

## New voice jumps into Conaway fray

*By Elisabeth Sherwin/Enterprise staff writer*

A letter from state Sen. Dave Cox, R-Roseville, which appeared on Woodland Mayor Matt Rexroad's blog before the man to whom it was addressed could read it, is the latest wrinkle in the Conaway Ranch controversy.

Cox's March 23 letter to Yolo County Supervisor Mike McGowan asked the supervisor to explain remarks made in a private office visit last year about development on the ranch.

McGowan, a staunch supporter of the county's efforts to buy the 17,000-acre ranch between Davis and Woodland, has repeatedly said the property will not be used for development but to preserve the land and water.

McGowan was vacationing in Hawaii on Tuesday when word about Cox's letter being posted on Rexroad's blog began to get some buzz. The supervisor dismissed the letter as a political distraction.

Rexroad is running against Frank Sieferman Jr. for the 3rd District seat on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors. He posted a copy of the letter, which he said was faxed to him, Tuesday on his online blog.

In the letter, Cox says he met with McGowan and Supervisor Helen Thomson last year to talk about a bill that would have allowed the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians to enter into a joint powers authority for long-term management of the ranch.

The tribe has offered to finance the ranch's purchase for the county.

The bill, AB 1747, was vetoed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger but Cox recalled McGowan said something during the conversation about the county considering "some limited development" on the ranch land.

"Given the apparent disparity from our earlier conversation and what I am now reading in newspapers, I would appreciate further clarification from you on Yolo County's plans to finance the acquisition of the Conaway Ranch, if acquired through eminent domain," Cox wrote in the letter.

The letter was copied to five other people, including Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, D-Davis, and Sieferman, chairman of the Board of Supervisors. Rexroad said he believes the letter is a public document.

McGowan will not see the letter until he returns to his office Monday, but he said he was irritated by what was read to him over the phone.

“I don’t know how to respond,” he said. “There’s nothing to say. We are in exactly the same place we were two years ago. We are acquiring the ranch for the benefit of the people in Yolo County. The developers want to acquire the land for speculation.”

McGowan said the dissemination of the letter was politically motivated.

“What is Cox getting out of this?” he asked.

Rexroad, who used to work for Cox, posted the letter online with a comment: “This letter has me wondering what is happening. If the Board of Supervisors has a plan for Conaway then they need to present it to the public.”

In a conversation with The Enterprise, Rexroad said, “The county doesn’t need the whole thing (Conaway). It can cut a deal and sell off certain rights when they acquire it.”

Rexroad said if he were on the Board of Supervisors he would make sure most of the land was farmed and certain hunting and gas rights were sold. The government should hold on to water rights, he said.

“I don’t want to develop any (Conaway) property,” he added.

McGowan, the man Rexroad may be working with in the future, was disgusted by the letter tactic.

“I don’t see anything going on here other than Dave Cox working hard for the Sacramento developers,” he said. “It’s silly and it’s a distraction.”

McGowan said he and Supervisor Thomson are scheduled to meet April 13 in a settlement conference with representatives of the Conaway Ranch owners. Yolo County Superior Court Judge Tim Fall ruled last fall that the county has the right to take the land from an unwilling seller. A June court date has been scheduled to determine the price.

— Reach Elisabeth Sherwin at [gizmo@dcn.org](mailto:gizmo@dcn.org)

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