

## 2018 Calaveras County Election Update – February 9, 2018

By Ward La Valley

With the possible placement by the Board of Supervisors of ballot measures relating to Regulating or Banning commercial marijuana for the June election, a real wrench was thrown into previous analysis of the possible election match-ups.

To be sure, marijuana was going to play a prominent role in campaign narratives anyway. Even though Regulating or Banning *commercial* marijuana is only indirectly related to the broader health, safety, economic, and cultural issues surrounding marijuana, candidates were likely going to have to answer questions on whether they supported, conditionally accepted, or were totally outraged by the Supervisors decision to Regulate commercial marijuana, and this was going to be a litmus test for some on both sides. And these answers would have mattered – somewhat. In the expected scenario (Regulation), only the most ardent opponents of Regulating commercial marijuana would have tried to make the issue paramount before the voters.

And with the issue somewhat “settled,” at least legally, most candidates might have seen the wisdom in moderating either their enthusiasm or outrage over Regulations. And if the election was going to also concern other matters – oh, just things like public safety, the budget, and the General Plan update (remember that?), candidates might have seen the wisdom in seriously expanding their narratives to try and attract voters from both sides of the marijuana issue. As it is, will anybody be listening to anything the candidates say that doesn’t have the word “marijuana” in it?

Because, as we have seen, the expected scenario failed to materialize, and there is a better than fifty-fifty chance that the full-Monty marijuana issue will be on the ballot in June.

We know that the exact language of what is to be put before the voters is extremely important in determining the likelihood of a yes or no vote for both a Ban and Regulations. But just the possible appearance of marijuana measure(s) on the ballot is enough to reach a few conclusions about what has changed.

Remember, unless a candidate gets 50% plus 1 vote in the Primary election, the top two finishers will advance to the General Election and fight it out again. With marijuana measures on the ballot, candidates previously considered favorites will now have to work much harder to advance beyond the Primary, and candidates previously considered longshots now have a clear path to at least get to the General Election, depending on their chosen narrative and the office they seek. For some candidates the focus will be to try to finish second and then take their chances from there.

In fact, the elections for Supervisor and Sheriff have essentially turned into a NASCAR auto race at Pocono Raceway. Pocono is a triangular track famous for being fast and tricky with three separate ‘lanes,’ or routes around the track, that depending on your car, can all get you across the finish line first.

So, if you want to be a Supervisor or the Sheriff, you must pick a lane to run in. But unlike NASCAR, in politics changing lanes in the middle of the race is usually fatal.

**Lane 1 is the inside lane. It is the Ban Commercial Marijuana Lane.** It’s the shortest distance to victory but has the sharpest curves and you have to guard against spinning out. Winning from Lane 1 requires maneuverability. It’s likely to come in at least second.

**Lane 2 is the middle lane. It is the grudging, pragmatic Regulation of Commercial Marijuana Lane.** It is the promise of a happy medium between Lane 1 and Lane 3. It requires a blend of horsepower and maneuverability. The danger is getting squeezed in by those running in Lanes 1 and 3. In Lane 2 you have

to work hard to come in at least second, but if successful, you're the favorite to win the Main Event – the General Election.

**Lane 3 is the outside lane. It is the enthusiastic, friendly embrace of Commercial Marijuana Regulations Lane.** It is the longest distance to victory, but you don't have to turn the wheel as much and you can stay on the gas more than in Lanes 1 and 2. This means you need horsepower to win from Lane 3. The thing to watch out for in Lane 3 is running into the wall. Lane 3 has a 50-50 chance to finish at least second but would be an underdog in the Main Event General Election.

We have a pretty good idea of the lanes the potential candidates have chosen from their public statements (all except two, but we'll keep looking).

The following have indicated an interest in running for the offices indicated by "taking out papers."

Please note that "taking out papers" is not the same as "turning in papers," which involves either turning in lots of valid signatures (no easy feat), a hefty check, or a pro-rata compromise (the more valid signatures, the less the fee). This is the first in a series of milestones in a prospective leader's political journey to office that ends with the ultimate milestone – the election.

However, experience tells us that the vast majority of names on this list are serious about running.

### Sheriff:

#### **Rick Dibasilio    Running in Lane 2**

##### Strengths:

- Currently Calaveras County Sheriff (Appointed Sheriff by Supervisors in 2016)
- Attractive, high energy, personable
- Seen as the heir to previous Sheriff by many, including previous Sheriff's family
- Good roots in Ebbetts Pass, but lives in West County – good balance
- Should have sufficient resources to run effective campaign
- No major criticism except from Auditor over budget issue; no political damage

##### Weaknesses:

- Seen as having limited "executive" experience before appointment
- Has not run for office before, politically untested; more prone to mistakes
- Seen by some as lucky and ambitious

#### **Patrick Garrahan    Running in Lane 3**

##### Strengths

- Has run for Sheriff before, in 2014
- In 2014, had support from former supporters of Sheriff Dennis Downum (retired in 2010)
- Retired law enforcement officer from Oakland, CA
- Strong community involvement since 2014 in Valley Springs / San Andreas
- Strong fund-raising potential

##### Weaknesses

- Passed over for Sheriff in favor of Dibasilio
- Not as well known outside Valley Springs, San Andreas
- Medium to low energy personality – uncomfortable in crowds
- May need substantial help from special interests to compete

**Gary Stevens -- Running in Lane 1**

Strengths

- Along with wife Nikki, experienced in Calaveras politics and campaigns
- Long-term resident, formerly in Calaveras law enforcement, fairly well known
- Wife Nikki is extremely well-connected across numerous important networks

Weaknesses

- Passed over for Sheriff in favor of Dibasilio
- Has not personally run for public office before
- Could be at fundraising disadvantage

District 3 Supervisor

**Michael Olivera -- Running in Lane 2**

Strengths

- Elected incumbent; could draw support from various special interests
- Likely to attract sufficient contributions to run effective campaign
- Clear, slow, deliberate speaking style, potentially relates well to broad spectrum
- Law enforcement background
- Arnold base was crucial in 2014

Weaknesses

- Is unlikely fit for Third District – maybe a little too conservative
- Unknown if Murphys, Forest Meadows will vote for him (didn't in 2014)

**Terence Langan -- Said to be running in Lane 1 but ??**

Strengths

- Said to be experienced in area political campaigns
- Said to be supported by D4 Supervisor
- Articulate in print; clever messaging
- Campaign could be adequately financed

Weaknesses

- Has never personally run for office before in CC
- Relatively unknown in District
- Could be tied to D4 Supervisor in negative context

**Merita Callaway -- Wants to run in Lane 2, but will face push to Lane 3**

Strengths

- Very well-known in District – former multi-term 3<sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor
- Articulate, with deep County Gov't. experience
- Only woman on ballot for Supervisor this year
- Good political fit for District
- Traditionally strong in Forest Meadows, very competitive in Murphys
- Could attract significant contributions from special interests

Weaknesses

- Merita fatigue vs. Merita nostalgia – which is it?
- Long record as Supervisor provides target-rich environment for attacks
- Sometimes superior demeanor undermined political popularity in 2014

District 5 Supervisor

**Clyde Clapp, Incumbent -- Running in Lane 1**

Strengths

- Elected incumbent, well-known in District 5
- Folksy, common-man image
- Had dedicated supporters during first campaign
- Set low expectations for his performance as Supervisor, and met them

Weaknesses

- Broke pledge not to run again
- Campaign may struggle for enough financial support to be effective
- Gustafson campaign may compete for same voters
- Will need to prepare for debates

**Bruce Giudici -- Running in Lane 2**

Strengths

- Has run for office before; ran for this office in 2016 recall election
- Early preparation plus dedicated core supporters equals strong start
- Engaging personality, good energy, quick study
- Could have sufficient resources to run strong campaign

Weaknesses

- Not a natural fit for District – liberalism could prompt attack in D5
- Stopper campaign likely to siphon off resources and voters
- Will have to work to raise sufficient resources to run effective campaign

**Gregory S. Gustafson -- Lane unknown**

Strengths

- Has run for office before – served on CUSD Board
- Well known in District
- Former Planning Commissioner
- Likely to have strong core of supporters

Weaknesses

- Has mixed record on School Board – was censured over benefits issue
- Must work to raise sufficient resources to run effective campaign
- May compete with Clapp for same voters

**Ben Stopper -- Running in Lane 3**

Strengths

- Former County Planning Commissioner
- Fresh face – relatively unknown except for appearances before Supervisors

- Could have access to significant financial resources

Weaknesses

- Has not run for public office before
- Relatively unknown
- Will likely have to take special interest money to compete
- Can be attacked as one-issue candidate
- Giudici could siphon off voters

Auditor / Controller

**Rebecca Callan**, Incumbent.

Strengths

- Elected incumbent
- Outspoken; high profile

Weaknesses

- Obvious paper trail of public quotes that involve her in County politics

**Robin Danfelt** - TBD

Assessor:

**Leslie Davis**, Incumbent

Strengths

- Multi-term incumbent
- Articulate; knows the job
- High profile during Great Recession over re-assessments

Weaknesses

- Has obviously antagonized some special interest(s) or would be unopposed
- Will not likely attract high levels of campaign money, leaving campaign vulnerable

**Tim Muetterties**

Strengths

- Well known retired realtor in Ebbetts Pass
- Wife is Chair of Planning Commission
- Campaign will likely be well-financed

Weaknesses

- Has not run for public office
- Not well known outside Ebbetts Pass area

The following offices and incumbents are likely to run and have no announced opposition:

- Clerk / Recorder: **Rebecca Turner**
- Treasurer / Tax Collector: **Barbara Sullivan**
- District Attorney: **Barbara Yook**
- Coroner: **Kevin Raggio**