

Dodd goes to Sacramento

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Starting at noon on Monday, Napa County will have its own voice in the state legislature.

For the first time in a generation, a Napa resident will represent the district that includes Napa County. While previous representatives have done a good job dealing with Napa County issues, it is reassuring to know that former Supervisor Bill Dodd will be there to advocate for us directly.

The Editorial Board sat down with Dodd last week, and what we heard confirmed our earlier confidence in Dodd as a candidate, which had led us to endorse him in the recent election.

Dodd says his first order of business will be quake relief. He and State Sen. Lois Wolk will be introducing bills that could offer tax credits to home and business owners for damage sustained and help cities and counties recoup the costs of dealing with the disaster. If passed, these measures would go a long way to meeting costs not covered by insurance or by federal disaster aid.

In the longer term, we were pleased by Dodd's priorities in his committee assignments. While the committee seats have not been doled out, Dodd has requested to serve on the committees for Business, Professions and Consumer Protection; Governmental Organization; and Water, Parks, and Wildlife.

Those committees would give Dodd influence in setting policy for small business and public infrastructure, licensing wine and other alcohol, dealing with tribal gambling issues, preserving open space, and regulating ground and surface water use. All are pressing issues for Napa County, and Dodd's interest in these committees speaks well for his policy agenda.

He told us that he deliberately did not request a seat on the Education Committee, despite his campaign focus on education issues. He readily admitted that, as a county supervisor, education was an aspect of government where he had little technical knowledge; former school board members and educators would bring more technical know-how to the committee, he said.

But, he said, that does not mean he will not be active in education matters. He spoke of trying to forge ties with and between the many school districts that dot his large district, perhaps convening a summit of district leaders to create a regional approach to common issues. We liked the sound of that.

We also liked the sound of Dodd's approach to building his legislative staff, a new thing for him since Napa County supervisors do not have dedicated staffers.

Dodd started by laying out a clear view of how term limits has affected the culture in Sacramento. Since legislators have a limited life in the Capitol, with constant turnover even in senior leadership positions, experienced staffers have become increasingly important. Dodd said he understands the need for experienced staff and has hired veterans for his legislative operation.

But he also acknowledged the downside of this shift. As staffers become more powerful, they can develop loyalties and agendas that are independent of the legislator and district they nominally serve. Dodd, therefore, chose to go outside the usual Sacramento network in hiring his top aide, Chief of Staff Ezraha Chaaban.

Chaaban has a law degree and has worked in Sacramento, but his main governmental experience came as director of governmental affairs for the North Bay Association of Realtors, and lately at the Encore Capital Group, a debt-management firm in San Diego. Dodd's strategy is to bring in a person who understands the system, but is not wholly immersed in it. We commend Dodd for what appears to be a wise and thoughtful outlook on developing his staff.

Dodd said he will be approaching his new job with an open mind and open ears. His many years on the Board of Supervisors appear to have taught him a valuable lesson in humility and the limits of a new lawmaker to challenge the system. We like what we heard from Dodd last week, and we are expecting great things from him as he speaks up for the interests of Napa County and the other towns that make up his district.