fiscal watchtower – he might overcome the structural advantages of either Clapp or Stopper – but most likely Stopper.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Clapp: Clapp's biggest worry is that he cannot get any more votes than he did last time. Clapp set modest goals for himself when he ran in 2016, and he met them. If Clapp cannot articulate a clear reason why he should be returned as Supervisor that involves more than just being against commercial marijuana, he may well look weak against either Stopper or Giudici.

Stopper: Stopper's biggest concern is that if he becomes too identified with former Supervisor Kearney and special interests, he will suffer Kearney's fate at the ballot box. Stopper is not a natural campaigner and is needing to learn on the job what the other candidates have already had a chance to learn in their previous campaigns. Like any challenger, but more so, he needs to articulate why he would make a better Supervisor than the incumbent.

Giudici: Giudici's biggest worry is that his background as a social liberal will doom him with the clear Republican majority in D5. While this may, in a crowded race, in fact help him advance to the General Election by driving Democratic votes his way, a classic, shrill, right-wing attack could rob him of a chance to win the General Election. If Giudici can't successfully define what actually makes a good District Five Supervisor, and in so doing define himself, his quest could be undone.

Gustafson: At this point Gustafson has absolutely nothing to worry about. Why should he? Gustafson, who took out papers to run in the 2016 Recall election but never filed them, might as well have not filed them this year – at least so far. What he may do with the remaining weeks of his campaign is a significant variable in this election. However, if he were to suddenly burst forth with a campaign it is uncertain what it would be about. As such it isn't clear what the repercussions might be. Speculation is that Gustafson can take votes that might otherwise go to Clapp, but evidence for this is scarce.

In Conclusion

Do not bet the farm on this race. The smartest play might be a \$2.00 bet on the nose for Clapp to win, but who comes in second is almost impossible to predict at this point. It's too bad they make you bet *before* they run the race.

Next up: District Three: Who's Your Incumbent?