

Elect Rutherford

10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, September 24, 2010

San Bernardino County cannot repair its corruption-tainted government by re-electing people linked to scandal. The county government needs a change in political habits and attitudes. And voters can make progress toward that goal by electing Janice Rutherford as 2nd District supervisor on Nov. 2.

Two-term incumbent Paul Biane barely edged out Rutherford in the June primary, winning 34 percent of the vote to Rutherford's nearly 32 percent. But voters have only two choices in the runoff, instead of the six candidates in the primary. Rutherford offers a clear improvement on the status quo, and that should be the decisive factor for district residents.

Rutherford has compiled a commendable record on the Fontana City Council, and she grasps the central issue in this election: the need for stronger ethics in county government. In contrast, Biane is an unnamed, uncharged co-conspirator in an ongoing county corruption case -- hardly a promising resume for reform.

Biane played a key role in county's legal battle with developer Colonies Partners over flood-control easements, the case now at the center of the criminal investigation. He was one of the board majority that voted to settle the lawsuit in 2006. Prosecutors call that \$102 million deal with a generous political contributor a theft from taxpayers, fueled by bribery and extortion.

In 2005, Biane was one of two supervisors who tried to settle the lawsuit by meeting with the Colonies without lawyers present. The other supervisor was Bill Postmus, now facing felony charges as part of the investigation. The county's lawyers called the proposed \$77 million deal that emerged from that meeting unreasonably generous to the Colonies.

The incumbent also was the primary driver of Measure P in 2006, a measure that bloated supervisors' pay under the guise of imposing term limits. Supervisors now earn about \$150,000 annually. Biane also voted for a surreptitious boost in supervisors' health, retirement and other benefits in 2007

-- a hefty upgrade disguised as a budget adjustment and slipped past the public without discussion.

Rutherford, by contrast, favors tough ethics rules and the creation of a county ethics commission. She also supports a sunshine ordinance to provide taxpayers with more transparency about county government actions -- a crucial step for a county with a long history of insider deals and behind-the-scenes decisions.

She also rejects the longstanding practice of supervisors meddling in lower-level county decisions, often to benefit cronies or special interests. Strong administrative controls are key to deterring misconduct, and ignoring them invites scandal. The county needs supervisors who will not bypass proper administration for political ends.

Rutherford's service on the Fontana council has been professional and commendable. She understands how local government works and the issues that San Bernardino County faces.

Janice Rutherford is the right choice for San Bernardino County, and voters in the 2nd District should elect her as supervisor.