

## **Getting to Know Your Elected Leaders – Part 6**

By Alan Smith

This column was started shortly after the governor signed former Senator Dede Alpert's SB1161 bill that resulted in Proposition 81 on the June ballot. The concept was to provide thoughts on how trustees/commissioners could become more involved in the election process to work towards the passage of Prop. 81.

However, we all know the results. But the skills you have now learned will be valuable throughout your ongoing library advocacy efforts. As stated elsewhere PLF and TBR will require ongoing support and many jurisdictions over the years will have various library measures on the local ballot.

Advocacy is not just a matter of trying to win an election. Rather, we need to make sure the library is never taken for granted by your funding source which usually is the Board of Supervisors or City Council. Just like the Sacramento legislators, your supervisors and council members are pressured for increased funding by local interest groups. These can include supporters of improved parks, establishment of a dog park, improved transportation, and on it goes....These are all worthwhile causes, however, we need to work together to maintain and increase our share of local funding.

Can trustees/commissioners make a difference? The answer we found in our county with Prop. 81 is "yes, we can." I served as a county coordinator for the Prop. 81 campaign with great support from my fellow library commissioners. Our commission has 29 members plus alternates. Nearly all played a part in the campaign. A power point presentation was prepared without government resources and 25 presentations were made throughout the county and over 50 endorsements were obtained from organizations such as school boards, chambers of commerce, political organizations and labor groups. Others obtained endorsements from the cities and Board of Supervisors. We also had a dedicated group in Walnut Creek who concentrated their efforts throughout their community. The result was Prop. 81 passed 53% countywide and over 59% in Walnut Creek.

When one becomes this involved you meet many other great library supporters who can be called on when library advocacy is needed. Indeed, many of my first calls were to current and former elected leaders who have worked hard on library funding issues over the years. Hint---Always retain phone numbers and email addresses of those who have helped you in the past. They can become invaluable in the future. If you are new to CALTAC and want to get involved you might want to read the prior articles in this series which we expect to have available on our website soon.

Do the electeds notice when you attend council meetings and support their library efforts? Recently I went to a nearby city and spoke on behalf of funding for their new library. After budget decisions had been made the mayor sent an email to all of us who had supported the council's efforts thanking us for our support. She said that it was so important to see the supporters in attendance and speaking, given the number of opponents who were also there. The bottom line is your voice in support of libraries counts more than you know.

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