

Challenge in the Third District

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Having two strong candidates competing for the same office is a good problem to have.

But it is still a problem.

Such a problem confronts the voters of the sprawling Third Supervisorial District, which includes nearly all of the county's Ag Preserve land, three of the five incorporated communities, a scattering of unincorporated villages and remote neighborhoods, and even portions of urbanized Napa.

Incumbent Diane Dillon is seeking a fourth term on the board. She is being challenged by Yountville Vice Mayor Lewis Chilton.

Either of these candidates would be a fine supervisor and representative for the far-flung constellation of towns the district represents, but we can choose only one.

Dillon has a record of tireless work on behalf of the district, starting with her life before elective office as an attorney in a firm representing the interests of up valley cities and as an activist in organizing Measure J, the 2000 initiative that strengthened protections of the Ag Preserve, and in preserving Suscol Ridge and the Stanly Ranch.

Once in office, Dillon has proved to be a champion for preserving the integrity of the Ag Preserve and keeping the tourist aspect of the wine business from overwhelming the agricultural nature of the industry.

Although she came to office as an activist in land-use matters, she has proven to be far from a single-issue candidate. She has embraced her role as a leader of all of the county's many functions, from planning to law enforcement to human services and finance.

Among her accomplishments, she was instrumental in crafting the county's caregiver ordinance, requiring those providing care to the vulnerable elderly to obtain a business license and undergo a background check. She pushed for an ordinance requiring landowners to create "defensible space," maintaining trees and underbrush in a way that minimizes the danger in fire-prone areas. She has been a key part of a fiscally conservative coalition on the Board of Supervisors that has maintained the county's bulletproof AA+ bond rating despite the enormous financial pressures from the Great Recession.

Chilton, meanwhile, comes with eight years of experience on the Yountville Town Council, governing at a time of vibrancy and change in that community. He has served on the county's

Local Agency Formation Commission, a panel with a key role in maintaining the delicate balance between the incorporated cities and the rural ag land that surrounds them. He comes with thoughtful and provocative ideas on how to boost cooperation among cities and how to manage and tweak the rules that govern winery development, balancing regulatory flexibility with a commitment to allowing development only where a winery has a strong tie to Napa County and the land on which it sits.

He is a successful businessman, owning the Yountville Deli and a commercial kitchen in Napa. He is preparing to open a second restaurant, this one in downtown Napa.

Chilton is an energetic and promising candidate, with ideas that merit discussion and a clear commitment to the district and to Napa County as a whole. He is one of several newer faces in county politics that represent an emerging younger generation of leadership.

And yet, when an incumbent has a solid record of accomplishment and maintains the passion and energy to continue high-level work, the burden shifts to a challenger to say why voters should move in a new direction.

Chilton speaks of new energy and forward-thinking leadership, and we applaud him for that, but we do not believe that he has made a strong enough case as to why voters should turn their backs on a successful and dedicated supervisor such as Diane Dillon.

Therefore, we endorse Diane Dillon, and urge voters to give her another term on the board.