

Spencer: Experience, vision to rebuild EDC

Publisher's note: *Profiles for the four El Dorado County District 5 supervisorial candidates will be running on May 6 and May 7.*



Jeffrey Spencer

Name: Jeffrey Spencer

Age: 58

Occupation: Planning professional

Education: Master of Science, transportation management, San Jose State University; Bachelor of science (2), Business administration and business management, University of Phoenix; Associate of Science (2), business, real estate, Sacramento City College

What elected, civic, nonprofit boards or groups are or have you been affiliated with and in what capacity?: Committee/panel member, National Academy of Sciences, Transportation Research Board

Board of directors, Natomas Basin Conservancy
President, Dry Creek Conservancy
Planning Commissioner, Yuba City
Chairman, Antelope Planning Council, Antelope
Board member, Sacramento Quality of Life Committee
Vice president, Antelope Community Association
Member, Sunrise Parks & Recreation, Park Development Committee
Member, East Antelope Specific Plan Steering Committee
Facilities chair, Catholic School Advisory Committee, St. Isidore School
Sacramento and California Association of Realtors committees

Commissioner/Scout leader, Boy Scouts of America
President, Mineta Transportation Institute Alumni Association
Member, Sacramento Sheriff Community Representative Forum
Creek Clean-up Area coordinator, Urban Creeks Council
Member, Knights of Columbus
Member, Active 20-30

Why do you want to be supervisor?: It was borne out of frustration with the current issues. I didn't seek to be elected, but rather, many residents that know me and my experience urged me to represent them, and I listened. Working as an elected official should not be just a popularity contest.

I have been in public service over 40 years, holding various community planning and environmental positions. My experience in the federal, state and local government and various nonprofits has prepared me to tackle the job of protecting and rebuilding the communities of El Dorado County.

This is a nonpartisan position. How will you conduct your duties in a nonpartisan manner?: The duties of any elected position is to represent the people. This means to represent all of the people, regardless of partisanship. Our Constitution set up a representative form of government, not a ruling one. Extremism and polarity is not welcome and will not

achieve our goals. We need to come together and find consensus and compromise to address the issues we face. When we work together, we can move mountains.

Why should people vote for you over one of the other candidates?: I possess the expertise and heart to tackle our issues. We are a small community, yet have big problems. Past elected officials have been locals with great interest in the issues, but they may lack the outside experience needed to get the job done. I have been working at these various issues my entire career.

What has been lacking is the big picture view. Our housing, economic and transportation issues are not just local issues, they are being felt across the region. To resolve the issues at hand requires an experienced individual with the partnerships and relationships I have forged over many years with government and business representatives at all levels, including the state Legislature and U.S. Congress. No other candidate brings this kind of experience.

How are you going to resolve the CalPERS issue?: I cannot resolve the CalPERS issue single-handedly. State pensions are a contract between the government and unions. They are funded by regular deductions from workers' paychecks and contributions from the state. CalPERS invests the money to cover future benefits.

At the state level, CalPERS was solvent until political policies undermined their investment strategies. Not unlike the Social Security system. People have been compelled to contribute to retirement their entire lives, and now some call it an "entitlement." The federal government has borrowed nearly \$2.8 trillion as of 2014 from the Trust Fund and used the money for other purposes.

The state government created the issue by dipping into the CalPERS account then passing the buck along to the cities and

counties. Gov. Pete Wilson took \$1.6 billion from CalPERS accounts in 1991 to help close a state budget gap. Wilson also reduced retirement benefits for new state employees, effectively creating a second class of state workers.

Then Gov. Gray Davis signed SB400 in 1999 that gave employee unions the kind of retirement security normally reserved for the wealthy. The law took effect in 2000, and that same year CalPERS investments were hammered by the bursting of the dot com bubble. Eight years later, the housing market collapsed and the Great Recession set in, putting the pension fund in a deep hole. CalPERS investments lost 3 percent in 2008 and 24 percent in 2009 – wiping out \$67 billion in value. The fund has a fiduciary responsibility to maximize investment returns on behalf of the retirees whose money it controls – and on behalf of state taxpayers.

Now you have Gov. Jerry Brown and his state policy creating further problems. CalPERS had a \$2.9 billion surplus in 2007 and now has an estimated deficit of more than \$138 billion. Last year, CalPERS announced its Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Five Year Strategic Plan, which is a blueprint for the agency's so-called socially responsible investment strategy. Last summer, CalPERS sent letters to 504 companies represented on the Russell 3000 Index calling for them to develop and disclose a board diversity policy. They have placed undue influence on business.

According to a report by the American Council for Capital Formation, the CalPERS fund's "environmental-related investments comprised four of its nine worst performing private equity funds last year, accounting for more than \$600 million in committed capital." It noted that "none of the system's leaders put their own money into environmental investments."

There are those public employees that have taken advantage of the system, boosting their retirements beyond reasonable

benefit. We need to address those within our responsibility and make sound decisions.

Politicians need to realize that these accounts are not a blank check for the latest scheme in government, but a security meant to cover those that dedicated their lives to public service.

Should the government be responsible for solving the affordable housing issue as well as homelessness? Why or why not to both? If yes, how would you solve those issues?: Homelessness is a result of a few factors, including joblessness, substance abuse, and mental health. Social programs have not kept pace with these issues and the government has a responsibility to offer help. I am in favor of a hand up, but not a hand out. There has to be limits to assistance as collecting government benefits should not be a career.

The residential population of South Lake Tahoe fell by 9.3 percent from 2000 to 2010, according to the Census Bureau, and the median income cannot afford housing. This is not unique to Tahoe, but across California. However, Tahoe is one of the most unaffordable in the state. According to Zillow, to buy a median house in SLT, you need an income of \$114,576. The Tahoe region's average-household-income-to-home-value ratio is 10-to-1, meaning average home cost is roughly 10 times higher than average annual wages. San Francisco, by comparison, is 8-to-1.

Due to a lack of good paying jobs and unaffordable housing we are exporting our future as younger people cannot afford to live here. The Lake Tahoe Community College is suffering enrollment, largely due to the cost of living. We have more people commuting into Tahoe to work and that affects our road congestion, contrary to environmental policy. What will happen to our community if we eventually have no local residents?

To date the county has not been able to fix the traffic issue in Meyers with tourists clogging up residential streets. What is your solution?: There is no one solution. We need to have a suite of options. The transportation demand has far outstripped our supply. While the economy of the Lake Tahoe Basin is largely dependent on tourism, it also brings many of the traffic problems at a high cost. The traffic problem extends the whole length of U.S. 50. I would work to implement a solution that makes all of the communities along the Hwy. 50 corridor less congested at peak times. It takes time and cooperation by many agencies to accomplish, and I know the ropes to get it done.

I have offered many ideas and suggestions to assist in resolving the problems we are experiencing with weekend and holiday traffic. One is called congestion pricing. Electronic toll collection with congestion pricing was supported by the CHP, the county sheriff, and many citizens in attendance at the meeting in February 2016. Another suggestion is using an odd-even license plate restriction like we saw during the gas crisis, and in critical events such as we saw in February, institute a periodic contra-flow that would improve flow leaving the basin.

One suggestion published in the *Tahoe Tribune* suggested a "better solution is to build a multi-modal transportation system that allows people to leave their cars at home." This is where we need a reality check. That would not work for a multitude of reasons. Plain and simple it is not practical. I support local transit systems, but TTD hasn't even provided regular service to Meyers, which is a community that has no transit. The folks out there cannot get into town for their shopping, recreation or jobs without a car. Who genuinely thinks a family of tourists is going to load the kids, all their baggage, and bulky recreational equipment onto a bus to come into Tahoe?

What would better serve our residents is to have affordable

housing near their jobs, and land use zoning that concentrates tourist accommodations near the attractions. These two would greatly reduce traffic and pollution which are primary goals in the basin.

The simple fact is funding for our roads is not enough to keep up with maintenance, and we have the impacts of about 150,000 people every week, nearly a 700 percent increase in our population. We need to mitigate these impacts and we need to find a way to do it. We always hear what can't be done, but never what can be done. It takes time and cooperation by many agencies to accomplish, and I know we can get it done.

What are your thoughts of making Lake Tahoe its own county?:

As with most proposals, there are pros and cons. I have heard that Placer and El Dorado in California should form one county in the basin, and Washoe and Douglas on the Nevada side should form one county in the basin. This may help focus efforts on local issues unique to the Tahoe basin. Still, there are already many layers of bureaucracy and paring down two is not likely to change things much.

The effort would be costly and not likely favorable since both states would have to ratify such a move. I am not in favor of further dividing folks, but rather, uniting them to be a community.

What entities would you not take money from?: I will not take money from any entity that expects a quid pro quo for donating. I also would not accept donations from any illegal or otherwise dubious entities. I would hope that donations come as support for my work ethic and ability to work on the issues we face. Any entity that expects favors in return will get their money returned. That may be the current practice, but not in my personal, ethical conscience.

What is the No. 1 issue facing District 5 and how do you propose to resolve it?: The district is large and diverse, and

no one issue can be attributed to the many people we serve. The Tahoe basin faces a critical problem with housing. The West Slope is facing many development pressures. We need to look at our guiding documents and stick to the plan. We need to enforce the laws on the books instead of creating new, confusing and contradictory ordinances.

The two main issues I see are housing and transportation. We have a serious shortage of affordable housing in the Tahoe basin, while the West Slope is experiencing pressures from urban sprawl. The condition of our roads and congestion needs full and immediate attention.

Do you believe supervisors should meet in Tahoe more often?

Why or why not?: Yes. Those elected to represent the people should be seen by the people. Staying out of touch means being out of touch with your constituents. Although we have districts with distinct representation, the whole of the board represents the whole of the county.

Would you support having more tax dollars from the county coming to the South Shore? Currently, more dollars leave the basin than come back.:

Unfortunately, in government budgets, there are donors and recipients. The populace and economy in Tahoe is the strongest among the cities in El Dorado. This would be one argument in the "pros" column to make Tahoe its own county. The needs are distributed throughout the county and the budget is made to cover those needs. I will work with our CAO and staff to represent the whole district's interests to the best of my ability.

What is your vision for the 56-acres in South Lake Tahoe?:

I do not have a different vision than what already exists. The analysis should be on the benefit for the county to keep it or transfer it. TRPA has limited coverage and development allocations, so other than what is there, we need to assess what else can be done. It will take a full view of the costs, revenues, benefits, and existing law and ordinances before

anything should be decided.

Although surrounded by the city, the county has services that it provides at that location. The county has let their investments fall into a terrible state of disrepair. If the city has defaulted on their agreement, it is wasteful to allow these facilities to become so bad. People deserve decent facilities to serve them. Again, a full cost/benefit analysis needs to be completed.

Do you support having vacation home rentals? Why or why not?:

Vacation home rentals is a complicated issue. Although I support private property rights that come into the issue, also we have zoning laws and one of the basic principles in real estate, the right to quiet enjoyment. I support licensing and letting the industry show they can be responsible. I have proposed a Vacation Home Owners Association to police the members. It should not be the responsibility of the taxpayer for the liability of benefits and retirement of more public servants policing commercial interests. VHRs are an industry and we do not want to suppress commerce, but we must also protect the rights and liberties of our residents.

Zoning, in its basic form, attempts to separate residential property use from commercial property use. We are experiencing incompatible uses. Houses are generally built for families and not typically built to be used as a business.

Years ago, people would allow their second home to be used by family and friends that knew the neighbors and respected the tranquility of the neighborhood. Today, these are being advertised internationally by online services and our housing stock is being snapped up by outside investors solely for the purpose of making a profit. Vacation-home owners say they rely on the income. That makes them a commercial enterprise. We have to use our common sense.

South Lake Tahoe has 1,400 vacation rentals, mainly entire

homes, in neighborhoods. South Lake Tahoe has 15,000 housing units, but more than half of them are second homes or seasonal rentals. These mostly are non-resident investors and speculators that have driven up the cost of housing to be unaffordable to those that live here. Only 18 percent of local residents can afford to buy the median-priced home, and 75 percent of our residents spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.

Jim Hamilton, 2005 president of the California Association of Realtors, told a group, "Real estate was never intended to be an ATM machine. This country was not founded on owning a home and making millions of dollars. Real estate should be about home ownership."

The landscape of real estate is changed. Ethical standards are in question. How is it an investor can bid up a home with the intention of making it a business, yet use a standard market appraisal and obtain a regular mortgage? Any other business has to use proper methods such as an income-based appraisal and business financing. We have to question the logic of allowing businesses to operate in our residential neighborhoods. Absentee investors do not live and work here. Residents report they feel trapped in their homes and on extremely bad traffic days, they tell of people that have done the unthinkable such as leave their cars, knock on the door and ask to use the bathroom, or even relieve themselves in the yard. My priority lies with the residents who live here and vote for me to represent them.

Unmovable traffic congestion, bad behavior, and the trash have left locals in a fit. It is a tourist economy, but even welcome guests can wear out the welcome mat. We need to protect home ownership and affordability for our residents.

The one thing we know since I was a Realtor is that the landscape of real estate is changed. Ethical standards are in question. How is it an investor can bid up a home with the

intention of making it a business, yet use a standard market appraisal and obtain a regular mortgage? Any other business has to use proper methods such as an income-based appraisal and business financing. We have to question the logic of allowing businesses to operate in our residential neighborhoods. Absentee investors do not live and work here. Residents report they feel trapped in their homes and on extremely bad traffic days, they tell of people that have done the unthinkable such as leave their cars, knock on the door and ask to use the bathroom, or even relieve themselves in the yard. My priority lies with the residents who live here and vote for me to represent them.

Tell us something about yourself that people might not know: I was a part-time actor and have been in movies and industrial films. "An Operation Lifesaver" film that I was a principal actor in won both a Telly (the industrial equivalent of an Academy Award) and a Communicator Award.