



Politics

Political Notebook - 10/15

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The Press-Enterprise

Tough-on-crime ballot measures are about as sure a bet as anything in California politics. Anything seen as helping people behind bars faces tough odds.

Inland resident **Annie Smith** isn't discouraged.

Smith, secretary-treasurer of Moreno Valley-based Families United for California Prison Reform, spent the past weekend helping collect the first of nearly 434,000 voter signatures she will need to qualify each of two proposed initiatives meant to make life better for prisoners.

"We need to make a big change. We can't keep picking away at an iceberg with a toothpick," Smith said, characterizing the efforts by lawmakers and the Schwarzenegger administration to fix the state's prison problems.

Both measures are aimed at the November 2008 ballot. One would repeal the state's "three-strikes" law and make people eligible for parole earlier. The second would increase prisoner rights, such as giving them more visiting hours with their families and letting them see movies rated R and NC-17.

"At least they should be able to see something besides 'Kindergarten Cop.' They are adults; they should be able to see adult movies," Smith said.

About 700 volunteers will help collect signatures, Smith said. Most have a connection to someone who has had run-ins with the law; she has three friends behind bars, she said.

"These are human beings. That's what everyone's missing, that these are human beings," Smith said.

Bond Cash

Like many of his GOP colleagues last year, Assemblyman **John J. Benoit**, R-Bermuda Dunes, opposed borrowing \$2.8 billion for affordable housing projects. The measure later became Prop. 1C on the November 2006 ballot.

Benoit also voted against Prop. 84, a \$5.4 billion water and parks bond that environmental groups qualified for the ballot.

Both measures passed and the first dollars are becoming available. Among those showing the way to bond bounty is Benoit, who hosted workshops in Riverside and Rancho Mirage last week to help local governments apply for the money.

"In 2006, Californians made an important decision to fund a new generation of infrastructure projects to modernize and invest in California's future," Benoit said in a statement announcing the workshops. "As the fastest-growing county in the state, it is imperative that local governments in Riverside County apply for and receive their fair share of the recently-approved bond dollars."

Benoit said he sees no contradiction in encouraging people to apply for the money.

"When all is said and done, the majority rules," Benoit said in an interview. His district shouldn't lose out on bond grants just because he personally opposed the borrowing, he said.

Very Select Group

Roads are a big deal for Inland residents and the people who represent them. As a result, the region recently got its very own Assembly Select Committee on Inland Empire Transportation. The panel is expected to meet for the first time later this month.

Announced by Assembly Speaker **Fabian Nunez**, D-Los Angeles, in August, the select committee includes Assemblywoman **Wilmer Amina Carter**, D-Rialto, **Benoit**, R-Bermuda Dunes, Assemblyman **Bill Emmerson**, R-Redlands, and Assemblyman **Pedro Nava**, D-Santa Barbara.

Santa Barbara? That's a long way from the 60-91-215 interchange.

Nava is the chairman of the Assembly Transportation Committee. As a result, it's probably a good idea to have him on the committee, even if he has never had to wait for the train to cross Riverside's Magnolia Avenue.

This week's Political Notebook was compiled by Jim Miller.
