

Variety of questions put STPUD candidates on the spot

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – The six candidates running for the South Tahoe Public Utility District board had to think on their feet a bit more than is usual at election forums.

Instead of each being asked the same question, Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe – sponsors of the event, asked different questions of each candidate. This meant no time to think, no time to essentially repeat what had been said before.



Ann Swallow kept the Wednesday afternoon event at Harrah's Lake Tahoe rolling along as each candidate was asked two unique questions. With time remaining, she asked them all to comment on their thoughts about the Brown Act – the California open meeting law.

While not all were able to precisely define what it does, they agreed transparency and openness in government is important – that backroom decisions are not the way to conduct public business.

Claude Gunsch, Mary Kortge, John Runnels and Randy Vogelgesang are vying for the seat being vacated by Marylou Mosbacher, while Dale Rise and Kelly Sheehan are going after the seat Rise currently has.

Here are the questions and answers in the order they were asked:

- **What vote by the board in the last year do you disagree with and why?**

Gunsch: He could not think of one.

- **Who will you vote for for the seat you are not a candidate for and why?**

Kortge: Kelly. She is great. I know her and she will do a good job. We share a lot of views.

- **Do you believe snowmaking is good or bad for the groundwater supply – and why?**

Runnels: The district entered an agreement to supply Heavenly Valley for this purpose. It increases revenues for the district. I don't see a problem with it. As long as the aquifers are replenishing, I see it as a good thing.

- **What are your thoughts on term limits for the STPUD board?**

Vogelgesang: I have not in the past been a strong proponent for term limits. The longer I have thought about it in relationship to STPUD, I'm in favor of it. The longer you are on the board the tougher it is to be an independent voice on behalf of the community and you side with recommendations from staff too often.

- **Do you agree legal counsel should be present at STPUD board meeting, as is now the case? Why?**

Rise: I've discussed this with staff. I don't believe counsel should be there. Mostly I've noticed counsel has little interaction during the board meetings. I believe we should have a part time in-house counsel instead of outside counsel.

- **If you didn't need a majority of the board, what one change would you make immediately upon being elected?**

Sheehan: I would eliminate (district) seats. I would have the top two vote getters be elected.

- **How do you expect STPUD to look, operate, function four**

years after your term expires compared to today?

Gunsch: With my knowledge of the district I can make changes that save ratepayers money with infrastructure.

- **With STPUD's water being very drinkable and plastic in landfills considered horrendous, would you back an initiative that had STPUD working with South Lake Tahoe's Sustainability Commission to ban plastic water bottles from being sold in STPUD's jurisdiction or some other related campaign to reduce the sale of water bottles?**

Kortge: I'm against water bottles – they cause cancer and all sorts of other things. Maybe we should bottle our own and sell it. I think it would be hard to put a ban on it. People buy a ton of bottled water every day.

- **The Desert Research Institute in Reno supports cloud seeding. Do you think the water districts in the basin should get together to fund their own cloud seeding so more moisture falls and in turn speeds up replenishing the groundwater? Why?**

Runnels: No. It's an unnecessary expense. There is no shortage of water. I think the money could be spent on other projects.

- **The district last week announced it would be resuming the turf buy-back program. What are your thoughts about the program?**

Vogelgesang: In general I think it's great, but with grant money only. If it were funded with our money, I would not support it.

- **Liberty Energy offers free energy audits. Part of those audits includes giving out low flow showerheads. Would you support the district installing low flow toilets for customers who want them? Why?**

Rise: Yes – anything to slow consumption. We offer a timer for showers. I believe before I got here we had a program for low

flow toilets.

- **A few years ago the district had a rebate offer for people who bought energy efficient washing machines. What are your thoughts on these sorts of rebate programs?**

Sheehan: I agree with anything that doesn't raise rates, but is an incentive to decrease use. But grant money only – no rate increase.

The election is Nov. 8. Vote by mail ballots have already arrived in mailboxes.