

Levy Likes Wingspread

Art Pearl & Bruce Cooperstein

Robley Levy is running for reelection for the second supervisorial district in Santa Cruz County. This run is very different from her previous two. Some of her long-time friends have become her enemies, and therein lies a tale.

Less than 20 years ago Santa Cruz was a right-wing haven; Pat Liberty and Marilyn Liddicoat were the dominant voices. For a very brief period Ed Borovatz and Phil Baldwin were supervisors but they were recalled in a nasty piece of business. After which no one was safe from Marilyn's McCarthyite rhetoric. Anyone not for her was a "gutless wonder," a "crummy bum," or worse. Those were not fun days for Gary Patton.

Some citizens (Art Pearl being one of them) decided recall could work two ways and went after the redoubtable Ms. Liddicoat. Many opponents of Liddicoat weren't hot for the recall. Some feared that a failed campaign would only increase her power and her vindictiveness. Some were against the idea of recall, believing it a tactic that favored those who abused power. Nonetheless, the recall gained sufficient steam to qualify for the ballot. Then came the search for a candidate; it would be more than embarrassing to have gone through all that effort and not have a credible alternative. Filling that void, with verve and courage, came Robley Levy. The recall failed, but it had to be a factor in Marilyn Liddicoat's unexpected retirement from public office. Levy, along with Joe Cucchiara, was elected the next go-round. And politics in Santa Cruz County changed.

It has changed again with Wingspread, over which Robley Levy has broken ranks with the two supervisors who for the most part have been her allies. Since she came out for Wingspread her character as well as her judgment have been impugned. We spoke with her about Wingspread and the unkind things said about her.

Pearl & Cooperstein: *How about this charge that you are so in Ry Kelley's hip pocket that he even pushed you to the microphone at the last Coastal Commission meeting?*

Levy: "I absolutely reject the idea that I am in any way in anybody's hip pocket. I do not know what Lee Quarnstrom [of the *San Jose Mercury News*] saw. I was in intensive questioning with county counsel and unaware of anyone touching or pushing me or talking to me. The way the hearing was structured, I find it very hard to believe that happened. Very frankly, the last person in the world that I would want to talk to under those circumstances would be Kelley." *Another attack on you is your tabling Wingspread at the Coastal Commission because you did not like the commissioners who were present at the time.*

"First of all, I was a representative of the board of supervisors, whose position is that this project should be approved. At that meeting there were either three or four members absent, and the rules of the commission are such that a losing vote is a denial, not allowing for some future consideration. To my mind, that was an unfair

hearing. For the project to pass it would need a yes vote from everyone present, and if there is one thing clear about the project, there is no universal opinion on it. It seemed to me to have a fair hearing I should ask to have it continued before a full commission. Obviously those against the project would prefer to have it heard under circumstances where there is the greatest opportunity for it to be turned down."

As to the project itself....

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KEN KEARNEY

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ject: 1) it is environmentally sound; 2) it mitigates traffic impact; 3) it provides public access to the coast; and 4) it provides a public benefit.

"In terms of the basic environmental issues, if you look at the EIR, what really strikes you, when compared with the Seascape project, is the astonishing difference. The ravine, the bluffs, the beach are preserved. There is some grading, but the visual impacts are very limited. The performing arts facility is virtually invisible because of the sloping nature of the area. I am certain a state park would be a vehicle park facility which would have more negative environment effects than Wingspread as currently constituted." *Opponents of the measure admit the public benefit of fields and the performing arts facility but believe they should be located elsewhere. Also challenged are the predicted economic benefits from the project.*

"There are no sure things to any venture. The estimates are fairly sound. The contractual obligations for a million dollars are clear. If the contractor goes under then anyone who takes over has to meet the obligations either in straight cash or reverted to a transiency tax."

How about the traffic mitigation?

"The developer will make major improvements at the two intersections that will access the project. I would have preferred extra ramps off the freeway, but that was not possible."

Finally, an overall assessment from you on the project.

"Wingspread is a difficult issue. It has changed shape since it was first proposed. To me, and I hope for the voters, what we are considering is how can that property be used to benefit the community as a whole. A state purchase will not deliver a great deal to locals, but with this version of Wingspread, for the first time the property becomes available to the public—the beaches and the playing fields and the 85 percent that remains in open space—all of which is not widely understood or acknowledged."

The claim of 85 percent is challenged. Opponents claim that 46 percent of the developable land will be covered.

With all the emotionality churned up over this particular issue, Levy hopes that it will not be forgotten that she was the one who insisted the project be brought to a vote. She also wants people to understand that voting Measure A down does not end the matter, nor is it the only factor in her bid for reelection.

"My guess is that if Measure A is defeated, the developer will come in with a new project that meets environmental requirements and it will be difficult to say no to that one," she says.

"Is this litmus-test, single-issue politics? Or is there willingness to look at a broad record and ask who is going to be the best supervisor for the second district. If you look at that record—environmental issues, social issues such as pay parity, and just bread-and-butter responses to constituent concerns—you will find I have a very good liberal environmental and social record, and the alternative is very, very bad news for anyone who cares about the future of Santa Cruz. On the issue of growth alone: Over the past eight years in the county we have reduced development from 1,000 units a year to 500 units. I think that is an accomplishment that should not be ignored."

Santa Cruz was a pretty lonely place for progressive-minded folks before Robley Levy came along; it could be that again if she were forced to step aside.

Note: Our first column touched a few nerves. Some accused us of lying. We tried to answer those accusations but space wasn't available to print our rebuttal. Our response is available to anyone who contacts us with a self-addressed stamped envelope. We admit to one distortion: we claimed that when pressed, President Reagan reached for his guns; it appears he really reaches for his astrol- oger.

The opinions in this column are the writers' and do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of The Sun.