

Yolo County joins U.S. Supreme Court in eroding private property rights
By Dudley Holman

Americans are very concerned with the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision granting local government greater authority and ease by which they can seize homes, small business and family farms from unwilling sellers -- and rightly so.

But to witness this impressive abuse of power, we do not need to look beyond Yolo County's borders to see how government is using its police powers to seize local farmland and water rights from unwilling sellers.

For more than 100 years, family farmers on the Conaway Ranch and most other Yolo County farms have been managing their farms just fine without the intervention of "Big Brother."

But times have changed and these are certainly extraordinary times for those fighting to protect private property rights.

For example, Yolo County has decided to use its police power to seize the 17,300 acre Conaway Ranch from its unwilling sellers. Like the U.S. Supreme Court's decision, this is an unprecedented decision by local government. Usually, government only uses eminent domain as a last resort and then, only to build roads, airports or other public infrastructure -- but not to own and manage a ranch!

Since the County intends to continue the ranch's current management practices, why are our County Supervisors rushing to seize this property?

Is it appropriate to use a local Indian tribe's gambling profits to pay for the County's eminent domain proceedings?

If the county cannot adequately fund and manage its currently held parks today, how can they afford to own and manage a 17,300 acre ranch tomorrow?

Is managing a ranch the best use of your tax dollars? Would your tax dollars be better spent on education, traffic relief and public safety?

The County has not answered these questions. In fact, they have denied all requests for a public hearing that could answer all these questions. As a result, Yolo County voters and the media have become increasingly critical of a police action that has few supporters.

According to a recent survey reported in the Davis Enterprise (7/24/05), 73% of Yolo County voters oppose the county's use of eminent domain to seize the Conaway Ranch.

But while voters have clearly spoken in opposition to the County, Yolo County Supervisors are more determined than ever before to join the U.S. Supreme Court in eroding private property rights.

The recent news that the owners of Conaway Ranch have been forced to negotiate the sale of the ranch to Yolo County only illustrates that the threat of eminent domain is just as powerful as the use of eminent domain. This is truly concerning news for the residents of Yolo County who have come to fear County Supervisors professing to protect the interest of family farmers all the while seizing Yolo farmland.

Dudley Holman is president of the Yolo County Taxpayers Association and is former mayor of Woodland. For more than 30 years, Yolo County Taxpayers Association (YCTA) has been protecting Yolo County taxpayers and private property rights. For more information on Conaway Ranch and YCTA, visit www.yolotaxpayers.com.