

Endorsement: A reluctant nod to Gaines in 6th Assembly District

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In the race for the 6th Assembly District – a heavily Republican district that includes parts of Sacramento, El Dorado and Placer counties – the options are less than palatable. But the choice is fairly easy.

Incumbent Beth Gaines is a better pick than challenger Andy Pugno.

Gaines – who succeeded her husband, Sen. Ted Gaines, in his old seat in 2011 – has worked the last year to make up for her lack of experience. She pushed legislation to limit disability lawsuits against small businesses, and championed small efforts to create jobs in her district, including approving commercial crawfish harvesting in Lake Tahoe.

While she is hardly as ambitious, thoughtful and pragmatic as, say, former Assemblyman Roger Niello – who previously represented part of this district – she would serve her constituents better than Pugno, another Republican.

We weren't always convinced of that. In the primary, Pugno impressed us with his grasp of the issue and his commitment not to use the Legislature as platform for pushing wedge causes. Yet Pugno is an ideologue – he wrote Proposition 8, the legally challenged initiative banning same-sex marriage – and toward the end of the primary his extreme rhetoric didn't match his prior promises.

Even worse, Pugno made a silly pledge not to run against

Gaines if she ended being the top vote getter in the primary. That was not bright. Why should voters support a candidate if he or she isn't going to offer them a competitive race in the runoff?

Doubly worse, Pugno then backed off his pledge and has continued running against Gaines, although without much energy or commitment. For that, he has been rightly dismissed as a flip-flopper and an opportunist.

Voters in the 6th Assembly District deserve better than this. They deserve two candidates willing to face the voters and each other, and answer the tough questions. While he stood almost no chance of winning in this district, Democrat Regy Bronner would have at least prompted Gaines to explain to voters why they should re-elect her.

As it is, Gaines is free to continue in her bubble world, benefiting from huge campaign money from contributors outside her district and rarely answering questions from the media without a handler at her elbow. Voters in the 6th District have little choice to re-elect her, but should demand better choices the next time.