

Opinion

THE FRESNO BEE FOUNDED IN 1922 BY CARLOS K. MCCLATCHY

OUR VIEWS

Conway for Assembly

Supervisor has the right experience for 34th District.

With Assembly District, just by virtue of its size, is a challenge to represent. Its boundaries encompass all or parts of Kern, Inyo and San Bernardino. The rambling district has vast natural riches, which provides much of the beauty but also brings along many challenges: migration, environmental consequences, social issues and land-use policies.

The Assembly representative of this district must advocate for the needs of those living in the demanding medium-sized cities of Visalia, Tulare and Porterville, as well as smaller, rural towns you may not have even heard of, like Lone Pine and Independence.

In a publican primary on June 3, The Assembly needs Connie Conway of Tulare, who serves as chairman of the Tulare Board of Supervisors. The race is open because incumbent Bill Alia, has been termed out. In the Democratic primary, Desmond Farrelly of Visalia is opposed. We don't make recommendations in races in which there is only

one generation lawmaker, is a good fit for this conservative district. She has been elected supervisor twice by substantial margins. Conway also served for six years as a director of the Tulare Redevelopment Agency, and she was a district manager of CorVel Corp., a health care organization specializing in workers compensation disability management.

One of the most important qualities of Valley legislators is an ability to collaborate regionally in a bloc, standing strong against lawmakers from more populous parts of the state.

Conway has demonstrated the willingness to work across geographical and party lines to get things done for this region. She chairs the governor's California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, which links local voices with cabinet-level state officials.

She has served as president of the California Association of Counties, a position that gave her familiarity with the whole state. She also is a past state president of the Cities, Counties and Schools Partnership, which should help her with education policy.

Conway's experience on the Tulare board will give her down-to-earth insights that could help the Legislature regain financial footing. She has no patience with the state's habit of dropping unfunded mandates on counties, and she, like us, is frustrated at the Legislature's distractions on trivial bills such as banning dogs from the laps of drivers, while the state budget can't be brought into balance.

The Valley already is set up to play a major role in legislative leadership, and Conway is well suited to play serious ball with the rest of

End the secrecy surrounding public employee contract negotiations

Peter Scheer, who heads the California First Amendment Coalition, has a novel idea: End the secrecy surrounding local government labor contract negotiations.

You can understand the logic and the urgency behind his idea when you consider the situation in Vallejo. That city is filing for bankruptcy. Why? Local officials approved salary and benefits costs for public employees and retirees that are more than the city can afford.

Scheer's point is that California law allows local government officials "to avoid public discussion of the true cost and fiscal impact of the pay deals that they have approved." By the time the public sees anything, a union contract already is a done deal and no changes can be made.

In some states, all phases of the bargaining process, including negotiations, are open to the public (though government officials may discuss strategy for labor negotiations in closed session). Minnesota, Florida, Kansas and Tennessee are examples.

California is at the opposite extreme. The state's Brown Act not only allows negotiations about salaries and benefits to be conducted behind closed doors, it allows local government

officials to vote on a final agreement in closed session.

Only after that vote and union acceptance of the contract does the local government have to let the public in on the deal. And only then does the text of the contract become a public record — when it's too late to change anything.

The situation in Vallejo should cause legislators to revisit this nonsense. At a minimum,

legislators should require local governments, before any vote, to publish a proposed contract and prepare a single, authoritative, easy-to-read document listing all parts of the offer, including cost.

They also should require local governments to hold a public hearing to consider the financial ramifications of every labor agreement. The vote to approve or reject the contract should be held in public session.

The Vallejo debacle highlights a basic truth: The public that pays the bills should be able to see and question a contract before a vote, not after.

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