

Board of Supervisors

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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Board welcomes McPherson and Friend, names Coonerty chair

Caput objects (briefly) to leadership decisions

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — Meeting for the first time with new members, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday selected Neal Coonerty as its new chairman.

The unanimous decision gives Coonerty a second turn behind the gavel of the county's top political body. But the move also came with questions from Supervisor Greg Caput about whether his South County dis-

trict was in line for a leadership position as the board's vice chairman.

"We're above petty predilections. We don't maneuver. I guess what I'm saying is, I'm responsible to the people of District Four," Caput said. "I think in the past, if somebody else were in my position, I would not be skipped over."

Instead, the job went to newcomer Zach Friend, from the 2nd District. Caput later said he was fine with the



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Fourth District Supervisor Greg Caput, at right, voiced his concerns to the board about being passed over for vice chairman while 2nd District newcomer Zach Friend, at left, was selected Tuesday.

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decision.

"I accept the explanation that they're doing it more by district than by seniority," Caput said after the meeting. "I just want to make sure that the people of District Four, no matter who is the supervisor of that area, (are) not being excluded."

The transition of power is always the first order of business in a new year, and the board typically rotates the chairmanship, a largely symbolic position. Chairs run meetings, but also lend their support to issues or

specific legislation and can serve as the public face of the county.

Caput has yet to hold a leadership post. He can be an iconoclast at times, often standing as the lone dissenter on issues such as the recent establishment of a no-shooting zone along upper Eureka Canyon Road. After two years, he still appears to be searching for rapport with other members.

Caput's 4th District, which includes most of Watsonville, last held the chairmanship in 2010, during Tony Campos' last year on the board. Campos' immediate predecessor was Coonerty, who first won election to the board in 2006.

As the owner of Bookshop Santa Cruz, Coonerty has been a voice for economic development. He said Tuesday he wants to continue pursuing those goals.

Over the past several years, county boards across California have been dealing with fallout from the state Legislature on issues such as the end of redevelopment and state prison realignment.

Coonerty said with the passage of Proposition 30, he hopes those days are coming to an end. He also hopes Assemblyman Mark Stone, D-Scotts Valley, a former member of the county board, can be a voice for local governments.

"They did a huge amount of damage when they got rid of redevelopment, so we're still trying to deal with that," Coonerty said. "Hopefully they'll leave us alone for a while."

Tuesday's agenda was light as the board welcomed not only Friend, a former crime analyst with the Santa Cruz Police Department, but also Supervisor Bruce McPherson, who returns to politics after a career in Sacramento that took him from the Assembly to the office of Secretary of State.

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