



# Power post vacuum

Placer County voters have few options when it comes to choosing their local representatives

BY GRAHAM WOMACK

When Jennifer Montgomery resigned her seat on the Placer County Board of Supervisors last spring to lead the Governor's Forest Management Task Force, 20 candidates vied to replace her. Months after the board appointed Cindy Gustafson to complete Montgomery's term, a quieter round of voting looms.

The five-member Placer County board makes numerous land use and policy decisions for one of the fastest-growing areas in the Sacramento region. But for years, largely the same people have been making these decisions. And little seems poised to change after the March 3 primary.

Just seven candidates filed by the Dec. 6 deadline for seats available in three board districts: Gustafson's sprawling 5th District, which spans Auburn to Lake Tahoe; District 3, which runs from Rocklin to Auburn; and District 4, which includes Granite Bay and east Roseville.

Longtime incumbents Jim Holmes in District 3 and Kirk Uhler in District 4 have nine terms between them, and are running again.

Holmes, who was first elected to the board in 2004, faces Craig Del Greco of Newcastle and Mike Murray of Rocklin.

"He's done a lot in 16 years," Murray said. "Sixteen years ago, I was in high school."

A member of the Placer County Republican Central Committee and a trainer by day for Stampede Consulting, Murray said he was motivated to run by board decisions such as its support of Pioneer Energy, which hiked its rates after borrowing \$18 million from the county in start-up costs.

Del Greco, who was unavailable for comment, has also voiced concern about Pioneer Energy, asking its governing board at its Jan. 7, 2019 meeting to consider increasing its reserves by 10 times, according to meeting minutes posted online.

Like Uhler, Holmes has been a voting member on Pioneer Energy's governing board. He has reported the board's actions to his fellow supervisors and advocated for Pioneer to his constituents. Holmes defended the two-way relationship, telling SN&R that Pioneer's

ratepayers are still getting a better than deal than with PG&E.

"It was a business decision that was politicized," Holmes said.

Uhler's board tenure has been sometimes stormy, with him aligning closely with developers and facing a 2010 recall effort. But Uhler also fared well among voters in his conservative district where President Donald Trump received 53.5% of the vote in November 2016 compared to Hillary Clinton's 36.4%, according to the Placer Elections website.

Uhler last won reelection by nearly 20 percentage points over challenger Victor Bekhet. This time, Uhler faces Suzanne Jones, who has been affiliated with Defend Granite Bay, a group opposed to development projects Uhler has supported.

Uhler and Jones didn't immediately reply to messages seeking comment.

Gustafson had a 26-year career with the Tahoe City Public Utility District, where she served as general manager. She also spent five years on the California Fish and Game Commission and served as CEO of the North Lake Tahoe Chamber/CVB/Resort Association.

"I had worked closely with Placer County for decades," she said.

Her challenger, Christopher Kershner, also sought the appointment when Montgomery stepped down. Kershner, an Auburn business owner, ran unsuccessfully for Auburn City Council last November. His three opponents all won, and each received at least 50% more votes than he did.

Kershner opted to run for public office after participating in a series of lawsuits related to prisoner civil rights claims against the Placer County Sheriff's Office, following a February 2017 arrest.

"I think everyone needs to be stood up for, not just people with resources, financial resources," Kershner said.

Holmes defended the long tenures of some supervisors, including 21-year member Robert Weygandt, up for reelection in 2022.

"When you look at the record, we've done a great job," Holmes said. □

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