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Pam Slater-Price (HAYNE PALMOUR IV/Staff Photographer)

REGION: Three supervisors up for re-election

By EDWARD SIFUENTES - Staff Writer

If the last 12 years are any indication, the three supervisors up for re-election probably will breeze by their opponents in the June 3 primary election.

Supervisors Pam Slater-Price, Dianne Jacob and Greg Cox have largely unknown opponents and hold a huge advantage in campaign money.

The three supervisors reported having more than a combined total of \$1 million in March for their re-election campaigns, while their opponents reported raising less than \$100,000 combined.

The advantage is not just financial, said John Dadian, a longtime political consultant in San Diego. They also have name recognition and largely successful track records, he said.

"The power of the incumbency is extremely powerful, especially for the supervisors, whose districts are so large," Dadian said.

That doesn't dampen the hopes of one challenger. Rudy Reyes, who is running for Jacob's District 2 seat in East County, said he believes he has good odds of being elected.

"Right now, I got a 50-50 shot," Reyes said.

The 30-year-old educator said he's banking on his notoriety as a medical marijuana activist to

garner votes.

Reyes suffered burns over two-thirds of his body after helping his family evacuate their Wildcat Canyon home during the 2003 Cedar fire.

He began using medical marijuana to relieve the pain from his injuries, and has been an outspoken opponent of the county's 2005 lawsuit challenging the voter-approved "Compassionate Use Act," which allows the medical use of marijuana.

All five supervisors, including Bill Horn and Ron Roberts, have served together since the mid-1990s. They have been credited with bringing stability to county government and shaping the 17,000-employee bureaucracy into a well-run machine.

Supervisors serve four-year terms and earn \$143,000 a year.

Proven track record

The incumbents all mention the county's good credit rating as a sign of the county's good health. In January, Standard & Poor gave the county's pension fund its highest rating, AAA.

But the incumbents say there is still much to be done, whether improving the county's fire resources or preparing for lean budget years ahead.

Jacob, whose district includes Ramona, Poway, Santa Ysabel and Julian, said improving the backcountry's firefighting agencies is one of the main reasons she's running again. She was first elected in 1992.

"I would say that we've done a lot to improve the system," including buying more fire engines and clearing brush, she said.

Jacob, whose district was hardest hit by the 2003 wildfires, said she wants to create a regional joint powers authority modeled after Orange County.

To win re-election, Jacob has accumulated a campaign war chest of \$354,000 as of March, according to finance records at the county Registrar of Voters office.

Reyes' campaign records show he had \$163 in March.

One advantage of being an incumbent facing largely unknown opponents is that they are able to accumulate campaign funds, Dadian said.

Money that is not spent in one election is carried over to the next, he said.

Slater-Price, whose District 3 seat includes parts of coastal North County, Rancho Penasquitos and Escondido, has raised \$419,000. Her opponent, Encinitas engineer John Van Doorn, who is not related to the North County Times columnist of the same name, raised \$25,000 for his campaign, most of it in loans.

The 50-year-old challenger is a regular at county meetings and he says that the Board of Supervisors is not responsive to the public's needs.

Slater-Price said that if the public believed the supervisors were not doing a good job, they would vote them out.

That could also be the reason why more candidates don't run against them, she said.

"If we wouldn't be doing a good job, we'd have more challengers stepping up," she said.

Continuity

One criticism often raised about the Board of Supervisors is that it doesn't reflect the diversity of the region. All five supervisors are white, registered Republicans who are nearing or at retirement age.

Cox said continuity has been good for the county.

"We've tried to set good policy and hire good people," Cox said.

One of his opponents, Howard Johnson, said it's time for a change. The 46-year-old father of five said the supervisors are out of touch with the people.

A self-employed webmaster, Johnson said he doesn't have health insurance and the income limits set by the county have kept him out of the public health system.

Johnson, a registered Democrat, said he had to take his daughter across the border to Tijuana to receive medical attention for a toothache.

Most of the challengers, including Johnson, said they favor imposing term limits for the supervisors.

The incumbents all said that term limits do not necessarily improve government. They pointed to the city of San Diego and state government, which have term limits and are mired in financial problems.

"The public always has term limits," Slater-Price said. "They can vote us out."

Contact staff writer Edward Sifuentes at (760) 740-3511 or esifuentes@nctimes.com.

District 1

District includes Chula Vista, National City, Coronado, Bonita and Imperial Beach

Incumbent: Greg Cox

Age: 59

Residence: Chula Vista

Party: Republican

Occupation: District 1 Supervisor

Years in office: 13

Opponent: Howard Johnson

Age: 46

Party: Democratic

Residence: Otay Mesa

Occupation: CEO of Vote for Better Leadership

District 2

District includes Poway, Ramona, Julian, El Cajon, Campo and Pine Valley

Incumbent: Dianne Jacob

Age: 68

Party: Republican

Residence: Jamul

Occupation: District 2 Supervisor

Years in office: 16

Opponent: Rudy Reyes

Age: 31

Party: Democratic

Residence: Santee

Occupation: former middle school and college teacher

District 3

District includes Encinitas, Del Mar, Solana Beach, Escondido, Rancho Bernardo and Tierrasanta

Incumbent: Pam Slater-Price

Age: 64

Party: Republican

Residence: Del Mar

Occupation: District 3 Supervisor

Years in office: 16

Opponent: John Van Doorn

Age: 50

Party: Republican

Residence: Encinitas

Occupation: Engineer