

Skull Session: The Race for Sheriff in Calaveras County

by Ward La Valley | May 30, 2018

Edwin R. Murray-Creek: Hello, and welcome back to *Skull Session*, a spontaneous and unrehearsed interview program on Calaveras politics! I'm your host Edwin R. Murray-Creek. Thank you for joining us.

Tonight, back with us are our two regular panelists. Now, for those of you unfamiliar with our show, our panelists are a little ... different ... in that they are, uh, ... former live persons ... no longer corporeal ... and ... well, not actually real in every sense of the word. So, ready? Let's get started!

First, he's the former overall chief strategist of one of America's most famous Presidents! Despite many obstacles he steered his friend, and client, all the way to the White House – who then was re-elected three more times! They had to change the law to prevent that from happening again!! Ladies and Gentlemen, the man who made Franklin Roosevelt president, Mr. Louis Howe!

Next, as Ronald Reagan's Political Director, he's the architect of the Southern Strategy that used race identity to align the Republican Party with America's white rural middle class, changing American politics to this day. He was the Campaign Manager of the successful election of George H. W. Bush in 1988 -- Ladies & Gentlemen, Mr. Lee Atwater!

And, since this show will focus on the race for Sheriff, also with us tonight, making his second appearance on the program, is Doctor Galen Adams, political advisor, and chief campaign architect for the most popular Sheriff in America – Sheriff Matt Dillon of Dodge City, Kansas, circa 1875. Most of you know Doctor Adams as "Doc."

Welcome to you all!!

MC: Okay, Doc, let's start with you. As you recall, the candidates are Rick DeBasilio, the appointed incumbent Sheriff, Patrick Garrahan, and Detective Gary Stevens. Have you noticed any significant changes in the race for Sheriff here in Calaveras County since we last saw you?

Doc: Oh, not so much, I guess. Like I said, all three candidates are real nice fellers, and they're all running real hard.

MC: So, how do you think it'll turn out?

Doc: How in tarnation would I know?!? I'm a doctor not a fortune teller!

MC: Well, all right then Lee, how about you? Is the current Sheriff – the appointed Sheriff – going to keep his job or not?

Lee: Well, first of all, as we all know, it's just very hard to defeat an incumbent Sheriff in these rural counties – appointed or not. The thing is, unless there are very unusual circumstances, most

voters aren't in a position to know whether the Sheriff is doing a good job or not, so they are very persuadable to stick with an incumbent.

Louis: Hey, there's another reason to provide meaningful ways to measure law enforcement. For fire protection we at least have insurance ratings.

MC: Well, Louis, in a recent campaign ad, Garrahan referenced crime statistics that claimed to be from the Sheriff's office. If true, this means a challenger was able to use information provided *by the Sheriff's office* against the incumbent Sheriff. Isn't this a step in the right direction towards transparency?

Louis: Yes, I saw that. I have to admit, I was impressed that the Sheriff's Office had some numbers and shared them with Garrahan. And even though the claimed 'increase' in crime seemed modest, the numbers helped put some meat on the bones of Garrahan's "leadership" narrative, which is his main issue.

MC: Well, I guess that's our cue to talk about marijuana and the Sheriff's race. Has it been the defining issue? Lee?

Lee: For a few weeks in early April, they all seemed to want to de-emphasize the commercial marijuana issue. That's certainly true of the *appointed* incumbent. But now, Stevens seems to be working to harvest the anti-marijuana vote he had skillfully sown in earlier statements.

Louis: Well, he needs it. Like Doc says, they're all three "real nice fellers" but you can only vote for one. Garrahan, who is the Sheriff candidate most closely identified with the commercial marijuana advocates, hasn't explicitly courted that vote ... probably because he's confident that he doesn't need to. But you're right, Stevens needs to make sure the anti-marijuana vote knows who "their" candidate for Sheriff is.

MC: So you're saying that Stevens needs the marijuana issue more than the other two?

Doc: He needs something, I'll tell you. So does that Garrahan feller. You know what, I saw a picture in the paper – a real newspaper, not one of these funny things here – of Sheriff DiBasilio... ,

Lee: You mean the *appointed* Sheriff DiBasilio.

Doc: ... of *Sheriff* DiBasilio, his sidearm holstered to his thigh, striding through another busted criminal marijuana enterprise, square jaw set in determination ... reminded me a lot of Matt.

My point is, both Stevens and Garrahan have tried to make themselves out as more 'executive' than the Sheriff – that Garrahan feller even talked about the virtues of just sitting behind his desk if he's elected! Sheriff Rick DiBasilio, him getting out there, getting his hands dirty, cleaning up the County ... I wonder if that ain't maybe what folks want in a Sheriff.

Louis: Times change, Doc.

Doc: Maybe, but people don't.

Lee: Well, it may be hard to beat an incumbent Sheriff, but Stevens is the one to watch.

MC: Why so, Lee?

Lee: This is Calaveras County. It is Republican. Stevens has run a real strong campaign. All the little things you have to do to win, they've done. They raised a lot of money – almost as much as Merita. They have lots of great signs in great locations, they've had countless meetings, and Stevens has showed up at nearly every event held in the last 3 months. They have advertised effectively. If you ask me, this is a case of a great campaign, and a perfectly solid candidate.

Louis: Wrong again, Lee. Garrahan has tightened up his narrative, he's advertising, and *he* mailed. I don't think the DiBasilio Campaign sent any direct mail, and Stevens only mailed a curious letter in an unmarked envelope to selected addresses attacking DiBasilio for supposedly saying he was "on the fence" about marijuana.

MC: Doc, you got anything to say?

Doc: That feller Stevens ... look here, the Sheriff doesn't have a dang thing to do with whether commercial marywanna growers get regulated or not. The Sheriff swears to uphold the damn law, and that's all. And he either goes out and does it or the voters throw him out.

Louis: Yes, that's Stevens' Achilles heel. His personal feelings about marijuana are, on paper anyway, irrelevant to how he does his job, yet he still has to pander to his constituency to get their vote.

Lee: I agree it's tricky ...

Louis: ... and cynical ...

Lee: ... to do without television advertising. But Garrahan has had the same problem. Stevens is in better shape than you people think because the anti-marijuana constituency is better organized than you think. They get together every Sunday. All in all, I think Stevens has done a good job trying to tell the Republican conservative majority in this County that he's their guy. You wait: you'll see.

MC: So doesn't that leave DiBasilio without a constituency?

Doc: Only if this whole thing is about marywannyy, which it ain't!

MC: Well, okay, what else is the election for Sheriff about?

(silence)

MC: Anybody? Is it about Leadership? Experience? Anything at all?

Doc: This is what I keep trying to tell you squirts. Electing a Sheriff is different. It's not about words, or constituencies. It's about the quality of the man.

Louis: I'm good with that.

Lee: Me too.

MC: Okay, then on that rare note of harmony, it's time for predictions! Doc, you have the honors.

Doc: Well, like I say, they're all three real fine fellers. But I just can't see where any of them challengers has laid a glove on the Sheriff. So, that's my prediction. The Sheriff wins.

MC: But what about ..

Doc: ... I don't know about this run-off business. I just think the Sheriff wins.

MC: He gets over 50%?

Doc: Sure, he does, why not? And if not, do you think he'll lose next time?

MC: Okay, Louis, you're up: what's the result going to be?

Louis: For a while there I thought that DiBasilio might get over 50%, but he seems to be lagging down the stretch. Maybe he's tired from all that striding around.

Garrahan has stepped up his campaign – he's been the only one to use direct mail, and his piece was effective. His advertising is better and more frequent. I don't think Stevens has sufficiently aroused his anti-marijuana constituency, if only because the Commercial Ban is, surprisingly, now the law. The issue isn't what everybody thought it was going to be when he decided to run. And Garrahan has, on the whole, successfully kept commercial marijuana out of his narrative.

MC: So?

Louis: I see a surging Garrahan in a close second to a fading DiBasilio. When the music stops, Stevens will be the one with no chair.

Lee: Oh, please. What crap. The Stevens anti-marijuana constituency is bigger, and like I said, 'way better organized than you idiots give it credit for. Garrahan hath cast his lot with the liberals, and he will now soweth the Republican whirlwind.

MC: Your colorful mixed metaphor notwithstanding, what is going to be the order of finish, Lee?

Lee: DiBasilio and Stevens, one and two. DiBasilio may have had a shot at 50% but he seems to be holding back, or something. I'm not sure ... like Louis said, maybe he's getting tired. So don't be surprised to see Stevens in second place nipping at the stalled, and *appointed*, Sheriff's heels. Stevens is in good shape to be the next Sheriff.

Doc: Pshaw!! Mister, are you kidding?!? Sheriff DiBasilio *tired?!?* Why, he could pick either of you fellers up and put you on the top shelf with one hand! Just what was your name again, young feller?

Lee: Don't you "Pshaw" me, you drunken old coot! And if I hear you say "feller" one more time ...

MC: Thank you all!! I think it's time we wrapped up!! It's been a most exciting and interesting Skull Session! For Free Tri-Tip Dinner, I'm Edwin ...

Doc: Oh? Oh??? **Coot** is it? That's **Doctor** Coot to you!!

Louis: Now gentlemen, let's not ...

Doc and Lee together: *Shut-up Louis!*

MC: Good night! Our Next Skull Session will be on the Supervisorial races, and our guest panelist will be Marj Votaire! I'm Edwin R. Murray-Creek and this has been another *Skull Session*