

# **Gunsch: Pay as you go is better than getting into debt**

***Publisher's note: Lake Tahoe News is profiling the six candidates who will be on the Nov. 8 ballot for the South Tahoe Public Utility District board. They are being published in the order they were submitted. Claude Gunsch is running for the seat vacated by Marylou Mosbacher.***

**Name:** Claude Gunsch

**Age:** 62

**How long have you lived on the South Shore?:** 38 years

**What water company supplies your home? Your work?:** STPUD supplies both.



**Claude Gunsch**

**Job/profession?:** Retired South Tahoe Public Utility District employee

**What stands out to you in the 2011-12 budget?:** In my opinion, the outstanding issues on the 2011-2012 budget are water meters and the ability to obtain grants should the district decide to purchase the Lukins water system.

**What boards, commissions, or other experience, including volunteering, do you have?:** I am a member of the volunteer

fire department at Fallen Leaf Lake. I have taught youth soccer as well as served as an assistant for the high school ski team. I have participated in a short-term mission trip to Guatemala for Church Family Missions.

**Is there any individual, group or organization you would not take campaign money from? Why?:** Currently, nothing comes to mind. However, if a company or individual had a large project up for review, I would most likely decline.

**What is the No. 1 reason someone should vote for you over another candidate?:** I think the biggest asset I would bring to the board is my 34 years of experience as a water and sewer treatment employee. Additionally, I am honest and fair and would put the community's needs first, as well as try to keep rates down.

**California law mandates water meters be installed. What is your solution to make the fee equitable for those on meters and those without one?:** I believe it would be most equitable if all meters were installed concurrently. Unfortunately, we don't have the time or money to install them all at the same time. I don't have a solution at this time, but will do my best to find creative ways to make it as fair and equitable as possible to all customers under the guidelines that are mandated by the state.

**To get the remaining 60 percent of South Tahoe PUD customers on meters it will cost \$15 million. As a board member, where will you get the money to pay for the meters?:** I will work with district staff seeking grants and/or low interest loans. With the cost of borrowing so low at this time, acquiring a loan could negate the necessity to raise rates.

**Do you believe the district should spend money on lobbying efforts in Sacramento and/or Washington, D.C.? Why or why not?:** Yes, I believe the district should spend money on lobbying efforts. Changing legislation saves the district

dollars that are not passed on to the ratepayers. We have saved \$34 million through lobbying. To date, according to my study of the budget, the return of money to the district is millions more than the amount the district spends on lobbying.

**What do you know about STPUD getting money from the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act?:** I need to do more research on this subject.

**How do you balance the economic situation of the community with the infrastructure needs of the district?:** We need to move forward to continue the high standards of clean water and support for fire protection. We also need to protect the environment from sewer spills. Receiving grant money helps alleviate raising the rates for upcoming projects. I believe in the policy of 'paying as you go' rather than being in debt. The cost of taking out small loans may eliminate the need to pass the cost on to the customer.

**With 38 percent of a customer's sewer bill going to meet the needs of the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Act and \$100 million already invested in Alpine County to take STPUD's wastewater, would you leave things as they are? If yes, why? If no, what would you change and how do expect to accomplish those changes?:** Yes. Because it is a state law and we need a place to put treated water for irrigation, I would leave things as they are. If we no longer had a place for our irrigation water to be held, the district could be fined millions.

**What should be done with the land STPUD owns where the old post office was on Black Bart?:** It stands to reason that the district should evaluate all the property it has. If some property could be sold without jeopardizing operations, I would support that decision.

**There has been a three-year wage freeze for employees. What are your thoughts on employee raises and benefits?:** The district needs to keep an eye on the economy and see what happens over the coming years. I would like to see our current

employees keep their jobs, rather than give raises and as a result have to lay off valuable employees. I believe there must be a balance in terms of what is the best interest of the customers and what is good for valuable employees.

**When would you vote for a hike on water and sewer rates and why?:** Obtaining a grant is one way to keep rate hikes to a minimum and through that money continue to protect the environment and meet water standards. The ideal situation is to work diligently on applying for grants which is basically free money to do a project. If we did not have grant money to pay for a proposed project, the benefit to the community would have to be very substantial before I would consider a rate hike of any kind.

**Lukins Brothers Water District – any comments?:** I don't believe it would be ethically right for STPUD to pass the burden on to the rate payers to bring Lukins Water up to the level of standards that is mandated by us. Perhaps the answer is in diligently working to obtain a grant with which to purchase this company.

**What should be the main priority of South Tahoe PUD?:** South Tahoe PUD's main priority should be to maintain a reliable water system that provides clean drinking water and fire protection to the community, as well as waste water system that protects the environment at a cost efficient rate.

**What should be the main priority of a South Tahoe PUD board member?:** I believe the main priority of a South Tahoe PUD board member is to set policy and to be a liaison between the community and the employees while keeping costs at a minimal.

**Tell readers something about yourself that most people don't know:** I am a straight shooter. I am honest and fair. If I cannot answer a question, I will search to find the answer. I am not a politician. My desire is to give back to the community that has supported me and my family over the years.

I have extensive knowledge about the utility district which could help save the district money.